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## Creating a Quality Culture in Open and Distance Learning Tutorials: A Case of the Zimbabwe Open University

**Trust Nyenya**

Lecturer, Department of Education and Quality Assurance,  
Co-ordinator, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

**Gift Rupande**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Science, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

### **Abstract:**

*This study was conducted to explore means and ways of creating a quality culture in open and distance learning institutions tutorials. The mixed approach was used where quantitative and qualitative were collected (Creswell 2006) to gain as much understanding as possible on tutorial practices so as to come-up with ways of ingraining a quality culture within the tutorials as one method would offer (Creswell 2006). Quantitative data was collected from part-time tutors through questionnaires while, qualitative data elicited from Regional Programme Coordinators through interviews, was used to further explain the findings in quantitative data. All the 52 part-time tutors in the region numbering fifty-two and 12 Regional Programme Coordinators formed the population of the study. All the part-time tutors responded to the closed-ended questionnaire, while only in qualitative data saturation was reached after interviewing five RPCs. The study revealed that both experienced and non-experienced ODL tutors feel the need to be adequately training to teach ODL students. Forty-three (83%) of the respondents indicated that they still needed training at least once every semester. Workloads for part-time tutors are within international standards. Sometimes tutors are given loads for tutors who are absent without prior or alternative arrangements and this compromises quality culture. There is very good communication between RPCs and tutors but weak communication between students and tutors due to inefficient platforms of communication used by tutors. While the peer evaluation form is effective the tutor evaluation form is not that effective due to the fact the feedback has not been reaching the tutor. Both experienced and non-experienced ODL tutors need to be re-trained at least once every semester. Tutors' workload should be maintained for sustained periods. Tutor student communication should be improved by making use of the student preferred platforms such as the Whatsapp. Tutor evaluation forms analysis should be returned to the regions for the benefit of the tutors and students. The tutor evaluation forms can be complimented with students' written submission which can be accessed by tutors so as to cater for the elements not covered by the tutor evaluation form.*

### **1. Introduction**

Sustainability of quality in open and distance learning (ODL) institutions depend on two factors; the institutionalization of a quality management system and establishing a quality culture for effective implementation of the quality management system. The Zimbabwe Open University instituted a quality management system. The effectiveness of the quality management system is by-and-large determined by the quality culture in the institution. In ODL institutions, learning takes place through designed materials and face-to-face tutorials. Tutorials are an important part of the students' learning programme since students depend on the learning material produced and have limited contact with the tutor. The limited time students are in contact with the tutor is essential in shaping the perception of their educational experiences with the university. The implementation of the quality management system concerning the administration of tutorials should always be improved. This is achievable through the establishment of a quality culture. Quality culture enables tutorial management to fill the gaps omitted by the quality management system such as the attitudes of the tutors.

### **2. Background to the Study**

European University Association (EUA) (2010:16) defines quality culture as a culture, "that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterized by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts." Put simply, quality culture is a combination of the quality management system [the policies, procedures and documents that guide operations] and the beliefs, values, norms and commitments that guide individuals in responding to various quality issue as they relate to their everyday work. In the ZOU for, example, there is a quality management

system which comprise the Quality Policy Manual, [quality policies], Regional Procedures Manual [procedures that have to be fulfilled in the execution of processes in the university's ten regions], and various documents that aid in the fulfillment of university objectives. These are complemented by the university culture. The ZOU Strategic Plan (2010-2014:9) lists the values that inspire operations as;

- Dedication to the highest level of excellence
- Creation of an innovative culture
- Promotion of integrity
- Delighting stakeholders
- A commitment and dedication to knowledge creation
- Institutionalizing liberal thinking and expression
- Making a difference

ZOU believes in developing best practices in ODL and is development and change oriented. Implied in the beliefs and values is that where a procedure is not fully documented, decisions or behavior should demonstrate innovativeness, delighting the customer, targeting excellence and improving on the quality management system. There is therefore, a strong link between the quality management system and the quality culture of an institution.

The ZOU Regional Procedures Manual (2013) describes the management of tutorials. In that respect, Regional Programme Coordinators; compile timetables, contact part time tutors, coordinate and supervise tutorials in their departments. The Administrative Officer shall hire tutorial venues and process resource requests for the weekend tutorials. As a starting point the procedure manual gives guidance and direction on the activities that must be carried out by the Regional Programme Coordinator (RPC) and the Administrative Officer. Bearing in mind the values that ZOU has, these procedures are not going to be conducted in a so simplistic manner if there is a good quality culture in the organization.

