A Force-field Case Analysis of the Push and Pull Factors Affecting ZOU Students in Enrolling and Withdrawing in Mashonaland West and Manicaland regions

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to describe Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Bed(EAPPS) students’ background, identify push factors motivating them to register and establish anticipated pull factors compelling these students to withdraw.

The study used a descriptive survey in which data was gathered from 48 students from Mashonaland West and Manicaland regions using questionnaires. The study found that, the majority of students are young primary school teachers studying by the distant learning mode for the first time. They are motivated by the need for a degree, salary increase and promotional prospects. These motives are promoted mainly by The Ministry of Education, the teachers main employer in Zimbabwe. Their progress can be affected by poor performance as a result of improper study orientation, irrelevant modules and costs. The study recommends serious student orientation, a review of modules, a practical programme orientation and short courses to develop intrinsic motivation. The study fears that if The Ministry of Education decided not to recognize ZOU degree qualifications, as it did for TECHKON university, then ZOU's survival is threatened. Tutors can visit students at identified rural centres to reduce travel costs and take ZOU to the people.

Introduction
Knowledge of students’ background and factors motivating them to enroll for a particular distant learning degree programme provides an essential contextual leverage used to sustain student motivation. This (student background and motivation) is even more important for ZOU students who attend and withdraw on a voluntary basis. This fluid nature of the distant learner calls for a student centred analysis of the push and pull factors which determine study continuity. It is undesirable by all ZOU stakeholders that any of these students be counted as a dropout statistic.

Actually, an important objective for teachers and tutors alike, is to increase the interest or motivation of those they teach. Beard (1978:82) identified these as teacher centred motivating activities; “clear definition of goals, prompt feedback for success, active rather than passive method of learning and a variety of teaching methods.” Of necessity for adult students is the fact that, the goals must be tailor made to satisfy those of the student. It also follows that, knowledge of the student’s background, push and pull factors is an essential base on which teachers build their student motivation strategies.

Let us regard student motivation as the crucial driving force, which pushes a student to register for a course and propels him/her through the four years of full-time studying at a distance. This is an important consideration in Zimbabwe during these times of a galloping hyper-inflation and all other reliabilities demand a lion's share from the limited resources. The costs of transport, tuition fees and accommodation are pull factors, pulling the distant learner from a ZOU degree programme. The purpose of this study is to establish the push (motivating) and pull (constraining) factors experienced by ZOU students in Mashonaland West and Manicaland with the aim of reducing the pull factors and student drop-out rate.

Contextual analysis
The most significant movement in the 21st century draws on the role of distance education as a tool for meeting a global and exponentially growing information economy. Those of us involved in distance education programmes consider that literacy, awareness and interest are powerful agents for curricular change and alternative means to the traditional methods of instruction. In developing countries, education is considered as a means of bridging the societal, economic and cultural gaps among different population groups. Hence
it was declared a human right in a democratic Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), is a distance teaching and open learning institution which was conceived in 1993 and was formalized by an act of parliament in 1999. At its conception in 1993, ZOU’s vision was to educate every primary and secondary school head up to a masters degree level by the year 2000, (Dzvimbo: 2000). This vision has not yet been achieved as some of the students fail, repeat and drop out of the programme. This study wonders what push factors had motivated them to register in the first place and what pull factors would compel them to drop. One should consider that, in a distance teaching and learning situation, the student is physically separated from the tutor. Students’ ability to learn on their own, makes ZOU products unique. In addition to their adult responsibilities, as parents and workers, such students demonstrate a high potential for life-long learning.

ZOU was instituted to overcome the tyrants of distance and learning space. It is open in the sense that, it has no age limit, hence is not bounded from above. It is not fixed anywhere but is everywhere in the form of its modules and students. ZOU offers full-time degree programmes in that, once the student has registered, collects his/her reading material, the student has the teacher on a full-time basis, in his/her bedroom, bus or at work. By that token, ZOU is the only university in which teachers work 24 hours a day. Such an operational measure of scatter makes ZOU the most popular university in Zimbabwe.

In its mode of teaching, ZOU was influenced by a combination of a dissemination and developmental orientation to open learning. The dissemination approach aims to open up access to quantitative and qualitative knowledge, while the developmental orientation encourages individual academic development to self-actualisation levels.

