

‘To Be Or Not To Be An Adult Educator’: Attitudes of Non-Governmental Organizations towards the Great Zimbabwe University Adult and Continuing Education Diploma

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the attitudes of Masvingo-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) towards the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education Programme offered by Great Zimbabwe University following a noticeable decline in student enrolment from 2010. The study used the qualitative design. Ten management and twenty non-management employees from ten Masvingo-based NGOs participated in the survey. Data were obtained using structured questionnaires and interviews. The findings of the research were that the respondents positively indicated that the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education programme was relevant for training adult educators. However, it needed to add on courses that addressed the current needs of the NGO sector. The research recommends that Great Zimbabwe University should engage the NGOs in stakeholder needs analysis in order to re-align the programme with current needs of the non-governmental sector and in the marketing of future programmes.

Keywords: adult education, adult educator, attitudes, adult and continuing education programme, non-governmental organizations.

Background To The Study

The Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education programme was introduced at the then Masvingo State University in August, 2005. Its introduction was premised on the need to provide university education to adults that would expand their intellectual horizons and develop new knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with their current and future work environment. It was also intended that participants would develop on their level of understanding of society and its various institutions and also upgrade their skills in order for them to even prepare for entirely new careers (Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education Programme Regulations, 2005).

The programme was designed for adults working in the fields of Health, Agriculture, Education, Community Development, Training, Theology, Commerce and Industry. The programme therefore targeted a wide spectrum of adults whose engagement involved the practice of adult education. The idea was that upon completion of studies, the new skills, knowledge and attitudes attained would help improve the participant's operational performance at work. There was therefore an assumption that the programme would appeal to working adults in both the public and private sectors. The programme duration was set at two years on block release. The arrangement is considered suitable for workers who need to balance the time for work and that for study.

Since its inception in 2005 to date, the programme has attracted seven groups/intakes with a total establishment of 108 students. This figure represents students who actually registered with the university to pursue diploma studies.

The need for this research was prompted by the decreasing enrolments as reflected in the table below:

Table 1: Diploma Students Enrolments Indicating Sources

Year Recruited	Number Registered	Government and other Sources	Non-Government Source
2005	18	10	8(44.44%)
2007	25	17	8(32%)
2008	29	18	11(37.93%)
2009	15	12	3(20%)
2010	13	8	5(38.46%)
2011	3	2	1(33.33%)
2012	6	4	2(33.33%)
TOTALS	109	71	38(34.86%)

Source: (GZU Students Admissions Office, 2012)

Whilst the student contribution from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was substantial between 2005 and 2010, the position in 2011 and 2012 shows a sharp decline which calls for investigation. Non-Governmental Organizations play a pivotal role in national development, hence they cannot dispense with adult education. The marriage of the NGOs with national development is contained in the vision of the umbrella body of NGOs, the National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (NANGO) which reads, in part; "to be a proactive community of NGOs responsive and committed to the sustainable development needs of all people in Zimbabwe.

Objectives of the study

This study was guided by the following four objectives:

- to determine the level of awareness of the diploma programme among the employees of the NGOs
- to establish the attitudes of the respondents with regards to enrolling for the programme
- to assess the relevance of courses on offer with regards to the needs of the NGO sector
- to solicit for suggestions for improving enrolment into the programme.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Defining 'Adult Education' *"..... if the time is ever reached when it becomes easy to define adult education precisely, this may well be a case for worry rather than for rejoicing."* Courtney (1989).

Knowles(1980) and Courtney(1989), including a host of other adult education experts admit that the notion of 'adult education' is a contested one due to the fact that the term can mean different things to different people. Nonetheless, in its narrowest sense , adult education is perceived to be about literacy and in its widest sense ,it is the 'mother' of all learning activities in which adults engage in beyond the formal school. As such, adult education usually refers to any form of learning that is undertaken by or is provided for mature men and women outside the formal schooling system (Seya 2004).This is because adult education can address varied learning needs of adults ranging from basic education, functional literacy, health care, life skills, civic education to higher education such as the attainment of university diplomas and degrees.

This scholarly search for a meaning revealed that Knowles (1980) has added another dimension when he states that adult education is also a movement or field of social practice in which individuals and institutions strive towards the common goal of improving teaching methods and materials of adult learning. In this case, institutions like universities have a responsibility in the training of adult educators such as field officers/instructors.