The Regional Procedure Manual does not spell out how part time tutors are going to execute the tutorial. However, some modules, for instance, Organizational Behaviour in Education MDEA 518 spells out how the tutorials may be conducted. Execution of tutorials is handled during induction of part time tutors and orientation of students to bridge the gap between students' expectation and delivery of tutorials by tutors. Tutorials can however be improved by executing them, while at the same time taking cognizance of the values and beliefs that are held in the University as alluded to earlier on.

Tutorial evaluation is conducted at several levels. The Regional Quality Assurance Coordinator quality assures the process. Basically, this involves the checking on the fulfillment of the procedures of tutorials and checking on the learning atmosphere at the venue and getting informal student feedback. There is also formal student feedback which involves the students' filling in tutor evaluation forms. There is also peer evaluation, where peers observe a colleague conduct a tutorial and fill in a peer evaluation form. The evaluation procedures can be improved through both the quality culture and the quality management system.

The procedures outlined can be pointers to the need for a quality culture where performance is guided by both the quality management system and the quality culture. Quality culture fills in the gaps left by the quality management system, which can also be explained as excellence, that is, when performance goes beyond expectation. The existence of a quality culture engenders the application of the quality management system to the spirit rather than letter, with operations centralized around customer focus.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

Is it possible to create a quality culture in tutorials in an open and distance learning institution like Zimbabwe Open University? This paper examines the possibility of implementing the quality management system in a way that fosters the creation of a quality culture in tutorials. A further examination of the benefits of a quality culture in ODL tutorials is made. Challenges which are likely to confront ZOU in the creation of a quality culture are explored with possible solutions offered.

### **4. Research Questions**

How can the management of tutorials in an ODL institution foster the development of a quality culture?

Does the delivery of tutorials in ODL lend itself to the development of a quality culture?

To what extent can the evaluation of tutors help to develop a quality culture in tutorials in an ODL institution?

### **5. Literature Review**

#### *5.1. Conceptual Framework*

The main argument put forward here is that quality culture can improve the quality of tutorials at an ODL institution like the ZOU. The improvement can be brought about through the recognition of ZOU value and philosophy and quality principles in the management, execution and evaluation of tutorials. The realization of values and beliefs compliment the quality management system.

#### *5.2. Theoretical Framework*

Powell (2011) sees culture as a way of saying how an organization expresses itself internally and externally and is driven by values. Quality culture can be viewed as how the organization delivers services to its customers in varying conditions to the satisfaction of the customers.

Rupande and Nyenya (2014:556) explain that tutorials are, “face to face meetings between the tutors and the learners and point out that these are not lectures.” Lublin adapted by de Groot in Makoni (2000) defines a tutorial as, “a small- group learning context that often, but not always supports and extends the learning experience offered by lectures or by distance education.” This view is corroborated by Lewis in Lockwood (1995) who explains that the role of the tutor (in a tutorial) is to compliment the learning material, extend their understanding and with general study problems. Thus in the ODL set up the tutorial is a crucial component of the student’s learning experiences. This is where the tutor bridges the gap between the course team requirements and the students by facilitating an understanding between the two through interpretation of the course material to the students. The catalytic nature of the tutor is evident through active engagement of the learner in the learning process. Tutorials are a form of induction of students into the academic culture of the discipline they are just embarking on. Students are also provided with the platform to interact with their fellow students socially and academically.

### *5.3. The Value Addition of Tutorials to Distance Education Learners*

Barker (1995) notes that face to face tutorials bring about interaction which raises the level of student satisfaction and persistence of distance students. Acker and McCain (1993) also weigh in by pointing out that tutorials are an integral part of the social experiences generally absent in distance learning among the learners and tutors. It reduces the remoteness of the learning process by bringing in human facilitators whose ideas are presented in the module, that is, the printed course material. Sapp and Simon (2005) substantiate the importance of social interaction by noting that it creates a conducive learning atmosphere. The tutorial provides for verbal and physical presence in the feedback process as some students detest learning individually and being physically separated from the tutor, (Howard (2009) and Hillman et al, (1994)). Howard (2009) and Hillman et al, (1994) further note that tutorials enhance students’ enthusiasm which is needed by distance learners to sustain their studies. Howard (2009) also argues that tutorials for ODL students would provide space for tutors to accommodate learners who would normally have preferred conventional mode and help those students who find the content difficult.

