

EXTENSION EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA: Issues, Problems and Possible Solutions

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Abstract

The desire to respond to the manpower shortage that hit the country at independence culminated into the provision of University Extension Education in Zambia. In order to produce the much-needed manpower to feed the labour market, the University of Zambia employed Resident Lecturers in all the provincial centres. Their role was that of implementing University Education to the community. However, some issues surrounding the policy and execution of University Extension Education have resulted into problems and challenges in its provision and achievements. Some of these issues concern the management style, financing, infrastructure, admission requirements and user fees. The major problems that have resulted from such issues include access and equity, imbalances across fields of study, accessibility and user-friendliness of administrative systems, lack of human resource, lack of teaching and learning materials, poor communication and low participation levels. Some of the recommendations that have been made in this article as a solution to these problems include lowering the user fees, paying tutors attractive allowances, designing courses based on the needs of a particular community and building permanent structures for extension education and of university standard.

Introduction

On the eve of Independence in 1964, Zambia suffered a shortage of skilled human resource. Carmody (2004) explains that the country only had 100 university graduates and 961 Cambridge school leavers against a population of 4 million people. The Lockwood Report of 1963 coupled with community assistance brought the University of Zambia into existence in March, 1966 (The Government Republic of Zambia,

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1966). The Department of Extra-Mural Studies was established in order to link the community with the University of Zambia by offering non-formal and non-credit programmes (Alexander, 1975). The University of Zambia employed and sent one Resident Lecturer to each province to implement university extension education on behalf of the University. The Extra-Mural Department is currently known as the Department of Adult Education and Extension Studies. It is apparent that some issues dictated in the University Extension Education policy have created problems in the provision of University Education in Zambia.

This paper attempts to discuss these issues and problems, and provides possible solutions so that the purpose of providing university extension education in Zambia can be achieved with minimum challenges.

Issues in University Extension Education in Zambia

1. Management Style

Even though the University of Zambia has entrusted Resident Lecturers with the responsibility of implementing extension education at its provincial centres, its activities still remain controlled by the Department of Adult Education and Extension Studies at the University's main campus in Lusaka. The much centralised system in which the University of Zambia extension education programme operates poses a challenge against academic freedom. Resident Lectures are not free to make any plans meant to smoothly facilitate university extension education in their provinces without consultation and authority from the University of Zambia. Such a state of affairs limits the Resident Lecturers' creative capacities. It is in this sense that Chakanika (1989) contends that the role of the Resident Lecturer is a challenge. A Resident Lecturer is a university employee and as such, his or her actions are monitored by the University. According to Chakanika (1989), the role of an extension worker is directed by university policy, rather than the felt needs and the local conditions of the people. Consequently, extension programmes do not often start with the people and their nature. Since extension programmes are dictated by university policy, the probability of adhering to democratic procedure during its formulation process is cast into serious doubt. In addition, each province is under the auspices of one Resident Lecturer, thus, making the Lecturer's task a difficult one.

2. Financing

Despite efforts to assist in developing the much needed human resource for this country, university adult and extension education in Zambia has received limited or little financial attention and recognition from the Ministry of Education. Public

universities in Zambia are expected to generate their own funds as the national budgetary allocation to post-secondary education intervention is always small and targets formal programmes. Consequently, the University of Zambia has used university extension education more as its fundraising venture than as its conduit to linking with the masses that have no access to university education. To shed more light on this, the University's extension centres remit all funds that they generate to the Central Administration, and in turn, only 25 per cent of the money is given back to each extension centre. However, this money is not enough for Resident Lecturers to run the provincial centres efficiently. It is, thus, perceived that university extension education is currently financing the formal programmes of the University of Zambia.

3. Infrastructure

In Zambia, university extension education is mostly conducted in rented structures and buildings and mostly those that host formal education programmes during the day time. Some of these buildings are unattractive and not conducive for adult learners who are the major clientele in extension education programmes. For a long time now, the University of Zambia has failed to acquire land in each province on which to construct structures for conducting university lessons. This relates to Luchembe's (2006) views that in Zambia, university extension education is conducted in rented buildings. It is worth noting, that some of these buildings are degrading and as such they hinder people of higher economic background from participating in university extension education. Thus, the work of the Resident Lecturer has become complex in that, persuading the community to participate in university extension education has remained a challenge.

4. Admission Requirements

Another issue has to do with admission requirements. The introduction of credit-worthy programmes entails that the entry and admission requirements be strict and up to the University's standard. It is clearly indicated (Mtonga, 1999) that for one to meet the minimum admission criteria, he or she should possess either three 'O' level credits to pursue a certificate course or five 'O' level credits in order to pursue diploma courses, respectively. This does not only exclude many ambitious and determined people who are left out on account of lacking the necessary entry qualifications, the practice has also turned extension education into a school system. This is because only those with prescribed qualifications can apply and be admitted and that these programmes are now leaving out many who wish to gain from university extension education by way of acquiring knowledge and skills for improved sustenance and survival in their daily

lives. It can be argued here that the introduction of creditworthy courses has, to a large extent, killed the real education by promoting the ‘Diploma Disease’, hence defeating its original mission (Mtonga, 1999).

