Celebrating 100 years of Open Distance Education in Zambia 1923 - 2023: Achievements and Lessons for the Next Centenary through the Lenses of University of Zambia

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Abstract

This landmark article traces the history of Open and Distance Education in Zambia since 1923 and establish key mile stones attained and lessons generated to inform the future. The study rides on archival online data, a non-obtrusive approach complemented with University of Zambia postgraduate alumni engaged through Social Media to illuminate the discourse at hand. Emergent from the findings are critical milestones attained such as the transformation of Open and Distance education education from physical to virtual space, from print to online resource, from social science to highly technical study areas such as nursing sciences, agricultural and natural sciences. There has been mass adoption of open and distance education nearly by nearly all learning institutions at tertiary level in Zambia owing to the University of Zambia's pioneering experience in Open and Distance Education. Over and above, this is a positive indicator that show transformation in attitudes of the Zambian community. While success attained is visible for all to see, a number of bottle necks still remain that need improving upon if the next generation is to benefit from the centenary experience. Lessons include: (i) the need to improve ODL friendly infrastructure, (ii) the need to invest in tailor-made programme to build capacity of ODL practitioners, (iii) the need to maximize technology in the delivery of programmes on offer to the community.

Keywords: **Distance learners, University of Zambia, Centenary, Open Distance Education, Zambia**

1. Introduction

This paper is motivated by the birth of the Zambia Journal of Distance Education inaugural issue. Thus, it provides anchorage for the rest of the issues to be published over time.The focus is on tracing the Open Distance Education lived experience since 1923 and how Zambia could apply it as a lever to transform the education sector in the next centenary. Keegan's (1986) definition of distance education informs the concept whereby distance teaching/education is viewed as a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organisational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live.

Background to the study

According to Kamwengo and Ndhlovu (2004) and Mwanakatwe (1971), the history of professional development of teachers in Zambia can be traced to the colonial period. As early as 1923 the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa established educational policy guidelines. First, the committee recommended the establishment of a system of specially trained visiting teachers as a means of improving village schools and continuing the training of teachers. They would visit schools in rotation. It was hoped that the education system would be improved in this way. Second, the committee recommended the establishment of institutions for training teachers and vacation teachers

conferences. Third, the committee suggested the creation of a system of government inspectors who would make the aims of education understood and give advice and help on carrying them out. The recommendations of the committee guided the provision of professional development of teachers during the colonial period.

The blue print as contained in the policy guidelines by the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa of 1923 resonates well with the definition of distance education as given by Keegan (1980). The presence of peripatetic facilitators of knowledge and skills sharing with learners in the comfort of their homes was the genesis of distance education as this form of education made it possible to instruct great numbers of students though not at the same time but at least wherever they live. Distance education is about shortening the transactional distance between the learner and the learning facilitator while observing learner autonomy and independence which was the whole-mark of the policy guidelines of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa of 1923.

However, during the pre-independence period in Zambia opportunities for education and training for indigenous Africans were inadequate. Very few Africans had reached the higher levels of education. Fewer than 1,000 had passed their School Certificate Examination and numbers with lower certificates were correspondingly small. Table 1 below gives the cumulative totals since 1933 of all Africans who had passed the named examinations at each level.

Table 1: cumulative totals since 1933 of Africans who passed examinations

Level	Males	Females	Total
Standard IV (Grade 6)	86900	23300	110200
Standard III (Grade 5)	28200	4200	32400
Standard II (Grade 9)	3940	480	4420
School Certificate (G.12)	884	77	961

This scarcity of persons with education in Zambia was more acute at the higher levels. The conclusion was harsh for the Zambian population on the eve of Independence, in terms of education. It was one of the least prepared populations in the whole of Africa (Kelly 1999). In terms of teacher training, in 1926 there were only two institutions training teachers for primary schools, Sefula and Chalimbana (Kelly 1999). This resulted in the shortage of human resources and consequently affected the country"s development at independence in 1964. According to Mwanakatwe (1971) the majority of teachers had a meagre education. Only a few had received twelve years of formal education plus two or three years of training as teachers. A small but rapidly increasing number of teachers had nine or ten years of schooling plus two years of professional training as teachers. The primary

school teaching force was, however, dominated by teachers who had been educated for only eight years followed generally by a teacher training course of two years' duration.

