To what extent does Zimbabwe Open University as an ODL institution give access to education and empowerment to women who have been marginalised?

Constance Kadada
Zimbabwe Open University
ckadada0@gmail.com
Phone: +263-773 725 537; +263-4-250281

Abstract

Education is one of the key components used to improve and empower an individual’s social, political and economic well-being. UNESCO cites Zimbabwe as having 17% of the adult population being illiterate with 2/3 being women. This is due to the fact that education is costly, thus, parents tend to favour sending boys to school than girls. Women are also affected by cultural factors. Some women, due to cultural factors do not own property, are given menial tasks meant to be specifically for women and occupy lower positions in the home. Some, due to early marriages are not able to pursue “formal schooling” (www.un-ngls.org/orf/documents/publications.en/voices.../vfa5.07.htm).

In Zimbabwe, some illiterate women are involved in subsistence farming and other menial jobs. There is also low meaningful participation of women in politics and decision-making positions in all spheres of development, limited access and to ownership of productive resources and increases in gender based violence. The main mandate of Open and Distance Learning is to give access to education to those who have been disadvantaged and are not able to study with conventional universities. The purpose of this study was to find out the extent to which Zimbabwe Open University, as an ODL institution, has given access to education to marginalised women in Zimbabwe and to what extent these women have been empowered. The researcher used the mixed research design that is, questionnaires and interviews to collect data from women who have and are studying for a Bachelor’s degree with ZOU. She also used secondary data from the registry. It was noted that quite a number of ZOU women employees had obtained Bachelors’ degrees and some were still studying. The fact that they were able to answer effectively questions affecting women in general was evidence of empowerment through education. From documentation from the Academic Registry, the number of women studying with ZOU had increased tremendously from 32% in 2003 to 51% in 2014.

Key words: education, marginalisation, women empowerment

Introduction

Education is one of the key components used to improve and empower an individual’s social, political and economic well-being. Okunna (nd) says “empowerment presupposes the existence of weakness and subjugation. It has become incontrovertible and thoroughly documented that in gender relations women occupy an inferior position all over the world”.

Globally, there is concern for women empowerment and access to education. In developing countries, such as, Zimbabwe, of the 17% who are illiterate, 2/3 of them are women who are marginalised, hence most have little or no access to education especially in tertiary education (UNESCO). Aitchison and Rule (2005:9) have in 1990 19.35% total illiterate rate with 13.4% male and 25.0% female. In 2000 the total rate was 11.3% with 7.2% male and 15.4 female. In 2015 it is anticipated that
the total illiteracy rate will be 4.4 with 2.4 male and 6.4 female. This is due to the fact that education is costly, thus, parents tend to favour sending boys to school than girls. Women are also affected by cultural factors which make them occupy lower positions in the home, do menial jobs while some do not have any rights at all.

(www.un-ngls.org/orf/documents/publications.en/voices.../vfa5.07.htm)

Other women are involved in subsistence farming which does not empower them economically as most of the crops are for home consumption. There is also no meaningful participation of women in politics and decision-making positions in all spheres of development, limited access and to ownership of productive resources and increases in gender based violence. Women need to be empowered so they can participate in activities that not only benefit them but their families as well.

**Literature Review**

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) realises the importance of educating women as one of its main concerns. It says:

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls’ education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends.

Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women’s literacy rates are significantly lower than men’s in most developing countries.

http://www.unfpa.org/gender/empowerment2.htm

The implication of this is that it is important to educate women so they can be empowered to help their spouses to provide for the family. Women spend most of their times with the children and tend to fend more for them in some instances than men.

UNFPA says parents have a role to play in the education of their children and women seem to play a more influential role than men hence the later need to be educated. An educated mother is not only employable but will make an effort to find resources to educate her children. An educated mother is aware of family planning issues thus, she tends to have fewer children whom she can afford to look after. This is in contrast to poor parents who might be forced to select children whom they can send to school. For UNFPA, “closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 is also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goals”.

http://www.unfpa.org/gender/empowerment2.htm

Early marriages are a cause for concern for lack of women empowerment in Zimbabwe. UNFPA (2012) reports says “31% of girls are married before the age of 18” (Matenga quoting Charumbira 2014) while the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) “recorded that 16,3% of the Zimbabwean population is married by the age of 15 years.”