5. User Fees

It is evident that the courses carrying credit value have now dominated in the University of Zambia extension education programme. For example, a study by Nduna (2010) revealed that all the courses provided in the North-Western Province of Zambia were Senate approved, leading to either a certificate or a diploma and that no student was enrolled in any non-credit course. Unlike non-credit courses, however, credit courses are only accessed upon payment of user fees according to the standards of the University of Zambia. Students in these courses, who are not the majority countrywide, are not even allowed to access their results if they have outstanding balances. This trend favours well-off, tuition-paying students but prevents low-income students from entering the programmes or from completing their courses. As Diamond (2006) puts it, while all education will bear fruit, this trend creates a bifurcated system in which the best education goes to those who can pay for it. This situation has drifted the initial mission of university extension from that of providing university extension education to all those who missed the opportunity to attend higher education, to only providing education to the empowered minority.

Problems in University Extension Education

The issues discussed above, on university extension education at the University of Zambia have given birth to a number of problems in the implementation of university extension education in the country. These problems are: access and equity, imbalances across fields of study, accessibility and user friendliness of the administration system, irrelevant curriculum, lack of human resources, lack of teaching and learning resources, communication challenges and low-participation.

1. Access and Equity

Even though the University of Zambia has managed to open extension education centres in all the provincial capitals, there is still a problem of access and equity in this education system. Not much effort has been put in place to make inroads in all the districts. The few people who enrol in the university extension courses are predominantly from urban areas, district headquarters and provincial capitals. This is primarily because most of the University of Zambia extension education centres are concentrated in urban areas, rather than the remotest rural areas. This makes it difficult

for students from these remote areas to access higher education due to distance and the challenges inherent in separating from loved ones in an attempt to move to a university location. The situation has negatively affected the participation of people who do not live in the provincial capitals, district headquarters and urban areas in university extension.

It is worth noting here that university extension education was meant only for the poorest of the poor. However, the current trend seems not to differ from the colonial school system where education was meant for elite and was concentrated along the line of rail (Mtonga, 1999). Lusaka, for example, is one of the urban provinces in Zambia but has eleven extension educational centres as compared to Mongu which only has two centres (Mongu and Kaoma Centres). This tendency provides more access to higher education to Lusaka residents who are already privileged with several post-secondary institutions than to rural dwellers such as those in Mongu. It can, therefore, be argued that the University of Zambia Management has taken the cue from the colonial era where university education was meant for a selected few and was concentrated along the line of rail. University extension education, which came in as an alternative to the school system, has not been able to overcome the colonial legacy that restricts university education to a few and can still be seen conspicuously alienated from the masses.

2. Imbalances Across Fields of Study

The introduction of user fees and the infusion of credit courses in the University of Zambia Extension Education programme has caused imbalances across fields of study. Admission requirements in extension programmes differ based on the general discipline each course belongs to. They are classified either under the social sciences or the natural sciences. Those that belong to the social sciences tend to have slightly lower user fees and admission requirements than those that are classified under natural sciences. As such, social sciences courses tend to have more enrolment than natural sciences courses, hence causing an imbalance across fields of study.

3. Accessibility and User-Friendliness of Administrative Systems

The University of Zambia recognised the need to extend course offerings off campus in order to improve access for remote communities. However, extension education centres are mostly located in larger regional centres but serve vast and sparsely populated geographic catchment areas. Thus, geographical distances and transportation problems make it difficult for many rural individuals with family and work responsibilities to pursue their preferred courses through extension education.

4. Irrelevant Curriculum

Chakanika (1989) postulates that extension programmes should be based on the felt needs of the people. However, the infusion of credit courses and standardised curricula in University of Zambia extension programmes works against this ideal. These standardised curricula, which are now popular in extension education, are not flexible, not culturally sensitive and cannot address the felt needs of the learners. Given the diversity of cultural norms and education needs of the clientele in university extension, it is practically impossible to design standardised education curricula that would reflect the cultural norms of all localities it is offered in and address the unique needs of each locality. Unfortunately, this is what the University of Zambia has done. However, designing a standard curriculum and imposing it on learners throughout the country creates doubts on how these courses address the felt needs of their unique communities. This confirms what Chakanika (1989) meant when he said that there was a contradiction between the principles and the execution of university extension education in Zambia. Even if a Resident Lecturer identifies a need in a particular province, he or she cannot provide such a course until approval is sought from the University of Zambia main campus.

