Factors that influence production of quality assignments for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Social Science students of Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in the Midlands Region of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between ZOU Social Sciences students’ performance in assignments and proximity to study resources by carrying out a comparative study of rural and urban students. The study had assumed that lack of libraries Internet facilities and physical distance from resources negatively affects students’ performance in assignments. Survey questionnaires, interviews and document analysis revealed that there were minor differences in performance of both rural and urban students. The study found that students who lived and worked in rural areas used libraries in towns and utilised study groups in towns over the weekends. Surprisingly, most students in towns did not use the libraries as often as expected of them. They tended to use the libraries during weekends in preparation for study group discussions. Students did not use the Internet facilities in towns citing spiralling costs and inadequate computer skills. The study also revealed that ZOU students tended to use the ZOU library more than other libraries citing relevance of study materials to assignments demands. Rural students suggested that the ZOU should establish district study centres with library resources to reduce the travel costs incurred by students living and studying from remote rural areas. The study makes some recommendations regarding how students should improve the quality of assignments they submit and how they should use study resources nearer to them in order to present scholarly work.