Benefits Of Adult Education Training

Adult education experts are fully convinced that adult education training creates benefits for learners. There is indeed some connection between adult education and improvements in many social sectors such as health, civic engagement on poverty reduction, parenting, well being and even happiness. Adult education is therefore the pathway for people to take full responsibility for their own lives and participate actively in the development of their communities. Mannion (2008) conducted some research that sought to analyze the wider benefits of participation in Adult Education. He developed a conceptual model which is based on five categories of benefits. These benefits included what he termed benefits related to

learning processes such as sense of community, social innovation and self fulfillment; benefits related to skills and competences such as ICT skills, self expression, information seeking skills; direct benefits such as further education, staying updated. Additional benefits such as self confidence, wider life circles, learning skills, shared expertise and lastly, further benefits like moral well being, physical well being, quality of life and well being at work complete the range of benefits.

Reflecting on the courses offered in the GZU Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education programme there is no doubt that participants become more informed about contemporary life issues like the HIV/AIDS pandemic, human rights , development and gender relations. Skills are also developed in such areas as information and communication, programme development, delivery of instruction, research and facilitating adult learning. There are also other direct benefits like one becoming more enlightened, better qualified and more competitive on the job market. A more informed person is better able to make rational choices and decisions and performs better at work than one who is less educated.

It is against this background that an argument is advanced to call for research into NGO participation in improving the educational experiences of their employees who work with communities...

Courses Offered In The Gzu Diploma In Adult And Continuing Education Programme

The programme offers fifteen (15) courses in two years following a semester system. During each semester, students take at least four (4) courses. Part 1 constitutes year 1 during which eight (8) courses are taken. In part 2, seven (7) courses are taken. Out of the 15 courses only two (2) are optional and are offered in Part 2. The courses that are on offer are : Introduction to Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education; Information and Communication and Technology; Introduction to World Religions and the Role of Religion in Human Development; Development Studies; Design and Delivery of Instruction; Programme Planning and Management in Adult and Continuing Education; Research Methods and Statistics; Participatory Methodologies in Adult and Continuing Education; HIV and AIDS Education; Human Rights Education; Research Project; Supervision of Personnel in Adult and Continuing Education

Optional Courses Include:

Agriculture; Church History; Community and Rural Development; Understanding the Bible for Pastoral Work; History and the African Church; Counseling.

ADULT EDUCATION AND NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION (Ngos)

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play significant developmental roles in communities in Zimbabwe. The World Bank defines NGOs as groups and institutions that are entirely and largely independent of government and have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial activities. These include charitable and religious associations that mobilize private

funds for development, distribute food and family planning services and promote community organization. The United Nations defines an NGO as a 'private organization that pursues activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services and undertake community development.' These definitions point to the diverse range of activities performed by NGOs. These include mobilization of local resources and initiatives, planning and implementing development programmes, facilitating development education and training, supporting and partnering Government in implementing visual development programmes. In pursuit of this range of activities, NGOs enmesh themselves in Adult Education as observed by Omolewa (2000). In this study; it is argued that employees in Non Governmental Organizations require training in adult education in order to be effective in their work.

CONCEPT OF ATTITUDES

Since the research set out to explore the way people perceive the Diploma programme at GZU, attitudes are therefore analyzed with regards to whether or not they can be modified and if so, how this could be done. Russell in Skinner (2009) defines attitudes as ideas with emotional content, important beliefs, prejudices, biases, predispositions or appreciations. This means that attitudes induce actions in people such as the actions of NGOs not to enroll for the diploma programme run by GZU. Van den Aardwed and van den Aardwed (2003) summarize this strong effect of attitudes on the moulding of behaviour by stating that attitudes prepare people for action. So what is exerting the motivational influence on the NGOs employees 'to be or not to be adult educators?'

Structure Of Attitudes

Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) describe attitudes in terms of three components. These are: the **affective** component which involves a person's feelings or emotions about the attitude object such as a dislike for the adult education diploma programme; the behavioural component which is the way the attitude that a person possesses will subsequently influence his or her actions such as by openly declaring that one will not read for the diploma programme; and the **cognitive** component which involves a person's knowledge or beliefs about an object. For instance, the belief that university education will help to produce competent adult educators.

Changing Attitudes

Van den Aardweg and van den Aardweg (2003) advise that changing attitudes is not easy because attitudes quickly become embedded in the minds of people especially at the cognitive and affective levels. However, all hope is not lost as they propose a process for modifying or even changing attitudes which, by implication, involves two strategies. These are presenting to the NGO employees the benefits of attending the programme and conducting discussions on the programme as part of a wide stakeholder engagement.