## **6. Tutorial Management**

Regional Programme Coordinators manage the tutorials. ZOU Regional Procedures Manual (2013) spells out that RPCs shall compile timetables and inform part time tutors on the tutorial dates. They also conduct tutorials, supervise and coordinate programmes in their departments. RPCs also induct part time tutors. This is as far as the quality management system provides. However, the other aspects which are not explicit in the procedures have to be conducted taking cognizance of the values and beliefs of the university. For example, the Regional Procedures Manual does not specify the frequency of the regional departmental meetings where issues induction and reminders of the tutorial requirements can be spelt out.

### *6.1. Induction/Training of Part Time tutors*

The engagement criteria for part time tutors do not preclude those who have not been exposed to ODL whether as learners or tutors. As such the pool of tutors has faculty from both the conventional and the ODL systems. Oftentimes the faculty may be serving in the conventional university. The issue of quality of tutorials delivered by the varied tutors is questioned. A National Centre for Education Statistics 1997 report indicated that 60 percent of higher education institutions provide training opportunities for distance learning faculty. The remaining percentage went into tutorials without proper ammunition. This scenario might be typical of experiences at ZOU. The emphasis on induction and or training for distance education or tutorial delivery is made by Bower (2014) who stresses that institutions should provide training as well as support for faculty members expected to conduct tutorials. The training emphasize on the use of distance education technologies and pedagogical approaches. Training also improves on the interpersonal aspects of the both the tutor and the student. Lublin adapted by de Groot in Makoni (2000:45) weighs in by stressing that, “inexperienced tutors require more direct guidance on how to run tutorials.” Even the tutors themselves are comfortable if they know they have what it takes to be an effective tutor. This is substantiated by the National Centre for Education Statistics 1997 report which noted that, “faculty may feel they have not been provided with adequate training or experience to competently manage teaching distance learning courses.” The quality culture can be built in tutorials through thorough training of tutors in preparation for both the methodology and the values and beliefs held in conducting tutorials.

### *6.2. Workload of Tutors*

The workload for tutors is one contentious issue. Tutors must have their workload assigned well before the tutorial as a quality measure for the work of the tutor does not start by the doorway of a tutorial venue. The American Association of University Professors (2014) explains that, “workload should be thought of as total professional effort, which includes the time (and energy) devoted to class preparation, program deliberations and scholarship (including but not limited to research and publication). By implication, the association notes that one’s workload should not only be viewed as the hours spent in the tutorial but the whole range of activities leading to the tutorial and after and as such should be recognized. Taking cognizance of the other academic functions, the College of Arts and Sciences’ formal course load is four courses per year. Adjustments are made upwards or downwards depending on the research activity of faculty members. The Board of Governors policy on faculty teaching loads (UNC Policy Manual 400.3.1.1) assigns “UNC Charlotte faculty responsibility for five courses per year. Teaching loads may be increased or decreased depending on the responsibilities and performance of an individual faculty member.” The other consideration for increasing or decreasing the workload may be on whether one teaches at under graduate or graduate level.

Two issues need consideration here. In the context of ZOU the issue of workload has to be considered in the context of part time tutors and RPCs. Bower (2014) provides useful insight in that regard by stating that distance learning institutions should adjust the workload of faculty as they have extra duties in curriculum, materials development and administrative duties. In the majority cases, ZOU part time tutors are employed elsewhere. The quality issue arising is whether they should be given a maximum load? In addition, how big may be the load? If a quality culture is to be engrained then a maximum of three-three may be reasonable especially where changes to one's load are minimized between the years. This leaves room for progression along one's learning curve within the area of specialization for meaningful research and application of content, pedagogies and technologies.

### 6.3. Internal Communication for Tutorials

The quality and effectiveness of distance education in general depends on appropriate information and communication technology (Kangai and Bukaliya 2010). The authors underlined two major aspects that must be addressed in tutorials. Firstly, it is the importance of communication and secondly the importance of using the most appropriate medium to communicate with students. According to Rupande and Nyenya (2014) the use of notice raised dissatisfaction in students as they had to be physically at the Regional Centre to view postings while those who received communication through Whatsapp and SMS were satisfied with the communication they received from the Regional Centre. The findings serve to underline the appropriateness and resultant efficiency of a communication system and technologies. In the same vein, EUA (2005) identifies internal communication as one of the key principles in the development of a quality culture. ZOU Quality Policy Manual (2013) also identifies internal communication as one its key elements of quality. The manual produced a long list of the various means of communication available, which include cellphones among others. Communication of tutorial dates, venue and even workload is very important. As such it affects the quality of preparation and availability of tutors at venues. It should also be noted that even tutors could improve tutorial provision by communicating tasks for students before tutorials so that they can come prepared thereby building a quality culture in tutorials.