... the majority of the girls were pushed into early marriages by poverty, cultural norms and other social, economic and religious practices... Stakeholders noted that child marriages robbed the victims of their
basic rights like health, freedom of choice and education (Newsday 5 March, 2014).

Women are not politically empowered, (UNFPA) and “throughout much of the world, women’s equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements for women.” Some women do not own land and cannot inherit property, might not be able to source for funding, are not in school and not promoted at their work places thus, culminating into some form of discrimination.

Gender inequality also makes it difficult for women to make any decisions at home and in other places outside the home. UNFPA advocates for laws to be put into place to promote “gender equality” hence there is need for more lobbying. (http://www.unfpa.org/gender/empowerment3.htm)

Gosh (2011:24) brings out the predicament of women who work in agricultural land where they do not have title deeds hence cannot borrow money nor compete with bigger enterprises. Some even engage in unpaid labour.

Boserup (2011:40) says in agriculture, some women continue to do degrading manual jobs such as spreading manure and carrying heavy loads.

Sen (2011 157) notes that women agricultural labourers, construction workers or petty traders experience a degree of social control over their mobility and this affects their entry into the market for wage labour and income-earning.

From the aforementioned, it looks like the categories of women mentioned have not received enough academic education hence are not empowered. Zimbabwe Open University could reach out to such women in similar situations through ODL to empower them. For ZOU, education can be brought to the door step of an individual willing to learn and it is relatively affordable.

In some countries many young women work in factories. Issues brought out by Elson and Pearson (2011: 213) are that women are preferred because ‘they are more docile and willing to accept tough discipline and more suitable to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work.’ They are willing to accept lower wages and to assume a ‘secondary status’ in the labour market. They are the first to be fired when there are retrenchments and can be hired easily when factories are expanding. Women in addition, are also engaged in domestic labour; they look after children and have no control over their own bodies and are not full members in their own right. This amounts to what Elson and Pearson call ‘super-exploitation’ of women. The little money they get in wages is used to support the whole family and in some instances the girl child is forced to work in factories so she can support the whole family.

Some of the women referred to above have acquired little or no education hence they might not only know their rights but are also not empowered. In the advent of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) such women can acquire education in their homes and work settings thus, broadening their horizon and exposing themselves to opportunities that they could have missed early in life.

Sexual exploitation is a problem for some women who accept it without question for economic reasons. This category of underprivileged women from poor countries leave their own homes and families to go and work as domestic workers (nannies and maids) and at times are forced to be sex workers. Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2011:238-239) talking about migrant workers who go and work in “affluent countries” say their very own children are left behind and “are taken care of by grandmothers, sisters and sisters-in-law, what Pyle (2011:253 terms ‘care deficit’. Sometimes a young daughter is drawn out of school to care for her young siblings.” At other times “their passports are stolen, their mobility blocked, forced to work without pay in brothels or to provide sex along with cleaning and childcare…” (Ehrenreich and
Hochschild, A. (2011:238-239). If these women had been educated and empowered, they would not leave their families to become slaves in foreign nations. They would have enough money to look after their own families.

For Pyle (2011: 254), the situation that these women find themselves in “violates human rights and dignity and undercut possibilities for sustainable development.” They are reduced to ‘codified labor.’ However, they have to endure hardships because of economic, social, political, legal and cultural conditions of the countries they come from. Alongside this, is slavery of women which includes (Herzfeld 2011: 245-248) bonded labour, forced labour, forced and early marriage, human trafficking and traditional slavery. Sen (ibid pgs 158-159) observes that in India poor women are employed in agriculture as casual labourers and bonded permanently; they succumb to sexual demands from landed households what she terms ‘regularized rape’ and ‘fair game’. Hunger and fear of losing their jobs makes them agree to ‘undesired physical intimacy’. This is coupled with ‘orgies of gang rape’ and ‘mass sexual violence’.

In Zimbabwe, the exploitation of poor women employed as domestic workers prevails; moreover, most get meager salaries that hardly sustain their families and themselves. The question is; can ZOU help such women by providing education since the institution gives a second chance to those who have been marginalised. ZOU has its doors open to every person who is keen to advance their education provided they have appropriate entry qualifications.