These complementary objectives, individual development and access, are achieved by using the module, its principal teacher at a distance. The module is written to address the requirements of the university course outline. Tutors facilitate student learning by interpreting the module, marking assignments and providing feedback to students and stakeholders. This tutor's linking pin function, motivated the researcher to explore motivating (push) factors and constraining (pull) factors experienced by ZOU students in Mashonaland West and Manicaland regions.

Research Problem
The study was motivated by the perceived lack of documented information on motivation (push) and restraining (pull) factors by ZOU students in Zimbabwe.

Lack of such information on push and pull factors, manifests itself in sporadic student drop-out which take stakeholders by surprise. During the panic, it is common for wrong questions to be asked and simplistic explanations and solutions to be suggested and put forward. Such a reactive position is not desired because it does not save the drop-out. The study seeks a proactive strategic position based on a current database.

Research Objectives
The major aim of this study is to establish the push and pull factors experienced by Intake 19, ZOU, Bed (EAPPS) students, is specifically focused by these objectives.

The study seeks to:
- describe the demographic and academic background of ZOU, Bed (EAPPS) students
- identify push factors motivating students to register for educational management degree programme with ZOU
- establish pull factors which can affect students’ progress

Significance of the Study
The study is influenced by Kurt-lewin's force-field theory which proposes that, "every behavior is the result of an equilibrium between driving (push) and restraining (pull) forces” (Stonner, Freeman and Gilbert 1997: 414).

Push factors motivate students to study and complete their degree programmes, while pull factors compel students to withdraw. The study
intents to find ways in which pull factors can be reduced, so that they are less than the push factors and enable more students to complete their studies with ZOU. Information found will be useful for ZOU co-ordinators and tutors. They can use it as content for guiding students during orientation. Strategies to maintain and increase push (motivating) and reduce pull (restraining) factors will be formulated as operational policies for ZOU to reduce the number of drop-outs as a result of pull factors.

**Literature Review**

As more and more universities are established, the competition for quality students increases hence, “the need to make university education relevant to the training needs of students becomes very urgent” as advised by Washanga, Githua and Keraro (1999:217). In Zimbabwe, the use of block-release, parallel and part-time programmes at tertiary institutions bear testimony to this need for student centred degree and diploma programmes.

It should be registered that, relevance is relative depending on the subject content, methodology and nature of student. The student variable requires the study to describe the demographic and background of the Intake 19, Bed(AEPPS) students. Thorpe’s (1989) hinted that, successful study is often related to the strength of motivation of individual students. This notion makes subject of this study, ‘student motivating factors’ of great significance for ZOU, whose student population register on a ‘voluntary’ basis.

For the methodology variable, Kowalski (1988) and Knowles in Jarvis (1990:90) suggested that andragogy (the teaching of adults) requires a teacher who is more responsive and less directive to student learning. They pointed out that, adults are motivated, exhibit fixed behaviors, are independent and demand high levels of content relevance.

To this list of adult characteristics, Ndeya-Ndereya, Mhlanga and Chikuya (2003: 7) added that adults; have vast and varying learning experiences, learn things of immediate importance to them, have competing interests in life and learn when they want to. This student freedom compels ZOU to use motivate strategies based on students’ known motivating and restraining factors.

The implications of these characteristics are applicable to ZOU students who are adults, learning at a distance requires that, tutors should observe and use them as a basis for sustaining the motivation shown during registration. Assumed knowledge and activities should be based on students’ experiences to promote relevance. Houle in Cross (1981: 82) grouped learners into three categories according to the purpose of their relevance:

1. **Goal-oriented learners** are motivated to learn by an identified specific need
2. **Activity-oriented learners** take up learning to escape boredom and loneliness
3. **Learning-oriented learners**, learn for the sake of learning, satisfying the fundamental desire to grow through learning