## 7. Delivery Techniques

Lublin adapted by de Groot in Makoni (2000:49) notes the basic premise of a tutorial as that, "students will be actively engaged in their own learning." Angelo (1993:5) describes active learning as, "students' investments in physical and mental energies in activities that help them make what they are learning meaningful and when they are aware of that meaning making." Thus active learning involves the learners being constructors of meaning with the tutor taking the facilitating the process as opposed to pouring knowledge into the learners. Pastoll (1992) identified four elements which facilitate active learning in a tutorial;

- Stimulus materials, which employ the five basic senses in some way, that is, read, touch, listen and analyze.
- Interpretation tasks, constructing meaning from a text, situation such as a case study or poem.
- Airing and sharing, achieved through discussion, negotiation or some other cooperative engagement.
- Feedback, group members get responses of other members and the tutor in relation to a task. There is further reconstruction or correction of ideas so formulated during execution of the task.

Rupande and Nyenya (2014:556) contend that effective communication within the tutorial context is achieved through, "techniques such as group discussions, presentations, demonstrations and explanations." The techniques can entrench communication between student-student, student-tutor and student-content. Each form of communication can be engrained in quality culture if there is respect, personal and collective commitment to quality.

EUA (2005:10) identifies one of the principles of promoting quality culture as, "communication, discussions and devolved responsibility" among tutors and students. There must be sound communication and discussion of responsibilities, tasks for students and tutors. The tutor should take care of his/her responsibilities of providing for stimulus material, while learners share and air their views which must be responded to by both other learners and the tutor with sound communication. The tutor should strive to intermediate and enrich the learning material and activities in the module as part of building quality culture. It should be the norm that the tutor creates knowledge opportunities and solve problems beyond the module.

## 8. Students' Feedback on Tutorials

ZOU Quality Policy Manual (2013:23) emphasize the importance of students' feedback by stating that, "customer feedback shall be obtained and analyzed." This is mainly achieved through the tutor evaluation form where students evaluate tutors. This is in tandem with the findings by the QAA (2006:10) which reported that, "the strengths identified by the student bodies, (on student feedback) primarily focused on the notion of giving students a voice, and providing them with the opportunity to comment upon quality and standards." Nyenya and Rupande (2014:22) also noted that, "student involvement in quality issues is premised on ownership of the learning process." The tutor evaluation form allows the students to influence decisions with regard to quality culture in tutorials and staffing. The analysis of the instrument is done at the National Centre then returned to the Region so that there is feedback to the Region and the concerned members. The idea of student involvement is captured in two principles identified by EUA (2005) ensuring internal reviews and participation of students in the university community. So students' evaluation of tutors serves three purposes; to influence staffing decisions, improve tutors' performance and also enhance students' participation in university life. In the process, students get to identify with the university especially if their suggestions are implemented. The peer review instrument is filled-in by fellow academics from the same department or faculty. The evaluated member usually retains a copy while the other copy can be used for administrative purposes. While the student advisor distributes the tutor evaluation form, the concerned faculty usually initiates the

peer review form for they will submit several of these for promotion purposes. The difference between the two is that while the former is filled-in by students the latter is filled-in by peers yet their use may be the same.

## 9. Methodology

The mixed approach was used in the study. In the study quantitative and qualitative were collected (Creswell 2006). By mixing the data researchers wanted to gain as much understanding as possible on tutorial practices so as to come-up with ways of ingraining a quality culture within the tutorials as one method would offer (Creswell 2006). Quantitative data was collected from part-time tutors through questionnaires, which were closed-ended. The collected data was also analyzed statistically. Qualitative data was used to further explain the findings in quantitative data as propounded by Creswell (2006:7) that, “one data type provides a supportive role for the other dataset.” Qualitative data was elicited from RPCs through interviews where open-ended questions were asked. Qualitative analysis of the data was performed. However, qualitative data was used to either confirm, dispute or explain part-time tutors’ views.