Maternal health issues and reproductive health is another area where women can be empowered through education. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948) views health to be a “right” and “a privilege every woman should enjoy”. Sen and Ostlin (2011:65) quote Garcia-Moreno et al 2006) who say:

“women have less land, wealth and property in almost all societies. They have higher burdens of work in the economy of care ensuring reproduction, survival, security of people both young and old. In some instances girls get less food, are less educated and more physically restricted...restrictions on their physical mobility, sexuality and reproductive capacity are seen as natural and accepted codes of conduct and legal systems condone, even reward violence against women”.

Many women are not educated and thus, their children below the age of five are likely to die of malnutrition. Uneducated girls perform duties of adults too early such as being in traditional marriages, hazardous labour and combat roles. HIV and AIDS also, is likely to impact negatively on women who engage in unprotected heterosexual intercourse with an infected partner and men who have sex with young girls. Domestic violence also affects many women who are not aware of their rights (Boserup ibid).

Related to the above is the fact that some women have no say in issues of sex. They are not allowed to use contraceptives as this is determined by their husbands. They are not afforded an opportunity to get information related to health.

...Many are also subject to sexual violence or coercion....The consequence is often unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, or unsafe abortions – all with further negative consequences. Traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, unsafe abortion practices and child marriages also put millions of women and girls at risk each year.

Adequate and accessible family planning services could help millions of women avoid the trauma of an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection, cut maternal mortality and enable women to make informed choices. (http://www.healthpovertyaction.org/policy-and-resources/rights-and-marginalisation/
sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights/)

Domestic violence is another area that poor uneducated women are subjected to by men. A study done by Osirim (2013) reveals “wife beating and rape are significant violations of human rights around the globe despite the fact that The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and signed by over 160 nations”. She expands on what CEDAW is about. “CEDAW recognizes gender-based violence as a form of discrimination against women which impairs or nullifies women’s enjoyment of their human rights including their rights to life and to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” She says further South Africa has a high rate of rape cases against women. “…every 26 seconds.” there is a woman who is being raped. Zimbabwean women are not spared either with “more than 20 women … assaulted daily by their spouses.” Rape in Zimbabwe is meant to subdue women and the law does not come to their defence on this issue. Where a wife is assaulted by her husband or raped, this is referred to as “common assault”. A woman who seeks for a peace order is protected by it for only 90 days. Most women do not report cases of domestic violence and those who do end up withdrawing the cases because they are afraid to lose bread winners should their men go to jail.

Other points that Osirim (ibid) brings out from a study by UNIFEM are the fact HIV and AIDS are spread through rape and marital rape. “Women’s exposure to violence increases their exposure to HIV and AIDS. Women can become infected as a result of sexual assault or coerced sex and the abrasions and tearing that can accompany these violations increases the chance of infection. Violence and fear of violence may intimidate women from trying to negotiate safer sex, discussing fidelity with partners or leaving risky relationships. Adolescent girls are at exposure to HIV and AIDS because of cultural, social and economic reasons. In Zimbabwe women are either sick because of the virus or have the burden of caring for the infected”.

UNIFEM also found that young women in Zimbabwe were most likely to carry the major burdens of health care delivery for those with HIV/AIDS, to such an extent that they often had to discontinue their education to meet their responsibilities...

This can also mean a death sentence for many girl children and adolescents. First, many men assume that young girls are virgins and therefore do not carry the HIV virus. Second, as illustrated in recent news stories about South Africa and noted among researchers in Zimbabwe, some HIV positive men believe that having sex with a child/young girl can cure them of the disease. Thus, growing numbers of girls/young women are (and have been) in danger of rape and infection with the virus (http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a8.htm).

I feel that empowering women through education could avoid situations where they are exploited sexually.