Research Methodology

This study sought to solicit the opinions and attitudes of employees of Non Governmental Organizations on the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education programme offered at Great Zimbabwe University. A qualitative research design was adopted because it suited the purpose of the study whose major focus was on understanding people's interpretation of their own social reality in a given situation (Bryman, 1988).

An inventory of NGOs operating in Masvingo Province with offices in Masvingo City was obtained from the National Association of Non Governmental Organizations (NANGO) Regional Offices. The list comprised 48 organizations of which 10 were purposively selected for this study. Those selected met the criterion of being engaged in community development or education programmes in rural or urban settings. Three (3) research subjects were conveniently sampled from each organization. The sample consisted of one (1) manager and two (2) junior employees occupying positions of field officer. The procedure for sampling involved the selection of managers whom the researchers considered had information that was important for the study and then assigning these managers the task of identifying two other members who they believed had knowledge or information on the phenomenon under study. Chilisa and Preece (2005) support this approach which combines convenient and snowball sampling because the researcher can identify respondents that might be difficult to sample through other sampling methods.

Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire that was administered on the twenty junior employees who were literate enough to answer the questions independently while the ten managers were interviewed in order to increase reliability and validity through in-depth probing. Triangulation of data sources is recommended to increase credibility of the research (Chilisa and Preece, 2005).

Data pertaining to demographic characteristics of respondents were presented in tables and analysed statistically in frequencies and percentages whilst those that needed descriptive treatment were interpretively analysed in accordance with each of the research objectives.

Findings And Discussion

The findings of this study are presented and discussed in the following sequence: demographic characteristics of the respondents, level of awareness of the diploma programme, attitudes towards the programme, assessment on course relevance, additional courses that need to be included in the programme, factors that are considered to negatively affect programme enrolment and suggestions on what the university needs to do to attract more participants in the programme.

Demographic Characteristics Of The Respondents

Respondents in the study totalled 30 participants comprising management and junior employees who were selected to provide views about the current adult education programme.

Age Ranges Of The Respondents

Table 1: Age distribution of the respondents

N=30

Age range in years	F	
21-30	6	
31-40	13	
41-50	8	
51-60	3	
Total	30	

Table 1 shows that 63% of the employees fell in the age range of 21-40 years. This age range constitutes adults who are mature and energetic enough to pursue NGO work. Those in the 41-60 years age group could constitute those in management positions. The younger employees could be the right candidates for diploma training as this could enhance their skills in working with adults.

Educational Qualifications Of Respondents

The study sought to establish if the respondents had an adult education diploma or any other tertiary education qualification.

Table 2: Qualifications of respondents.

N=30

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma in Adult Education	7	23.33
Degree in Adult Education	2	6.67
Other Degree /Diploma	10	33.33
No Diploma/ Degree)	11	36.67
Total	30	100.00

Thirty percent of the respondents had diploma/degree qualifications in adult education while 36.67% possessed neither a degree nor a diploma qualification. All of the non degree/diploma employees were in the field officer grade whose duties involved interaction with adults. It could be among these employees where adult education skills are required.

Experience Of Working With Adults

Respondents were also asked whether their work involved training or educating of adults. In response, 19 (63.33%) of the respondents said their work involved educating and training of adults whilst 11 (36.67 %) said they were not involved in educating and training of adults. Those who were involved in training /education practiced adult education in the fields of advocacy, agriculture , civic education and health promotion. This finding indicates that there existed an enrolment base for adult education in the NGO sector. The University needs to explore the means to attract students ‘to be adult educators. ‘

Prior Knowledge Of The Diploma Programme

The study found out that 60% of the respondents did not know of the existence of this programme at Great Zimbabwe University let alone to have been trained in adult education. Twenty percent had heard about the programme from their peers and work colleagues. Noteworthy is that 26.67% of the respondents had already been trained in adult education elsewhere. Such respondents could become useful in the campaign to market the GZU diploma programme

Attitude Of Employees Towards The Diploma Programme

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or not to the statement that they would enroll / would have enrolled for the programme if they were eligible and also whether university trained adult educators had a role to play in the NGO they worked.

Table 3. Employee reactions to statements on attitudes towards the GZU Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education.