### 9.1. Population

All the part-time tutors in the region numbering fifty-two (only those active, that is with tutorial load for this semester) formed the population of the study. Quantitative data was collected from the part-time tutors, which was corroborated with qualitative data solicited from the twelve Regional Programme Coordinators. The part-time tutors were important, as they are the executors of the programme while RPCs provide a managerial view of the tutorial execution.

### 9.2. Sample

All the part-time tutors responded to the closed-ended questionnaire, while only in qualitative data saturation which reached after interviewing five RPCs.

## 10. Presentation of Findings

In order to unveil the management practice of tutorials in the ODL institution to foster the development of a quality culture the researchers analyzed the responses of the respondents in light of the research questions raised. These are treated in turn below;

How can the management of tutorials in an ODL institution foster the development of a quality culture?

An examination of the induction of part-time tutors was made. The table below shows the exposure of part-time tutors to the ODL mode of teaching and learning.

N=52

Department	No. of Part-time Tutors	Tutor With ODL Exposure		Tutors Without ODL Exposure	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
MBA	4	4	100	-	-
Physical Education and Sport	6	6	100	-	-
Master in Peace & Leadership	1	1	100		
Development Studies	4	0	-	4	100
Counselling	3	3	100	-	-
Teacher Development	7	6	86	1	14
Nursing	2	2	100	-	-
Bachelor of Commerce	7	5	71	2	29
Geography	2	1	50	1	50
Educational Studies	4	3	75	1	25
Special Needs Education	5	4	80	1	20
Agricultural Management	7	5	71	2	29

Table 1: The Exposure of Part-Time Tutors in Various Departments to ODL.

The above table indicates that part-time tutors in the Department of Development Studies do not have ODL exposure while the Agricultural Management and Commerce and Law have 2 (29%) each not having ODL exposure. Geography also having one (50%) of its part-time tutors not having ODL exposure. However, seven out of the twelve Departments have at least above 80% of their staff having ODL exposure. These statistics may indicate that while orientation in the ODL tutoring may be needed throughout, the five departments which have below 80% of their staff with ODL exposure may need regular re-training of their staff to remind them of the pedagogies, technologies and challenges faced by ODL students for effective tutorial experiences. In line with Lublin adapted by de Groot in Makoni (2000:45) these “inexperienced tutors require more direct guidance on how to run tutorials.”

N=52

	Once upon engagement	Once per semester	Once per year	Once in three semesters	Once in two years
What has been the frequency of tutor induction and training in the past?	37	7	8	-	-
Suggest the ideal frequency of training for tutors.	9	39	4	-	-

Table 2: The Frequency of Tutor Induction and Training in Mashonaland East Region

The table above indicates that induction was conducted at engagement for 37(71%) of the tutors. The other 15 (29%) tutors were trained either once per semester or per year. If from Table 1, 12(23%) needed some training in ODL yet 15(29%) from Table 2 indicate that they are trained at least once per year, then they might be a chance that there is some development of those who have no ODL experience what so ever. However, from the above table it would indicate as if even those who have had ODL experience in the past still need training in ODL approaches as 43(83%) of the respondents indicated that they still needed training at least once every semester. This finding confirms the National Centre for Education Statistics 1997 that faculty may feel need to be adequately trained or experienced to competently manage teaching distance learning courses. The skills gap may be that while the tutors might have experienced ODL, they are in fact working in different set-ups such that they need regular re-training. Asked to evaluate the importance of tutor training before tutorials, some tutors responded;

-I am a secondary school teacher, so when I come for tutorials I need retraining otherwise I might end up trying to race through the module in a lecture fashion

-I need to be reminded that this is not a teachers' college where I have to teach everything

-There is need for discussion as professionals on how to handle ODL students

-As professionals we need to revisit our approaches, technology and facilitation techniques

-I do not have any teaching background because I am an Agricultural expert. All I have done is research and experimentation so training in ODL tutorial is indispensable for me.

The range of responses mainly indicate that there is the ODL tutor are on full employment elsewhere where their practice is pretty different from what they do as tutors here.

As a follow-up to the two tables above, five RPCs were asked how they handled those tutors who had little exposure to ODL. Their response was almost unanimous that,

“I hold tutor re-training every semester for all the members before the beginning of the first tutorial.”