A direct implication of these groups is that, ZOU materials specifically, modules and tutorials should aim to meet the student’s goals to be motivating (push factor) otherwise they become pull factors against stakeholders wishes. Walklin (1990: 212) identified student certification motive to learn when he said, “students join a course to learn theory and practice then obtain accreditation, validation of competences or certification for knowledge and skills acquired.” This observation is applicable to those ZOU students who are already appointed educational institutions heads. These could be motivated largely by the need of the paper qualification. Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (1994) in Cross (1981: 89) listed the following reasons (push factors) for adult learning; knowledge acquisition, personal intellectual growth, community development, religious, social development, escape from loneliness and an obligation from employers. These push factors were paralleled to learning barriers (pull factors) classified into the following three categories according to their source:

1. Situational barriers which include costs of tuition, transport, books
2. Institutional barriers encompassing these, course not scheduled for student convenience, too much red-tape in enrolment process, entry requirement too high

3. Dispositional barriers such as, student feeling too old to learn, lack of confidence and low achievement as shown by low assignment marks.

An important observation is that, the strength of each of these factors depends on the value the individual student attaches to the degree qualification. That is an individual analysis of the push and pull factors according to Kurt-lewin’s force-field analysis.

In Kenya, Washanga, Githua and Keraro (1999) found that, university courses were not sufficiently diversified to cater for student choices. Some students were ignorant of the relationship between the courses they take and their future careers. These were pull factors lowering student morale and future prospects.

In Zimbabwe, Nyaumwe and Bappoo (2004) found that mathematics teachers were motivated to attend the annual technology workshop by personal and professional factors, the need to keep abreast with mathematics technology and improve expert power in the teaching of mathematics. Zinyama (2005) supported the personal goals when he echoed that, students at Harare, Mutare and Bulawayo polytechnics participated in adult learning mainly to fulfill their personal goals. The key to these motives, were those goals related to their lifestyles, aspirations and need to increase knowledge as well as to fill in idle time.

The literature identified these aspects; universities should respond to students’ individual needs, adult students are unique and attend tutorials for different reasons. Whether they continue with their studies or not depends to a large extent on how they are motivated because they learn when they want to. Unfortunately, the literature says nothing about ZOU students. Specifically, it is mute about their motivation (push factors) and restraining (pull factors). This is an important required missing piece of the jigsaw in ZOU’s distant learning process.

Methodology

Research Design
A descriptive survey was adopted because of its ability to collect opinions, views and perceptions of people. It was the appropriate design to describe the academic background of ZOU students and their motives for enrolling in distance learning programmes.

Instruments
A five-item questionnaire was designed by the researcher for this specific purpose. It asked close-ended questions requiring demographic and academic background information of the respondents. Open-ended questions sought students’ aspirations, push and pull factors. Open-ended questions were ideal to facilitate individual responses and free the study from being confirmatory than exploratory. The questionnaire was also appropriate in that, respondents are literate. They provided individual responses and data was gathered from Mutare and Chinhoyi simultaneously.

Population and Sampling
The population of this study was made up of all Intake 9, BEd(EAPPS) students of 2006. The study settled for a convenience sampling strategy to raise the 48 respondents (n = 48), from those students who were present and voluntarily accepted to complete the questionnaire after the tutorial. The number of respondents, n = 48, is large enough for the variables (demographic data, academic background, aspirations, motivating factors and restraining factors) to be normally distributed hence findings can be generalized.

Procedure
A five item questionnaire was structured by the researcher for this particular study. It was pilot tested on a group n = 25 of students in Midlands province. After analyzing data, a few adjustments were done before 60 questionnaires were produced. Thirty questionnaires were sent to and administered by a colleague in Mutare after a tutorial. The other thirty were administered at Chinhoyi Provincial Center.

Out of the 60 questionnaires, 48 were completed and returned. That was an 80% return rate. Data was analysed using percentages to facilitate variable comparison.
Modified Morstain and Smart, Educational Participation Scales (EPS) and Kurt-lewin’s force-field analysis were used to approximate students’ inclinations to complete or drop out of the study programme.

Findings and Discussions

Demographic Data

Respondents were distributed by Gender and Age as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range in years</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51 plus</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
<td>29 (60%)</td>
<td>11 (23%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>48 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents are male (56%). This could be the natural distribution of the student population by gender. One can infer that, more males than females are studying educational management. The majority of students are young (60%) in the age range (31–40). This is the group, which has more responsibilities in the community, hence vulnerable to economic pull factors. The distribution is positively skewed by age.