N=30

Statement	Reaction(frequency and percentage)						
	SA	A	N	D	SA	TOTAL	
I would join/could have joined the diploma programme if offered.	13(43.33)	9(30)	8(26.67)	0	0	30(100)	
University trained adult educators have a role to play in NGO work	20(66.67)	3(10)	7(23.33)	0	0	30(100)	

The findings show that all the 30 respondents expressed a positive attitude and willingness to enroll for the diploma programme. The question whether or not university trained adult educators can make a difference in NGOs was important for checking on reliability and consistency of responses since it discreetly emphasized on the utility of the diploma to NGO work whereas the previous question was on the attitude to enroll or not.

There were 76.67% of the respondents who agreed that university trained adult educators have a role to play in the NGOs they worked for. None of the respondents doubted the utility of the diploma with respondents stating such reasons as those useful skills were needed. There were others among those who already possessed equivalent qualifications who stated the need for research skills and effective adult education methodologies. Programmes in adult education run the risk of irrelevance and of being shunned by adult learners if they are in the hands of untrained educators (Dean, 2011).

These reactions significantly demonstrate positive attitudes towards the Diploma programme for both employees and managers of NGOs in Masvingo.

Attitude Of Managers Towards Enrolling Subordinates On The Diploma Programme.

Table 4. Managers' responses to enrolling subordinates.

N=10

Statement	Participant Reaction						
		SA	A	N	D	SA	TOTAL
The manager would recommend the Diploma programme to subordinates	F	4	3	3	0	0	10
	%	40	30	30	0	0	100

It was found out that 70% of the managers would recommend the diploma programme to their subordinates. This view points to highly positive attitudes towards the programme. The major influence on this attitude was that NGO management felt most of their work involved working with adults and as such their subordinates needed adult education skills to produce results. Youngman and Singh (2005) noted that those who facilitate adult learning require a particular range of competences in order to be effective.

Relevance Of Courses Offered In The Programme

The respondents were requested to assess the relevance of courses offered in the programme and to list the five most relevant courses which they felt adult learners in their organizations could be trained on in the diploma programme. This could offer an indication of the usefulness of the diploma courses to NGO work. Gboku and Lekoko (2007) assert that ranking is useful in Adult Education because it makes it easy to identify the priority needs of the community that require immediate solutions. The table shows how both the managers and their employees assessed the courses.

Table 5. Assessment of diploma courses by NGO employees...

Course	Frequency	Percentage
HIV/AIDS Education	22	78.33
Gender Studies	20	66.67
Research Methods and Statistics	19	63.33
Development Studies	16	53.33
Information Communication Technology	14	46.67

Table 6 shows the importance of health education and the need for NGOs to understand and teach HIV and AIDs Education effectively. This assessment confirms an observation by Indabawa (2002) that Adult Education is the most effective means for promoting the reduction of the spread of HIV/AIDS. Adults in the lower socio-economic backgrounds constitute the most affected victims of HIV/AIDS. Respondents also chose Gender Studies and Research Methods and Statistics which reflects the need to place emphasis on gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming in project work and the need for development agencies to address the real needs of the communities they seek to provide services. Development Studies was prioritized probably in view of the mission of the umbrella body, NANGO, which emphasizes sustainable development. Both management and staff appeared to value Information Management (ICT) reflecting the quest for appropriate competences needed to navigate the information highways. Overall, this selection reflects the complementarity of knowledge and skills in the practice of NGO work.

Courses Of Least Relevance To Ngo Work

Respondents identified those courses offered in the programme which had either little or no significance in their work. These courses were identified as: Introduction to World Religions; History of the African Church; Understanding the Bible for Pastoral work; Church History; Agricultural Extension and Development.

Respondents unanimously agreed that such courses needed to be offered to students majoring in religious studies. The finding could mean that prospective students could be dissuaded from enrolling for the programme if they regarded some of the courses offered as irrelevant.

Courses That Could Be Included In The Programme

Respondents regarded the inclusion of the following courses as an aspect that could make the diploma studies more relevant to NGO work. These were identified as follows: Project Management; Financial Management; Result Based Programming; Monitoring and Evaluation; Conflict Management; Administration/ Management Principles.

By so doing, the respondents identified important NGO roles. Success in these roles needs skills and knowledge on the suggested topics.

Perceptions Of NGOS On Decreased Enrolment

The study also sought to find out what the NGO employees thought were the reasons for the declining enrolment into the diploma programme. Whilst the majority of the NGO employees could not suggest reasons, the few that offered them mentioned ignorance of the existence of the programme at Great Zimbabwe University, economic hardships faced by prospective students and high study fees as the major reasons for declining enrolments.