Theoretical Underpinnings

To illuminate clear understanding of the growth of distance education in Zambia, two theories are applied namely: (i) equivalency theory, and (ii) autonomy and independence theory (Simonson, 1995). The equivalency theory states that distance education is not identical to traditional education, but it is equivalent. The basis for Simonson's equivalency theory is that learning experiences should be equivalent, rather than identical regardless of whether the learner is in a traditional or distant setting. In addition, the Theory of Learner Autonomy and Independence as advanced by Wedemeyer applies here as well (Wedemeyer, 1981). According to Wedemeyer, the system should:

i. Be capable of operating any place where there are students---even only one student, whether or not there are teachers at the same place, at the same time;
ii. Place greater responsibility for learning on the student;
iii. Free faculty members from custodial-type duties so that more time can be given to truly educational tasks;
iv. Offer students and adults wider choices (more opportunities) in courses, formats, and methodologies;
v. v.Use, as appropriate, all the teaching media and methods proven effective;
vi. Mix and combine media and methods so that each subject or unit within a subject is taught in the best way known;
vii. Cause the redesign and development of courses to fit into an articulated media program;
viii. Preserve and enhance opportunities for adaptation to individual differences;
ix. Evaluate student achievement simply, not by raising barriers regarding the place, rate, method, or sequence of student study; and
x. Permit students to start, stop, and learn at their own pace.

2. Methodology and Research Design

The study used the Qualitative research approach in which an interview schedule was used to engage Alumni of the University of Zambia by distance learning mode via various online tools namely: WhatsApp, Email, Google Form and Facebook. This approach was preferred because the study sought to generate in-depth views from participants (graduates) regarding their lived experience within the University of Zambia. Hence the design was appropriate. The use of social media to generate research evidence was in line with Simui, Mwewa, Chota, Kakana,

Mundende, Thompson, Mwanza, Ndhlovu and Namangala (2018). In addition, we applied content review on 10 purposive selected cross-sectional research articles on distance education within the University of Zambia to project the growth of distance education over time.

A purposively selected sample of all the inaugural UNZA-ZOU Postgraduate alumni were selected out of which twenty five participants volunteered to voice their experiences. To choose research participants purposively, an inclusion/exclusion criteria was applied. To be included as a participant, an alumni needed to have:
    i.   Graduated from the University of Zambia,
    ii.   Studied in the inaugural (2014 – 2016) UNZA-ZOU Programmes,
    iii. A postgraduate alumni.

Table 1: Participants' Profiles

Name	Date Data Generated	Sex	Program	Age
01A	2018/01/26	M	MSPL	46 - 50 yrs
02B	2018/01/26	F	MBA	36 - 40 yrs
03C	2018/01/26	F	MDEA	36 - 40 yrs
04D	2018/01/27	M	MSPL	41 - 45 yrs
05E	2018/01/27	M	MDEA	51 yrs & abv
06F	2018/01/27	M	MDEA	36 - 40 yrs
07G	2018/01/28	M	MDEA	26 - 30 yrs
08H	2018/01/30	F	MBA	41 - 45 yrs
09I	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	41 - 45 yrs
10J	2018/01/30	F	MSCC	Above 51 yrs
11K	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	41 - 45 yrs
12L	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	41 - 45 yrs
13M	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	31 - 35 yrs
14N	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	46 - 50 yrs
15O	2018/01/30	M	MSPL	40 - 45 yrs
16P	2018/01/30	M	MSCC	31 - 35 yrs
17Q	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	40 - 45 yrs
18R	2018/01/30	M	MSCC	36 - 40 yrs
19S	2018/01/30	F	MSPL	31 - 35 yrs
20T	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	31 - 35 yrs
21U	2018/01/30	M	MDEA	46 - 50 yrs
22V	2018/01/30	F	MSCC	Above 51 yrs
23W	2018/01/30	M	MSPL	40 - 45 yrs
24X	2018/01/30	M	MSPL	40 - 45 yrs

Note that the following abbreviated programmes above stands for: MSPL, Master of Science Peace Leadership & Conflict Resolution; MBA, Master of Business Administration; MDEA, Master of Education Management; & MSCC, Master of Science Counselling.

