Introduction
The concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is relatively new in the field of education and is quite diverse depending on a particular institution. Basically, ODL, in institutions such as Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) involves the separation of the teacher and the learner and provision of self-contained teaching/learning materials. The purpose of this paper was to find out the extent to which ZOU collaborates with industry and community in the development of world class teaching/learning materials that satisfy the needs of the student, industry and the community. ZOU targets mostly mature students who are engaged in full-time employment who desire to advance themselves academically. As a stakeholder to ZOU, industry should provide the learning institution with the type of content that it needs to function successfully. ZOU could also collaborate with communities to improve individual livelihoods, through imparting skills to small-scale farmers and Small and Medium Enterprises. A case study of ZOU was used. Participants were randomly sampled from ZOU lecturers, employers in industry and entrepreneurs in the community. Interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires were used to gather data which were analysed using content and statistical analysis respectively. Hopefully the findings will help ZOU develop and deliver relevant teaching/learning materials.

Background
It has been and still is a big challenge for industry and community to interfere with curricula of most learning institutions unless they have been approached to assist. Of late, most institutions of higher learning have introduced the concept of attachment, which is hands-on experience for the learner. For ZOU, this concept is limited to a few programmes such as Bachelor of Science Honours in Counselling, Bachelor of Science in Development Studies, Bachelor of Science in Records and Archives Management, and Bachelor of Science in Special Needs Education to mention but a few among a wide range of programmes. In other faculties such as Commerce and Law, the students are not yet going on attachment because the assumption is that the learners are already in employment.

Abstract
The concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is relatively new in the field of education and is quite diverse. Basically, ODL, in institutions such as Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) involves the separation of the teacher and the learner and provision of self-contained teaching/learning packages. The provision of relevant teaching/learning to the student depends on a collaborative team approach which comprises learning institution, industry, community and many others. The purpose of this paper was to find out the extent to which ZOU collaborates with industry and community in the development of world class teaching/learning materials that satisfy the needs of the student, industry and the community. ZOU targets mostly mature students engaged in full-time employment who desire to advance themselves academically. As a stakeholder to ZOU, industry should provide the learning institution with the type of content that it needs to function successfully. ZOU could also collaborate with communities to improve individual livelihoods, through imparting skills to small-scale farmers and Small and Medium Enterprises. A case study of ZOU was used. Participants were randomly sampled from ZOU lecturers, employers in industry and entrepreneurs in the community. Interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires were used to gather data which were analysed using content and statistical analysis respectively. Hopefully the findings will help ZOU develop and deliver relevant teaching/learning materials.
are involved in a joint venture. Participants plan and make decisions; individuals consider themselves to be part of a team working towards achieving common goals. They share expertise and responsibility for the outcome. Further, the relationship among collaborators is non-hierarchical; there is shared power based on knowledge and expertise rather than role or title. When we consider the collaboration that can take place between ZOU, the industry and the community, we need to take into cognisance the sentiments expressed above and try to work out the partnership accordingly (“Unmasking the Role of Collaboration and Partnerships in Open and Distance Learning Systems,” World Journal of Management and Behavioural Studies 1 (2) doi.org/10.21595/wjmb.2013.131.pdf).

According to Hill (2011), companies need to develop collaborative capabilities before implementing collaboration tools. In any collaboration, there should not be any information overload which may be incomplete and distracting. Only the right information released at the right time tends to be effective. Some principles to consider when people are in collaboration are that there should be focus to achieve business results and to treat collaboration as a capability. While information, authority and decision-making should be aligned, personal accountability should be promoted. High standards for discussion, dialogue and information sharing should be put into place. A few strict rules should be articulated and enforced. Further, the organisation should be flexible enough to promote collaboration while support systems should be aligned to promote ownership. A rhythm of divergence and convergence should also be promoted and complex trade offs managed. (www.optimapartners.co.uk/blog-and-news.asp?id=OPT-BC100010)

Benefits of Collaborative Team Approach

Links between educational settings, services, agencies and the community help improve educational achievement, prosperity of organisations and the livelihoods of individuals. The collaborative team approach boosts self-esteem as concerned individuals, organisations and learning institutions have a contribution on the outcome of the project at hand. Therefore, there is need for greater partnerships in working with other services and agencies to be able to review and/or develop learning materials in line with the demands of industry and community (www.sagepub.com/upm-data/25241_02_chemicals_02.pdf). In addition, information sharing is academically and socially healthy as it helps build consensus, strengthen partnership voice, break down professional boundaries and parochial attitudes; can help to build a more cohesive community approach through united multi-agency practitioners taking greater ownership and responsibility for addressing local needs jointly, thus, avoiding duplication or overlap of provision of services. Collaborative team approach promotes mutual support, encouragement and the exchange of ideas between staff while at the same time it helps the sharing of expertise, knowledge and resources for training and good practice. It leads to more manageable workloads; improved co-ordination of services resulting in better relationships, improved referrals and the addressing of joint targets, for instance, during student attachment; it offers a broader perspective or focus to working practice.