Respondents had the following: Academic qualifications: Standard Six 1(2%), Grade Eleven 1(2%), ‘O’-Level 43 (90%) and ‘A’-Level 3(6%). Such a distribution could be accounted for by the minimum academic entry requirements which have been evolving over the years in Zimbabwe. According to Chivore (1990:18) ‘minimum academic requirements for entry into both non-graduate secondary and primary training colleges are five CSC, ‘O’-level equivalent to grades A, B or C.’

The majority of respondents are non-graduate primary school teachers (72%). They are classroom practitioners with either a Certificate in Education (C.E.) or a Diploma in Education (Dip. Ed). The number of students in educational administration namely, Senior teachers, Deputy Head or Head is decreasing. Secretaries (Sec.) and Accountancy (Acc.) are also registering in for the Bed(Educational Management) degree. An outstanding feature about this group is that, the majority 44 (92%) are involved in distance and open learning for the first time.

The other four (8%) did ‘O’-level by correspondence.

The implications of these findings on the contents and the teaching learning process in ZOU include, revisiting the content by including areas which apply to other students’ work. ZOU’s mission statement, read from *The Faculty of Education Arts and Humanities Student Handbook* (Undated: page 34) is to, “enhance capacity building by equipping officers in educational administrative positions with relevant administrative and planning skills.” The programme’s target population is made up of practicing administrators. According to these findings, only 6 out of 48 (13%) are from the targeted population. One wonders whether ZOU has quickly exhausted its market clientele.

The findings could be supporting Washanga, Githua and Keraro (1999: 210) who found that, “some students are ignorant of the relationship between the courses they take and their future careers.”

Aspirations

Respondents’ aspirations can be summarised in five categories: first, the only primary school head who responded, aspires to be a District Education Officer (D.E.O) that accounts for (2%).

Three respondents (6%) wish to be promoted to
lectureship posts in colleges or university. Those who aspire to be school heads 28(58%) are in the majority. Two reasons could be advanced for this; first, being a school head is the only visible promotional post for the student. Second, the Ministry of Education, their employer does not have other uses for the degree qualification.

In the study the researchers were surprised to register that, 13 (27%) of the respondents aspire to be, ‘better qualified teachers’ by doing an administrative degree content. It is the study's submission that, Bed (EAPPS) is not the best degree for students with such motives of being better effective classroom teachers. The last 4(7%) of the respondents want to, “leave teaching and probably use the degree in other management areas”.

**Motivating (push) factors**

The study analysed findings using modified Morstain and Smart (1974) found in Cross (1981:86), Six factor analysis of Educational Participation Scale (EPS). Readers should note that, respondents indicated more than one reason or motivating factor, which drove them to register for Bed (EAPPS) degree programme.

From these findings, one can deduce that, ZOU students are motivated to register for educational management degree programmes by three basic factors:

1. **External expectations.** The Ministry of Education Sport and Culture's policy of paying more to those who have degree qualifications than those without is compelling students to register.

2. **Friends who have completed the degree.** Friends who have completed the degree have been identified as motivating and encouraging.

3. **Professional advancement.** In which candidates expect promotion when they hold a degree is also motivating. Ministry of Education and Culture no longer promotes non-graduate teachers to Headship posts.

Self-development and cognitive interest is the least identified motivating factor by (35%) of the respondents.

Contrary to findings by Zinyama (2005), ZOU students do not register to fill up idle time. Nobody identified anything under Social relationships, Social welfare and Escape from boredom, home or work routine. It can be concluded that, ZOU students are goal-oriented. Their learning is a means to an ending.

**Findings seem to support Maslow’s hierarchy of needs which proposes that, adults from lower social classes are interested primarily in learning activities which meet their survival needs (acquire a degree, pay increase and promotion to Headship post).**

Researchers in the study are disturbed by the observation that, there is less intrinsic motivation in these students. If the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture which seem to provide the motivation valence for these students, reverses its salary and promotional policies which require a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Motivating (push) Factors n=48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
degree qualification, or decides not to officially recognize higher degrees obtained by distance learning, then the first blow would be a high student drop-out. We dread to imagine if the degree programme neatly but surely collapses or dies a natural death. It reminds the researcher of South Africa’s Technikon university degree programmes turned obsolete just overnight and the university was pushed out of business.