3. Findings of the study

Nearly all the participants acknowledged the usefulness of their masters programmes in the formal work engagements. For instance, when participants were asked to identify modules (subjects) areas within their Masters programmes they deemed very useful, 05E and 06F unanimously reported that all of them (modules) were very useful. This was equally reported by 08H who argued, 'the entire MBA program is very useful in my current role' (08H, 2018). However, others had specific modules that they felt useful in their operations such as

Table 3: Useful Content Areas at Work places

Name	Useful Content Areas
07G	Financial Management, Strategic Management and Politics in Education
08H	The entire MBA program is very useful in my current role
01A	Diplomacy and international relations
02B	Human Resource Management; Strategic Management; Economics for Managers; Corporate Integrity; Financial Management
04D	Conflict resolution, leadership, psychology of peace, research and diplomacy
10J	Very useful Programme especially the multicultural module
23W	I am using the knowledge in leadership courses and in preaching and pastoral activities

The findings above on the usefulness of the UNZA programmes by graduates resonate well with Păcurariu (2019) and Egesah's (2019) studies. Clearly, the competencies developed through the university training were applied at work by the graduates. Thus, there was a strong relationship between the field of study undertaken by graduates and their work.

Job Promotions Attributed to Postgraduate Training

Other than the usefulness of the programmes noted by participants in table 1 above, a considerable number of them clearly stated that their promotions on the job was attributed to the their postgraduate qualifications obtained at the University of Zambia. For example 19S observed that, 'I was elevated on account of recognition of the qualification I obtained via UNZA-ZOU' (19S, 2018). In the same vein 17Q attributed the rise in his salary to the qualification obtained. He noted that, 'My salary scale was changed to degree scale and soon it will be change to Deputy's scale' (17Q, 2018). 11K on the other hands noted that, 'It is a valuable Programme because I am able to manage the office confidently due to the acquired knowledge (11K, 2018). Similarly, 18R observed that, 'it has made me do my work in a professional way and respect the views of the criminals when investigating them (18R, 2018).

Equally, 17Q noted that, 'I am highly competent in management and supervision skills for the new position I am occupying' (17Q, 2018). Furthermore, 12L observed that, the Programme was 'Highly valuable and practical…consequently changed my character and mindset' (12L, 2018). All this could be attributed to the robustness of the curriculum and Programme delivery mechanisms in place as alluded to by 150 who argued that, the Postgraduate Programme was 'well designed in terms of content and duration….' (15O, 2018).

Contribution to the Betterment of Humanity since Graduation

There were notable contributions to humanity made since participants graduated under UNZA-ZOU programmes. For instance, 02B remembered having, 'donating to Orphaned Children in need in terms of clothes/books/sanitary pads' (02B, 2018). As for 04D noted that he had participated in 'Conflict management and peace keeping' (04D, 2018). In addition, 06F observed that she had, '… held several seminars with school management and provided on leadership and management of schools' (06F, 2018).

Similarly, 09I noted that, 'I am Compete in management and supervision skills for the position I am occupying' (09I, 2018). In the same vein, 14N observed that, 'in terms of the way I do things and respect from my subordinates despite the position remaining the same' (14N, 2018). Further, 18R noted that, 'I am now seconded in the United Nations for 2 years in Sudan' (18R, 2018). Furthermore, 19S observed that:

> *The MSc PLCR has consolidated my independent mind and opened my mind. Now able to think more critically and analytically. Now able to work better in teams. (19S, 2018).*

19S' observations are consistent with Ratnaningsih's study on the acquisitions of soft skills among graduates (Ratnaningsih, 2013). It is clear that UNZA-ZOU graduates acquired soft skills as typified by 19S, 09I and 06F among others.

Areas of Improvements

Make Programme Practical

Notwithstanding the positives raised by the participants, a number of areas were highlighted that needed further improvements. This is consistent with Bandiru and Wahume's (2017) Tracer study at Moi University who noted that a number of needy areas in the teaching-learning processes as well. In the current study, 01A advised that, there was need to 'make the MSPL much broader by including practical examples from all over the world, other than limiting it to Zimbabwe (01A, 2018). Equally, 02B emphasized the need for making programmes on offer 'more practical…' (02B, 2018). Similarly, Simui, Thompson, Mwewa, Mundende, Kakana, Chishiba and Namangala (2017) advocate for inclusion of practical elements in the instructional materials to cultivate a friendly outlook in the learning process among distance learners.