Collaboration helps to improve understanding and raise awareness of issues and agencies, and other professional practice. It increases the level of trust existing between partners/providers in relation to everyone, knowing what each can and will deliver. It also facilitates joint planning for future multi-agency developments; increased staff morale, knowing that they do not work in isolation and that issues and problems can be resolved collaboratively; more enthusiastic and committed staff who have high expectations of themselves. An extended school co-ordinator in a secondary school commented: ‘We benefit from having the experience of working with people from other backgrounds. We pick up other perspectives and others’ ways of doing things’ (Coleman, 2006: 14).

In addition to the cited benefits, www.state.nj.us/education/students/irs/collaborative.pdf argues that for educators, parents or guardians and other community representatives, collaborative team approach programme provides opportunities to pool their experience, expertise, resources and individual perspectives on student strengths and vulnerabilities for the precise identification of student opportunities for the development or enhancement of essential skills and strategies to meet diverse student needs. Collaborative team approach provides a medium for bringing about changes in school culture and the norms of professional behaviour that promote collaborative interactions and relationships, which benefit students, educators, parents and other community members alike. Collaboration increases general communication and coordination among all staff, and specifically staff in special education and general education, and provides a way for them to share their expertise. It also increases staff and parent awareness of student needs and available resources for obtaining support and assistance in career choice, and increases administrators’ awareness of educational needs and programme refinements as well as providing valuable information for making school-wide curriculum changes.

The Challenges of Collaborative Team Approach

The challenges that are identified with collaborative team approach arise largely as a result of the complexities involved when practitioners engage in collaborative ventures. The following are some of the main challenges faced by members of a collaborative team:

- Funding concerns in relation to sustainability, for example, conflicts over funding within and between different agencies; a general lack of funding for collaborative team approach training and development work and to cover accommodation and on-costs for service delivery.
• Time – only a finite amount of time available to respond to many different priorities peculiar to specific organisations
• Communication – it might be challenging to ensure clear routes for two-way communication between the educational setting, agencies and practitioners in order to exchange information and improve joined-up co-ordinated working
• The danger of a lack of clarity arising about the roles and responsibilities of practitioners in a wider and more diverse student’s workforce
• Adapting to working in a new and different context, for example, a factory, a school or a mine, as opposed to own familiar home or work environment
• The management of different professional and collaborative team service cultures, for example, staff recruitment and retention, disparities in status, pay and conditions of service, working hours and working conditions. Some Ministries, such as, Health work 24 hours a day, seven days a week and Education in most learning institutions in Zimbabwe is officially 8 hours a day.
• Understanding each other’s professional language and protocols
• Territorial issues – overcoming the reluctance to share equipment and facilities, professional jealousy and inter-agency mistrust (www.sagepub.com/upm-data/25241_02_chemicals_02.pdf)

Solutions to Challenges of Collaborative Team Approach

In collaborative team approach, there is need to avoid too much ‘referring on’ or ‘passing the buck’ becoming too regular an approach being adopted to give the illusion of effective action having been taken. There is also need to find mutually convenient times for managers and practitioners to meet. Where problems of cross-authority, health authority (primary care trust – PCT) and the local authority boundaries are different, solutions of addressing them should be found. This can be compounded by additional stress and pressures arising from unsuccessful or disappointing attempts at multi-agency working having an adverse effect on staff morale and turnover. The assumption that multi-agency partnership working must be adopted at all times, even when it may be inappropriate in some instances should be carefully examined. To be looked into also are instances where lack of coherence in the aims, intentions and joined-up thinking between different agencies, may result in role overlap or duplication of services. Further, other areas to look out for are staff resistance to change both within the educational setting and among multi-agency practitioners and a lack of understanding and appreciation about the reasons for change, and what the change process entails and the benefits it can bring to improving the quality of school and college graduates, young people and their families.