The fact that women should be empowered cannot be overemphasised. Chant (2011:180) says in Gambia it is mostly women who provide meals for the family while some men even refuse to work. Should they work, their money is not used for the family’s upkeep. The surplus money men get is used to get a second wife. In the Philippines poor men who are not employed spend most of their time drinking and gambling. It is the women who think of ways to provide for the whole family. In Costa Rica men are viewed as selfish and concerned about their own needs. For men, when things are tough, they leave women to all the responsibilities. Women tend to think of their families and children hence will soldier on.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) sees education as helping in creating opportunities for women. By educating
women, the wellbeing of family and future generations is guaranteed and at the same time poverty is reduced. Educated women, apart from marrying a bit late are also concerned with the importance of health care for their families. An educated mother will influence her children more than men and will strive to make them better. Most educated women are in the labour force so can afford to send their children to school – are aware of the dividends of having educated children and because they are fewer, she can afford to send them to school. They are aware of family planning so there are no unwanted pregnancies – the uneducated may have to choose which children to send to school since they might not be able to send them all at the same time.

In the 1994 Cairo Consensus – education for women was meant to address “social and economic development and to close the gender gap. Universal completion of primary education was set as a 20-year goal, as was wider access to secondary and higher education among girls and women. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 is also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goals”


Writer (2010) posits that once a woman is educated, it culminates to the fact that the whole family becomes educated. Women, through education can be empowered with knowledge; skills, self-confidence; they can participate in the development process. An educated woman can choose right from wrong, has confidence to meet the challenges of life and does not succumb to customary practices. By having educated mothers, a country is uplifted health wise and such mothers are conversant with ICT technologies thus, bridging the generation gap between mothers and their children. Women empowerment entails that such women are broadened in their thinking, can develop new ideas and hopes and can get top positions such as in sports, politics, education, army, engineering, aviation, health and so forth.

(women.writearticles.org/...Article/Women-Empowerment...).

**Statement of the Problem**

Most women in developing countries are poor and marginalised hence they fail to look after their families and themselves. They are engaged in menial jobs where the wages are very low and do not match the amount of work they do. They are not empowered enough to know their rights neither have they been afforded an opportunity to education. Where resources are not enough, the boy child is preferred at the expense of the girl child. Most of these women play a subservient role and are not engaged in decision making; they are not empowered culturally, socially and economically. Women are also physically and emotionally abused and this is the case some Zimbabwean women find themselves in.

**Research Questions**

1. To what extent does ZOU empower marginalised women through education?
2. Is domestic violence related to illiteracy and ignorance of rights of women?
3. To what extent is participation of women in politics determined by education?
4. What is the impact of education and empowerment to women’s health?
5. Are educated women empowered enough to analyse different laws that have been passed to protect women?

**Objectives of the Study**

- To find out whether ZOU empowers marginalised women through education;
- To establish problems which uneducated women face such as domestic violence and whether or not they are related to illiteracy and ignorance;
• To discover the extent to which educated women in higher learning (ZOU) get involved in politics and decision making processes;
• To find out the extent to which educated women in tertiary institutions know about issues of health in general and reproductive health in particular;
• To discover whether education can empower women to the know laws that have been passed in relation to women.

Methodology

The methodology chosen was mainly quantitative with a bit of qualitative. Quantitative research “explains the phenomenon by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods” (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2000). http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/36869_muijs.pdf

In this case the researcher wanted to find out whether ZOU has empowered women through education to embark on Bachelor’s degrees. I also wanted to find out through a questionnaire with 12 questions to what extent ZOU women staff members who have embarked on education were aware of the social ills that befall marginalised women all over the world and Zimbabwe. The qualitative methodology was used when I was given data on the percentage of women studying with ZOU in 2012 and 2014. The qualitative methodology is meant to collect a lot of data; in this case, however, I was able to reach out fewer students because most were not willing to answer the questionnaires. Also, I was able to get the responses fast. Other responses might have been biased thus, might not have provided the true anticipated data. The qualitative methodology gave correct data as it had been captured by the Academic Registry. I was not able to get their sentiments on empowerment of women as I did not have time to form focus groups due time constraints.

Research Design

The research design used was a case study of Zimbabwe Open University, the reason being that it is an institution catering for large numbers of students. ZOU is an ODL institution mandated to give a second chance to learners denied access in other conventional universities hence one of its catchment areas is marginalised women.

Population and Sampling

Convenient sampling was used on ZOU female staff members who are studying with ZOU. This was because this group of ZOU female students was accessible to the researcher. The researcher also drew information from documentation which showed the number of women studying for Bachelor’s Degree with ZOU in 2012 up to 2014.