If each frequency is awarded a plus one (+1), because it is a push or motivating factor, then this group of students has a total of 115 points for its’ push factors.

**Restraining (pull) factors**

Using a modified version of Morstain and Smart (1974) factor analysis, the following table of factors was formulated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description of Restraining (pull) factor</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Student factor</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- pressure from work and other commitments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- distance from ZOU study centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- failing assignments and examinations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Material factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- irrelevant modules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- inadequate reading materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Process factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- inadequate teaching during tutorials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- course duration is too long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- assignment due dates are too close</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- poor communication between centre and students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Institutional factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- financial constraints, fees, transport, stationery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- lack of research facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings suggest that, ZOU students are mainly affected more by process factors. Inadequate tutorial time and inadequate tutoring may be attributed to students improper orientation to distance learning. They (students), expect a conventional mode of teaching in which they are taught the whole course material by the tutor.

Under irrelevant materials, students complained of module EA3DC 402, computer application. One student X, said, “Module EA3DC 402 computer application is not relevant at all. I suggest it should be re-written for the benefit of students.”

Another student Q, described the introduction to statistics module EA3DC 201 as, “inaccurate, shallow and irrelevant for ZOU examinations”.

On the issue of tuition fees, Chombo (2000:14) defends them as realistic when he says, “One of the options for departments in universities is to charge realistic fees. The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) now charges realistic fees for its programmes.” These expressed sentiments could close any possibilities of reducing this pull factor.

If we award a minus one (-1) for each pull factor, then this group of students has a total pull factor score of (-143).

When Kurt-Lewin’s force-field analysis is applied, the group of students’ Resultant Educational Participation scale (REPS) = (Push factors) + (Pull factors) is REPS = 115 – 143 = -28

This negative resultant indicates the group’s inclination to drop out of the programme. There are more pull factors than push factors.

**Conclusion**

This study found that, the majority of respondents from Bed (EAPPS) intake 19, are young non-graduate primary school teachers in the (30 – 40) age group. These teachers are involved in open and distance learning for the first time, hence vulnerable to distance learning restraining (pull) factors. Most of them are classroom practitioners (72%) aspiring to obtain a degree, salary increment and enhance promotion prospects to the post of school head. Hence, registering for a ZOU degree is not voluntary, but a means to two basic ends, acquiring a graduate teachers’ salary and securing promotional prospects for headship posts.
ZOU students are mainly goal-oriented, motivated by external expectations, such as professional advancement and self-development. From Morstain and Smart's (1974) factor analysis, the group has a push factor of 115.

Major pull factors identified are associated with the mismatch between student expectations, orientation, tutoring process and lack of relevant resource materials. There are more pull factors than push factors in this group. The pull factor score was (-143). Kurt-Lewin’s force-field analysis had a negative resultant (-28), indicating a high inclination to drop-out.

**Recommendations**

In the light of these findings, the study proposes the following measures to reduce the effect of the pull factors:

- Students receive thorough orientation on ZOU’s open, full-time distant learning mode, to wean them from the tutor dependence syndrome.
- New programmes be designed to satisfy the degree requirement of the primary school classroom practitioner who does not require school administration.
- ZOU should introduce practical skills programmes to promote intrinsic motivation in adults who hope to do or produce something from their learning.
- Modules should be revised as a matter of urgency, to promote quality of learning and uphold the image of the only distant learning university in Zimbabwe. Special focus for module review, should be on relevance and need for a practical orientation.
- The number of assignments submitted for marking could be increased to three or four per course, to increase the student’s chances of passing the course work.
- Action oriented forms of assessment, such as supervision of practicing heads (ZOU students) could be used to increase the chances of passing and reduce pull factors.
- Transport costs, could be reduced by establishing rural centres where tutors would visit students for tutorials. Respondents suggested Rusape, Chipinge, Nyanga, Buhera, Kadoma and Magunje.

**References**