Some issues are concerned with engaging the ‘hard to reach’ parents/carers, families, children and young people with multi-agency service provision, education and lifelong learning. Positive ways for meeting the challenges in schools and other educational settings are already contributing in a number of ways to improving the wider well-being of children and young people, however, they cannot do this alone. Every Child Matters (ECM) a UK government initiative for England and Wales launched in 2003 is an example that provides a climate that fosters and encourages partnership working with external agency practitioners, who also recognise the school or other educational settings as being a valuable resource to help them fulfil their remit in relation to this huge agenda. One extended school (ES) co-ordinator commented: ‘We can’t work in isolation from the ECM agenda because anything we do fits in with one category or another’ (Kendall et al., 2007: 11).

Sundstrom, de Meuse and Futrell, (1990) point out that applications for effective team approach include advice and involvement, as in quality control circles and committees; production and service, as in assembly groups and sales teams; projects and development, as in engineering and research groups; and action and negotiation, as in sports teams and combat units. The key to development is feedback to and from team members.

Research Questions

For this research study to be carried out, answers to the following research questions were sought:
1. To what extent does ZOU collaborate with industry in the development of teaching/learning materials?
2. What influence does the community have in the development of ZOU teaching/learning materials?
3. To what extent does ZOU liaise with industry and community in order to come up with programmes on offer for each academic year?

Methodology

A case study of ZOU was used. Participants were randomly sampled from ZOU lecturers, employers in industry and entrepreneurs in the community. Interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires were used to gather data on the collaborative team approach in the development of ODL teaching and learning materials. Data were analysed using content and statistical analysis respectively. Qualitative data were used to draw up themes and meanings of verbal data from open-ended questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.

Presentation and Discussion of the Results

At the Zimbabwe Open University, lecturers and programme leaders do not just dream of programmes to launch for incoming students but base the development of learning materials on results from needs analysis. In an interview with a lecturer and programme leader of Bachelor of Education in Youth
Development Studies (BEDY) in the Faculty of Arts and Education, on 23 July 2013, the informant stated that the Faculty introduced the BEDY programme basing on the felt need prompted by Commonwealth countries. ZOU had been handling the programme under the supervision of the Commonwealth for five years, then it was weaned off to develop its own modules with relevant information to suit the needs of Zimbabwean youths. A market survey for needs analysis was conducted for the BEDY programme and organisations which contributed were the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, and Churches. These organisations were and are still helpful when it comes to sharing what is on the ground in terms of market needs.

In another interview with a manager at Barclays Bank on 24 July 2013, it was stated that ZOU is offering programmes which are very helpful to those who wish to study while they work. The programmes are relevant as they are home-grown with practical examples which are likely to be experienced at one’s work place. He, however, pointed out that since ODL usually is appropriate for mature students who are already in employment, if it were possible there should be more face-to-face interaction than at present especially for beginners who still need guidance on how to study at degree level. Another alternative could be to introduce call centres where learners can find assistance when need be, for a fee if necessary. There should also be some mechanisms put in place to monitor progress of students as well as assist them all the way through when they face problems with their studies. ZOU could maximise on the comments given to students on attachment as well as practical examples presented in assignments and encourage e-learning for current information.

An analysis of questionnaires from five ZOU lecturers revealed that they view the collaborative team approach as comprising ZOU human resources personnel such as authors, editors and content reviewers working together across the university and each individual contributing whatever they have towards the production of teaching and learning materials. It also involves working together to improve the quality and pooling of expertise to develop the modules for the benefit of the learner, hence, a lot of dialogue is needed. They recommended that the collaborative team approach should be used in the development of teaching/learning materials as the module is the teacher and it yields high products through cross-pollination of ideas. Further, there is sharing of resources as well as the fact that people do their work in time and more people with diverse experiences produce better products. However, the team approach is not necessarily effective without choice of the right team members, good team management and a conducive environment for individual contribution.

In a focus group discussion on 25 July 2013, most lecturers agreed that ZOU faces some challenges in the development of materials especially on developing new courses and modules due to such issues as failure to pay engaged writers, content reviewers and editors on time. ZOU staff members are confined in offices, locked up in administrative activities thus, making it difficult to network with industry and commerce. On the question of what ZOU can do to create a team spirit while developing ODL teaching/learning materials, it was suggested that the institution should value contributions of all stakeholders and ensure that everybody maintains high standards of performance. Another contribution was that there should be a collaborative approach in coming up with a course to offer and adding more time to the processes of developing the learning materials. University research work or findings have to be put to test by industry, commerce and communities. Platforms may be set up to showcase to would be end users the applicability of university research findings. Once industry is made to appreciate our research findings, it may be persuaded to contribute in cash or kind towards the fulfillment of perceived and real needs of learners. Yet still, another contribution was that team members should be trained and that regular in-service workshops should be held. On collaboration of ZOU with industry and community, the participants said this is done on a moderate basis hence they felt that these should be involved more in module writing, content reviewing and editing. They said use of case studies and research based learning materials are needed. As for the community, they felt that to date, very little contribution comes from it as they are not given the opportunity to attend seminars on materials development or any such fora.