Instrumentation and Procedures

Questionnaires were administered to ten ZOU female students and out of thirteen, eight questionnaires were collected thus, making it 61.5% returns. The researcher also had an interview with one senior officer in the ZOU Academic Registry where she obtained statistics for female enrolments from 2012 to 2014.

Delimitations

The researcher was limited to students in Harare Region as she did not have time to travel to other regions. Her sample was quite small; she had time constraints and the challenge of some respondents being unwilling to fill in the questionnaires.
Presentation and Discussion of the Results

Findings

Name of Region/Faculty/Unit
All the questionnaires were answered by ZOU students in Harare mainly because they work in Harare. Out of 13 questionnaires, 8 responded thus, making 61.5% returns. While 5 were from the Faculty of Commerce and Law, one from Library Science, the rest were from the Department of Media Studies.

Age group
The majority of the respondents were within the 21 to 30 years age range with only one being in the 31-40 age range. Yet still, 2 respondents were within the 41-50 years age group. This is an indication that those who were denied the chance to learn in other institutions, were given another chance to learn and are within the age range of those going to universities.

Occupation
On occupation, two are clerks, one a desktop publisher and the rest are secretaries.

Reasons for wanting to study with ZOU
This is an indication that those with lower paying jobs want to raise their status hence they have embarked on degree programmes. Their reasons for wanting to study with ZOU are that while it is open learning, it also empowers them. It is flexible, affordable, and convenient and for one working in the library, the degree she is doing is in line with her current duties. Their opinions of ZOU as compared to other conventional institutions were that the former was affordable. For them ODL suits everyone; ZOU is the only institution offering ODL and was ideal to those currently employed. One however, advised ZOU to enhance the quality of the modules especially the new ones. Another respondent advised ZOU to improve on service delivery and to avail tutors to students. ZOU has flexible payments and flexible study.

Do you believe that ZOU can empower women who are marginalised?
On empowering of women, all the respondents agreed that education empowers them. It empowers every person given the chance to acquire it. Marginalised women stand an even better chance to get empowered if afforded education. Education gives any person access to information. An informed person makes decided choices that are well reasoned.

If you were to get involved in domestic violence, how would you handle it?
On domestic violence, one respondent believes that she can visit her relatives to give her enough time to cool off and later talk to her partner constructively; she would not want to expose him to the police. The other respondent suggested that she would report the matter to relatives, go for counselling or report to the police if it is physical abuse. Another responded felt that she could make peace within the home then seek mediation, and if it fails then seek judicial intervention for justice and protection from future violence. The majority indicated that they will report to the police. Yet another respondent said one should seek advice from the Msasa Project [Msasa Project deals with survivors of gender-based violence in Zimbabwe].

Educated women engaged in politics more than the educated
For the question whether educated women are engaged in politics, the majority agreed that women should participate and get involved in decision making. Another one said this promotes gender equality and gives knowledge that will make them active members of society. Another respondent said educated women get more engaged as they have more opportunities to rise in the hierar-
chy of leadership. Women who are uneducated engage in grassroots politics for patronage and perceived security unwillingly. Only one respondent strongly disagreed that educated women should not get involved in politics because they do not have time to fight – they are busy and professional.

**What is your opinion in relation to reproductive health and health in general to women and education?**

On issues of health and reproductive health, the majority did not answer this question. The two respondents who answered said educated women are strong and can stand on their own and cannot succumb to stresses. If divorced, they can support their children. Another one indicated that the women in the Apostolic churches such as Marange sect need help. Another respondent said educated women have better choices in reproductive health decisions such as family planning and marriage decisions whereas the less educated tend to be less economically inclined hence give total audience to their spouses. Some resort to child bearing as a continuous way of pleasing their husbands even at the cost of their own health. It was evident that most respondents were not familiar with issues of reproductive health neither were they knowledgeable about health issues in general. One respondent said it is vital in the sense that most women become victims of cervical cancer because they do not have the knowledge of the importance of pap smears which should be done once a year. They are also not familiar with family planning methods.