5. Lack of Human Resource

The emergence of new institutions offering university extension education has led to massive competition for tutors. Some tutors leave university extension education in search of greener pastures. The Conditions of Service for tutors at the University of Zambia leave much to be desired. The allowances are usually paid late and as a result, they get demoralised and search for better opportunities. Furthermore, the tutors teach under difficult circumstances. For example, in some centres such as Mulambwa in Western Province, some classrooms do not have electricity (Mukumbi, 2015). Consequently, the tutors are usually forced to end lessons the moment it becomes dark. Mukumbi (2015) discovered that in Western Province, certain tutors had no students enrolled in their specialised discipline and some taught less than five students, a situation that made them fail to continue teaching in university extension education. This is also in line with Luchembe's (2006) position that the reality in many provincial centres is that the tutors are understaffed and that sometimes, staffing improves but the situation is temporal because of the current policy of recruiting other categories on six months contracts.

6. Lack of Teaching and Learning Materials

The other problem that besieges university extension education concerns lack of teaching and learning materials. The University of Zambia has not provided libraries in its extension centres. The fact that university extension education is conducted in rented buildings has made it impossible to put up libraries in provincial centres and students find it difficult to write their assignments. The situation has adversely affected the tutors because they entirely depend on the internet in order to prepare their lessons. As a result of this, many potential participants stop participating in university extension education.

7. Communication Challenges

Communication is yet another problem that besieges university extension education in Zambia. With regard to the little resources available at university extension centres, Resident Lectures are not able to smoothly advertise university extension programmes to the community. Aside from that, Resident Lectures are supposed to reach out to so many districts in their province in order to market university extension education. It is worth noting, however, that some of the places in the remotest rural areas are impassable due to rivers, swamps, sand and other geographical and physical barriers. The Resident Lecturers' vehicles need fuel in order to accomplish such tasks throughout the month. This is made impossible due to insufficient funds. As a result, many people have little or no access to university extension education in Zambia. In reference to the above, Chakanika (1989) notes that, the success of any university extension education entirely depends on the active participation of the community.

8. Low-Participation

All the foregoing problems lead to the problem of low-participation in the university extension programme. As Mandumbwa (2011: 13) observed, participation in university extension education in some provinces in Zambia is seemingly low. In January 2014, there were only 45 participants in university extension education in Mongu District (Mukumbi, 2015). One issue that contributes to this problem is poor learning infrastructure. As earlier noted, the University of Zambia, Central Administration takes a larger portion of the funds raised through university extension education (i.e. 75%).

Most extension centres are of low standards due to inadequate funding to rent standard buildings. For example, the University of Zambia is renting one of the oldest schools in Mongu (Mulambwa Basic School) because that is the only place that falls within the budget of the University of Zambia. It is worth noting, however, that the number of institutions offering university extension education in Zambia has increased

and as such, there is competition for students. Some of the institutions are offering their diploma and certificate programmes in neat and standard venues making it difficult for the University of Zambia to compete for students using its name only.

Furthermore, many potential students of university extension education come from poverty stricken families. As such, they are not able to meet tuition costs in university extension education. Other potential participants are not able to meet the entry qualifications stipulated by the policy and decide to enrol elsewhere where entry conditions seem favourable.

Possible Solutions

In view of the aforementioned issues and problems in university extension education in Zambia, there is need for the University of Zambia to consider doing the following:

- (a) Construct standard buildings specifically for university extension education.
- (b) Increase funds allocated to university extension education centres.
- (c) Lower the tuition fees and reduce the entry requirements to passes.
- (d) Pay tutors attractive allowances.
- (e) Provide libraries in all university extension centres.
- (f) Decentralise university extension education, in order to establish a centre in each district and organise lecturers to be visiting students in their respective districts during vacations.
- (g) Provide courses based on the needs of the learners in various provinces unlike providing courses that the University of Zambia sees fit.

Conclusion

In summary, university extension education in Zambia has changed people's lives by offering the qualifications that have earned them employment. However, issues such as management, poor infrastructure, stringent enrolment conditions, irrelevant curriculum and inadequate financing of university extension education have given birth to problems in implementing university extension education. Such problems include low levels of participation in some university extension centres, lack of human resource, lack of teaching and learning materials and poor communication. It is, therefore, recommended that for university extension education to meet its initial mission, the University of Zambia should consider increasing the funds it allocates to extension education centres, construct worthwhile infrastructure meant to be used as university extension education venues, lower the tuition fees and reduce the entry requirements of five passes, and start paying tutors attractive allowances. The University of Zambia should also provide libraries in all university extension centres and decentralise

university extension education thereby establishing a centre in each district. The idea of Lecturers visiting students in their respective districts during vacations should also be organised.

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