Allocate Competent Research Supervisors

In addition, 03C requested the university to 'allocate supervisors for research work who have a heart for the students, those who can really supervise not just mark the proposal and final report (03C, 2018). This was consistent with 12L who advocated for use senior and competent members of staff. She noted that, 'let the Programme be handled by Doctors and Professors to enhance quality education' (12L, 2018).

Restructure Programme to allow for a complete year of dedicated of research

Further, 05E observed that:

> *There should be a complete one year of research work without theory and examinations so that students produce quality research documents (05E, 2018)*

05E's appeal was re-echoed by 06F who advocated that, 'some courses can be merged to give more time for research project' (06F, 2018).

Allocate Competent Programme Coordinators

Equally, there was need to allocate competent Programme Coordinators as noted by 08H. He lamented that,

> *So far the programmes being offered are great. However, management should look into the issue of the Course Coordinator for MBA Programme who has never been supportive. He's a source of confusions hence MBA classes keep looking like students are disorganized. Coordinator XXX is doing more harm than good both to IDE and the MBA student populace. If it was within my powers, I would recommend that he's replaced immediately so that there's more sanity under MBA Programme. I rest my case!!! (08H, 2018)*

Integrate illustrations from other countries

There was need to widen the scope of illustrations used in the instructional materials instead of having only the Zimbabwean examples. For instance, 09I contended that,

> *The module on financial management … should include the Zambian situation. Most of the modules we used were more on the Zimbabwean situation (09I, 2018)*

Similarly, 13M advocated for 'domestication of study materials in the Zambian context' (13M, 2018). 09I and 13M observations resonate with Simui, Thompson, Mwewa, Mundende, Kakana, Chishiba and Namangala (2017) on distance learners' perspective on user-friendly instructional materials at the University of Zambia. In their study, Simui et al (2017) highlighted the critical importance of illustrations in instructional materials for distance learners.

Stop the Plagiarism syndrome

Further, there was need to stop the plagiarism syndrome among students as it was eroding the quality of education. This sentiment was noted by 14N who observed that,

> *Something should be done to stop the vice among students to copy long papers from the senior students. One of my colleagues kept knocking at my door from the same and the whole issue damaged our relationship (14N, 2018).*

Collaborate with other Partners

There was need to identify critical partners and collaborate with them for the sake of enhancing quality of delivery. For instance, 19S advised that,

> *Collaborate with other institutions such Ministry of foreign Affairs, SADC and COMESA. Bring in more guest lecturers from these institutions to consolidate theory (19S, 2018).*

19S' concerns were re-echoed by 24X who noted that there was need to, '…collaborate with Zambia Institute of Diplomatic Studies, (24X, 2018). Equally still, 15O retorted that there was need to '…collaborate with Zambia Institute of Diplomatic Studies' (15O, 2018).

Face-to-Face Interaction preferred to 100% Online Interaction

For instance, HO08 argued that internet connectivity was still challenging especially in rural areas. HO08 added that 'I still face internet challenges to access my learning materials and sometime IDE has to be called because some learners fail to access relevant information, (HO08, 2019). This call for improved ICT infrastructure if e-Learning is to become a reality as noted by IK09, 'just improve on the online system. The world is operating via electronic media today (IK09, 2019). While the ICT infrastructure remains under developed, leaners advocated for the use of hard copy print media. For instance, QK17 requested that 'hard copies needed to be availed to learners alongside the soft copy (QK17, 2019). Equally, DU04 recommended the use of hard copy print learning materials. For instance, DU04 endorsed, 'I would recommend having hard copies because even studying becomes easier when traveling as one does not need to open the computer, DU04, 2019).

Whereas some learners had earlier resisted the introduction of the Learning Management System in 2016, paradoxically, there had been remarkable improved level of adoption among distance education learners. For instance, IK09 commended the University for implementing an electronic Learning Management System. 'I give you a credit on the online submitting of assignments because distance is now not a barrier (IK09, 2019). Equally, LG12 applauded the University for introducing the LMS as follows: 'Astria is a powerful tool that need just a few improvements. I like it! It is more efficient when it comes to updating student information (LG12, 2019). IK09 and LG12's noted transformation in

their learning culture is consistent with Çakıroğlu, (2014) who observe that students keep adapting their learning styles as their means of learning kept changing.