An analysis on the sentiments from the community is as follows: one participant says ZOU should introduce doctorate courses that are affordable and accessible to prospective students in rural areas. Another participant was of the opinion that ZOU should advertise their programmes more widely to the business community and convince it that their degrees are as good as those of other state universities. Two other participants advised ZOU to introduce more technical programmes for the benefit of aspiring entrepreneurs and provide more on-line courses to cut on costs in terms of travel to and from Regional offices and resource centres for information. On what they have gained from ZOU, two participants obtained a Bachelor’s degree respectively with the other one obtaining a Master’s degree. For the other participants, she says she benefited from ZOU because it caters for part-time students which other universities do not. She is using the communication skills she obtained from the degree in her field of work. The third participant said she has not gained anything out of ZOU. The fourth participant claims to have gained business management skills through ZOU. All the participants said they had not engaged any ZOU part-time students and they were not aware that they could do that.
An analysis on the sentiments from industry is as follows: The personnel in industry stated that collaborative team approach implies the coming together of experts during the process of teaching/learning sharing information, ideas and views on specific issues, the sentiments supported by Hill in 2011. That way, knowledge is imparted easily due to different styles of teaching used in collaborative techniques. It was pointed out that unless team approach involving the learning institution, industry, commerce and the community is enforced, in some instances it becomes very difficult to engage ZOU graduates due to bad publicity in the media from those who do not know what is on the ground and who are not students themselves. At international level in general, ODL institutions may be viewed as providing second rate tuition as compared to conventional learning institutions. The proposed solution was to enlighten team members that every contribution from every team member is equally important thus, making the members own the course and product, otherwise without that the ODL courses will remain their thing. However, for those graduates who are already in employment of particular organisations, the story is different as their contributions to their places of work are highly appreciated.

In another focus group discussion with personnel from industry on 25 July 2013, what came out of the discussion was that collaborative team approach is very valuable in the development of superior quality teaching and learning materials which incorporate current global events in industry, community and the economy. In general, collaborative team approach is very effective as it enables learning institutions to cater for the needs of the learners, industry and community as well as enable the ODL institution to evaluate its programmes versus the clientele needs. This group also expressed their concerns in regards to the fact that some local and international companies to date do not recognise ZOU qualifications as opposed to qualifications obtained from conventional universities. That is a major challenge which needs to be addressed through the engagement of industry, commerce and community in the development of ODL materials of high quality in addition to the development of team spirit. In addition, they also stated that ZOU modules ought to be reviewed on a regular basis instead of waiting for a crisis resulting from negative publicity. However, most organisations nowadays encourage their personnel to upgrade themselves academically while they work and ODL is the answer as the programmes are home grown and relevant to the clientele.

Conclusion

From the research findings, it can be concluded that collaboration of ZOU, industry and community needs to be aggressively promoted and that their contributions be used when reviewing the existing as well as new learning materials. ZOU should cater for the real needs of the learners for them to function productively at their places of work and daily lives. On the other hand, ZOU should market itself effectively and ensure credibility of its courses on offer. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations will help ZOU in the development and delivery of relevant teaching and learning materials.

Recommendations

In light of these research findings, the following recommendations were made to improve on the quality and relevancy of ZOU teaching/learning materials.

- ZOU should always collaborate with industry and community, who are the market base of the learning institution and include their contributions when reviewing the learning materials.
- For ZOU to develop useful learning materials, an open system that allows information to be shared across all units and players is required.
- Production of teaching/learning materials for ZOU, as an ODL institution, is one of its core businesses hence more resources should be channelled towards this area more than anything else if students are to benefit from their fees.
- Research questions have to be raised by industry, commerce and communities and brought to the university for research so that there is a linkage among them.
- All ZOU courses should be made affordable to all aspiring students including the marginalised and those in remote areas.
- ZOU should introduce more technical programmes for the benefit of aspiring entrepreneurs and provide more on-line courses to cut on costs in terms of travel to and from Regional offices and resource centres for information.
References