**Are you familiar with any laws that protect women?**

On laws that protect women, only two women were aware of them with the majority showing ignorance about these laws. The two who were familiar with these laws indicated that they protect women from abuse by their partners, society and public. These laws also protect the vulnerable. One respondent said the 5.1 Marriage Act encourages officially monogamous lives as opposed to customary marriages which allow polygamy. It stipulates equal sharing of property on separating. The law also recognises community of property by the surviving spouse regardless of what it is. Some laws protect women against domestic violence, sexual harassment and abuse of women at work. The laws let women know about their rights and how to handle every situation and where to report such cases.

**Do you believe that education of women farm and domestic workers can improve their livelihood?**

On whether education can improve the livelihoods of domestic and farm workers, 3 said no, one said yes, and the others did not respond to this question. It is evident from the responses that most did not understand the question and hence did not take time to ponder on it.

**What challenges in life do uneducated women face?**

One question was on challenges facing uneducated women. The responses were that such women are used, abused, are victims of domestic violence and cannot read and write. They also are not very responsible to their families financially and educationally when helping their children with homework. There is lack of information to make fair decisions, inequitable stamina to contest for socio-economic means and lack of confidence in self-presentation even on platforms that would not require any education. One respondent indicated that the uneducated lack confidence and do not know their rights.

**Do you think educated women can have an impact on the future generation of Zimbabwe? If so, explain how?**

On the question on the impact of educated women on empowering the future generation of Zimbabwe, most said women are bet-
Women are strong and they can apply education to educate the future generation and with mothers’ love, they want a bright future for new generations. Women can encourage others to get educated and can act as role models of future generations. Of those in leadership, they can educate their fellow women. One of the vice presidents in Zimbabwe is a woman and there are quite a number of women occupying top leadership posts.

What professions can educated women pursue?

On professions to pursue, it was found that women can get equal opportunities, equal employment and hence one can pursue any profession. One respondent said the sky is the limit; every profession in Zimbabwe is now gender sensitive.

From one of the keynote addresses by Primrose Kurasha (2003) Vice Chancellor of Zimbabwe Open University, she recognises the marginalisation of the girl child who is forced into early marriage and by the age 35-40 years would have finished child bearing. Such women are ripe market for ZOU. The ratio of men and women enrolled at ZOU by 2003 were 68% for men and 32% for women. At that time this seemed to be quite a large percentage since women were not given access to education.


The numbers of female students studying with ZOU have since increased tremendously. In an interview with an officer in the Academic Registry, (2014) she provided statistics for enrolments of students per semester for 2012-2014.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
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<th>Male</th>
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<td>January 2013</td>
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<td>January 2014</td>
<td>3106</td>
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(Interview with an officer at ZOU (Acting Manager, Admissions, Registration and Records, 18 February 2014).

From the above statistics, there is a clear indication that more female students are studying with ZOU with almost equal numbers between male and female students. In the January 2012 semester, the percentage of females studying with ZOU was 48, 8% as compared to 53, 16% males. In the August 2012 intake, 49% females registered against 50, 9% males. In January 2013, 48,1% females registered as compared to 51% males. In August 2013, 48, 12% females registered against 51,8% males. Finally, in January 2014, 51, 4% women registered compared to 48, 6% males. It is clear now that more females are studying with ZOU as compared to men.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, there is a clear evidence of a quest by females to embark on degree programmes and that the numbers have since increased from 32% in 2003 to 51% in 2014. Females need to have access to education so they can be empowered to take part in politics, while at the same time take care of their health and that of their children. Educated females are involved in decision making and can take responsibilities of their families financially and educationally. They are the ones to influence future generations of Zimbabwe since from birth, they spend most of their time with children. ZOU has done a tremendous job in educating females through ODL and is commended for a job well done.
**Recommendations**

The following are recommendations suggested by respondents for Zimbabwe Open University:

- ZOU is advised to be innovative so that it can be able to stand the current market competition.
- ZOU also needs to be quality focused.
- The quality of the modules should be enhanced since these take the place of the tutor. Some modules are a bit difficult for students as they cannot make sense out of them.
- ZOU should improve on its student assessment and monitoring schedules by increasing industrial attachment where external assessment can help increase course coverage credibility.
- Education should be made available to all marginalised women including those at an advanced age. ZOU as an open learning institution should afford such women with additional tuition tailor-made and institution initiated to encourage enrolment to completion as most of these women tend to drop out.
- ZOU should improve on service delivery.
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