In addition, IK09 commended the University as follows:

> *The platform is excellent. Online discussion forums through the platform should be enhanced. Just appreciate on what the institution is doing to make our learning easy. I started studying before Astria was introduced and I have seen a lot of improvement in the way class registration, payment and communication with the lectures, assignment submissions, has greatly improved because of Astria (IK09, 2019).*

Equally, FH06 observed as follows:

> *This programme is good in the sense that submission of assignments can be done at anytime and anywhere as long as you have network. No need to travel long distances to submit hard copies at UNZA hence its cost saving (FH06, 2019).*

IK09 and FH06 learning experiences are consistent with Connectivism learning theory for the Digital Age where ICT tools are put to good use (Siemens 2004).

Figure 1 below showing Astria platfrom used for application, learning and management of distance education at the University of Zambia.

Fig 1: Astria Plaform - Online application

Pioneers on Distance Education at the University of Zambia

As we unveil distance education in Zambia, it becomes paramount to celebrate a selection of pioneers and contributors to distance education at the University of Zambia through their published works. The University of Zambia being the mother of Universities in Zambia and pioneer of distance education within the higher education

sector, it is thus justified to reflect on some of the important published reference research works to generate debate on important mile-stones attained and challenges un-resolved in the distance education enterprise.

The development of distance education in Southern Africa in general and University of Zambia in particular is associated with Prof Richard Siaciwena whose works are in the public domain. Top among his works include Siaciwena(1990). Distance Teaching and Higher Education in Zambia, where focus is on the educational problems Zambia faced at independent and outlines the reasons and background for the introduction of distance teaching methods which provide access to the range of courses that have been established. Another classic article by Siaciwena focuses on the Role of Open and Distance Learning in the Implementation of the Right to Education in Zambia. In this article emphasis is on the progress and challenges faced by Zambia by 2008 and the role of open and distance learning in addressing those challenges (Siaciwena and Lubinda, 2008).

Next to Prof. Siaciwena is Dr. Chifwepa and Mr. Nkosha (late) whose contribution to distance education include the transformation of distance education from Directorate to Institute status. The transformation set distance education on a trajectory path of growth as dual mode related internal politics were better managed (Simui, Namangala, Tambulukani and Ndhlovu, 2018). See figure 2 on the evolution of distance education at the University of Zambia.
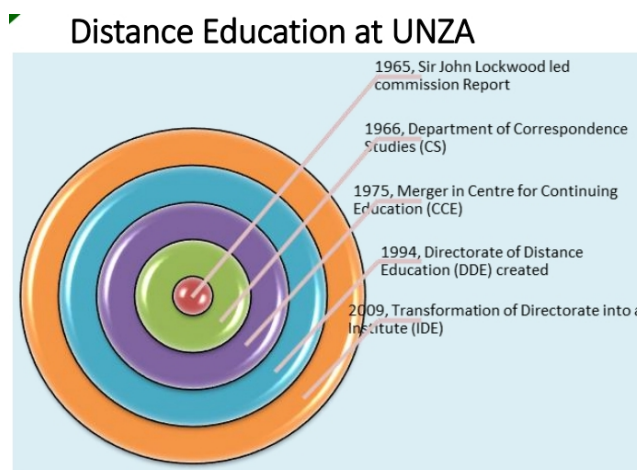

Fig 2: Evolution of Distance Education at UNZA

Dr. Chifwepa is credited for popularising the application of Information Communication Technologies in Distance education at the University of Zambia as chronicled in his thesis, Development of a Model Plan for the Application of Information Communication Technologies in Distance education at the University of Zambia (Chifwepa, 2006).

At the time of this publication, Prof. Namangala was at the helm of the Institute of Distance Education within the University of Zambia. His contributions included the

popularisation of distance education education across Natural Sciences linked disciplines such as Agricultural, Medicine, Nursing, Health Sciences and Veterinary among others. See figure 3 on the diversity of science programmes on offer at the University of Zambia.
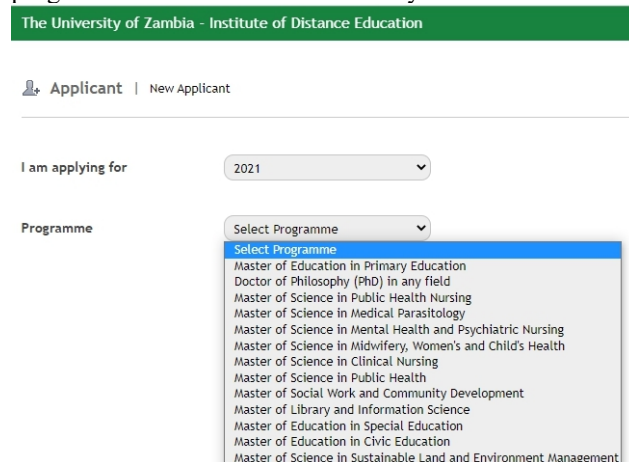