Turning to NGO employees, the major constraints that affect their participation in the programme are: insufficient time to attend lectures since NGOs management expects their contracted employees to meet set targets timeously; the nature of work requires employees to spend most of their time in the field with the clients. This leaves little or no opportunity for engaging in residential study programmes; their employment statuses are that of 'contract workers' whose terms expire at fixed periods. They have to apply themselves fully to enhance their chances to have their contracts extended or renewed.

Gboku and Lekoko (2007) observe that multiple obstacles have a synergistic effect on individuals who may wish to engage in Adult Education programmes.

NGO employees expect management to offer support to employees who may need to further their education. They see management being facilitative by reimbursing all the fees paid by the student; allowing access to the organisations resources such as library books, computer equipment and transport to study venues. This support could generate interest among employees to enroll for continuing education programmes.

Suggestions For Improving Enrolments In The Diploma Programmes

The respondents made several suggestions that they considered would help improve enrolments into the programme. These emanate from what respondents identified as obstacles/ constraints to enrolment into the programme. However, concern has already been raised on the ignorance the public has on the existence of the adult education diploma programme. Lack of awareness of the programme was attributed to ineffective marketing of the diploma by the university. Respondents therefore suggested that the university engages in an extensive marketing exercise involving both the print and the electronic media to ensure that the benefits of the programme are highlighted. The public would be interested to know how the programme increases ones employment opportunities and how it adds value to his/her performance at work. As Brookfield (1986) suggests, participation can be increased by structuring programmes around learners' needs and abilities. Respondents also suggested engaging in campaigns which involve personal visits to various organizations to market the programme to the employees. This approach is possible if management is engaged in the sensitization initiatives. Advertising for enrolment should be in print and electronic form with some of the advertisements posted directly to NGOs.

Suggestions were also made regarding how the learning should be organized. The block release idea was endorsed; however, it was thought provision of evening classes could enable some NGO employees to budget time for attending lectures. Those taking commercial courses in the parallel programme under the Faculty of Commerce at GZU were cited as a successful example.

Fees were once again cited as a major constraining factor. Respondents suggested that a flexible fee payment system be developed to alleviate the financial pressure that students face. Adults are known to have multiple roles and hence competing interests (Rogers, 1986).

The issue of attaching adult education students to NGOs was suggested. This it was observed could achieve three objectives. Firstly, it would expose the student to NGO work and to working with adults. Secondly, it would afford the host NGO to assess the value of adult education trained personnel in their organizations. Ultimately, it would enhance employment opportunities for people holding adult education qualifications in future.

Finally, some respondents suggested that the university needed to be more visible through having its own separate buildings. Currently, it uses facilities at the town's teachers college and technical college. Whilst at face value this appeared to be outside our enquiry, it was advanced that people's perception of a university develop from what they see and experience. Increased visibility enhances the status of the institution and distinguishes it from other tertiary institutions. The university programmes can also be viewed and judged along with the institution itself.

Conclusion

The study concludes that:

*The Adult Education programmes are not well known to the public and hence extensive marketing is necessary. This can be done through personal visits to organizations, print and electronic media.

*Most of the courses offered in the programme are very relevant to NGO activities. However, there is need to revisit the inclusion of courses on religion on the programme

*Non Governmental Organizations have a positive attitude towards Adult Education training This is the case because most of their activities involve working with adults.

*Participation of NGO employees in University Adult Education Programmes is constrained by:

- lack of time to attend lectures
- lack of adequate finances to meet fees requirements.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, it is recommended that the University engages in an extensive programme marketing exercise so that the community becomes fully informed about the existence of this programme. This can be effected through the print, electronic media and also through door to door meetings with potential beneficiaries.

There is need to engage in stakeholder consultative meetings to identify clients' needs which will enable programme designers to align the Diploma programme with the NGOs educational needs. Such meetings can help to develop positive attitudes towards the programme.

The University should re-examine the courses offered at Diploma and Degree levels so that at Diploma level emphasis is placed on foundation courses which provide the adult education practitioner some firm grounding upon which to build his / her career. The University should explore the feasibility of instituting an organized fee payment system where adult working students would pay their fees in installments through a stop order arrangement.

Finally, the number of Religion courses being offered either as core as or optional courses should be halved to create space for programme designers to accommodate other courses suggested by Non Governmental Organizations such as Monitoring and Evaluation and Project Management.

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