Fig 3: Diversity in Postgraduate Programmes

In addition, Prof. Namangala is credited for spearheading the adoption of the Virtual Learning Environment among the University community. See figure 5 on the Learning Management System (LMS) in use at the University of Zambia.

Fig 4: LMS in use at the University of Zambia

Further, Prof. Namangala pioneered the creation and adoption of a stand-alone ODL policy, the first of its kind in Zambia, at a time the University had lived without a tailor-made ODL policy for 50 years (Simui, Namangala, Tambulukani and Ndhlovu, 2018). Further, he is credited for mentoring emerging ODL practitioners at doctoral level such as Dr. Simui Francis, Dr. Godfrey Mwewa and Dr. Kasonde Mundende whose works ODL are equally in the public domain such as Simui, Namangala, Tambulukani and Ndhlovu (2018), demystifying the process of ODL policy development in a dual-mode context: lessons from Zambia. Mundende, Simui, Chishiba, Mwewa, Namangala (2016), Trends and

prospects of instructional material development and delivery at the University of Zambia.

Further published works on distance education at the University of Zambia include: Simui, Mwewa, Chota, Kakana, Mundende, Thompson, Mwanza, Ndhlovu and Namangala (2018), "WhatsApp" as a Learner Support tool for distance education: Implications for Policy and Practice at University of Zambia. Simui, Chibale & Namangala (2017), Distance education examination management in a lowly resourced north-eastern region of Zambia: A phenomenological approach. Simui, Thompson, Mwewa, Mundende, Kakana, Chishiba & Namangala (2017), Distance learners' perspective on user-friendly instructional materials at the University of Zambia. Muleya, Simui, Mundende, Kakana, Mwewa, & Namangala (2019), Exploring learning cultures of digital immigrants in technologically mediated postgraduate distance learning mode at the University of Zambia. Last but not the least is the Manchishi, Simui, Ndhlovu, & Thompson (2020), whose work focused on tracing the Experiences of an Inaugural Postgraduate Distance Education Alumni cohort of the University of Zambia.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has revealed the major milestone in the development of distance education at the University of Zambia which is the engine of development for Zambia. At policy level, an ODL policy is in place after living without one for 50 years, to guide practice. In addition, transformation has been recorded from print age to virtual learning environment. This has contributed to lowering cost of production within the ODL enterprise. However, whereas learners have migrated to the virtual Learning Environment, their learning culture is profoundly still in the print age as they keep on requesting for print based educational resources. Secondly, there is limited interactivity among learners and between learners and their learning facilitators, negating the very essence upon which the Learning Management System was created. Thus, it is clear that the majority of distance education learners engaged preferred physical interaction to cyber space interaction, use hard copy to soft copy print learning materials and physical library to electronic library. While the ICT infrastructure remain under developed in most rural areas, a significant number of learners have progressively embraced electronic media as the means of learning.

5. Recommendations

Thus, if we are to learn from the University of Zambia's experience, the following are recommended:
i.   Institutions of Higher Learning should provide a blended learning approach as the exclusive use of soft copy learning materials intimidate a number of digital immigrants who were reported having

withdrawn from the University on account of the introduced Virtual Learning Environment.
ii. There is need to advocate for improved ICT infrastructure in Institutions of Higher Learning. Repeatedly, learners bemoaned the poor ICT infrastructure in most rural Zambia. Therefore, if eLearning is to become a reality, there is need to lobby through relevant Government agencies to accelerate investment in ICT infrastructure Countrywide.
iii. While the ICT infrastructure is still developing, there is need to deliberately emphasize on the use of Asynchronous (different time) technology and less of Synchronous (real time) in the delivery of instructional materials.
iv. There is need to build capacity among staff and learners in the use of eLearning platforms. This is a sure way of improving interactivity among learners and staff.
v.   Given the economic challenges prevailing, there is need to consider cost implications whenever new innovations were introduced without disadvantaging distance education learners.

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