The RPCs pointed out that it is paramount that tutors be re-trained once every semester before the first tutorial so as to remind the tutors of various students' concerns that they have to contend with. They also noted that each semester may have its unique challenges which have to be borne in the minds of the tutors as they execute their duties. For instance, some students may not have received their modules by the first tutorial. Tutors should be well equipped on how to help in such scenarios. The findings confirm those of the National Centre for Education Statistics 1997 report which noted that faculty feels the need for adequate training or experience to competently manage teaching distance learning courses. Indeed both the quantitative and qualitative data above confirm Lublin adapted by de Groot in Makoni (2000:45) that these “inexperienced tutors require more direct guidance on how to run tutorials.” Qualitative data also suggests that even the experienced need to be reminded of the challenges faced by ODL students especially that the tutors are not in full employ of the ODL systems.

10.1. Workload of Tutors

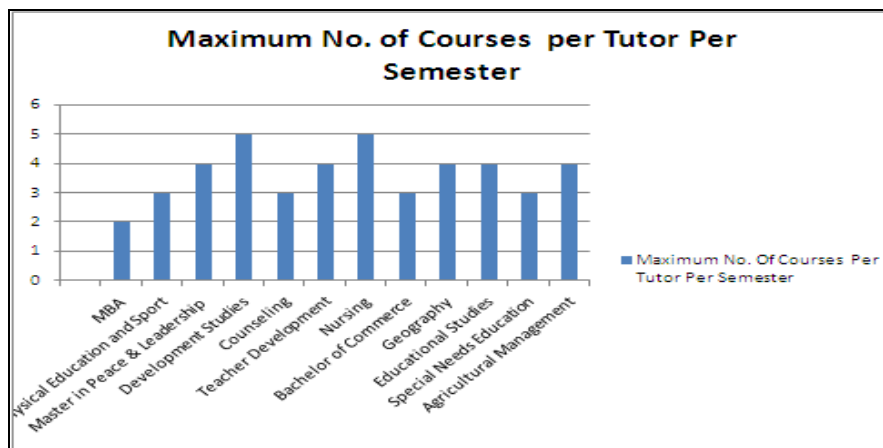


Figure 1: Maximum Number of Courses per Tutor per Semester

The figure above indicates that MBA has the least number of courses per tutor per semester. On the other hand, Development Studies and Nursing departments have the highest number of courses per tutor per semester. As a follow-up tutors were asked if they had new courses in the following semester to which the majority responded that they rarely changed implying that the workload indicated above in the majority of cases translated to yearly workloads. The workload is within the international standard of five courses per year as is the case at “UNC Charlotte faculty responsibility for five courses per year.” The load can be varied upward or downward depending on other responsibilities of the faculty members. The tutors however pointed out that in some instances some tutors do not communicate in time their unavailability at tutorials leading to increased workloads on the available tutors. While the workload may remain within international benchmarks of around six per year, the quality issue that arises from the fact that the load assigned at the tutorial venue fails to account for the preparation aspect of the tutorial. In that vein, The American Association of University Professors (2014) noted that, “workload should be thought of as total professional effort, which includes the time (and energy) devoted to class preparation.” However, the tutors expressed their satisfaction that the courses they take rarely change thereby allowing for research and publication within one’s area of specialization (The American Association of University Professors 2014). An examination of the tutor attendance for July-December 2014 for the region was made. The Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Management’s three tutorials revealed that of the seven active part-time tutors four were present at the first tutorial, two on the second and last tutorial. The RPC was asked how he managed the situation. His response was that he rescheduled some groups to a later date and also reallocated some loads in the process. These are the issues which lead to low quality of tutorials. Reallocation of workloads leads to heavier than normal loads and poor preparation by the tutor as one may not know what is to confront him on the tutorial day.

Internal Communication for Tutorials

Rate the efficiency of the communication mechanisms on tutorials between	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Extremely poor
Tutor and RPC	41	11			
Tutor and student	11	21	12	8	

Table 3: The Efficiency of Communication among Tutors, RPCs and Students

Forty-one (79%) of the tutors rated the communication between them and Programme Coordinators as excellent while 11 (21%) rated the same as good. On the other hand 11 (21%) rated communication tutors rated their communication with students as excellent and 21 (40%) as good. Twenty (39%) rated the same as average or bad. In order to find out why generally communication between tutors and students was not impressive, tutors were asked to indicate the prevalent communication platforms used and these were tabled below.

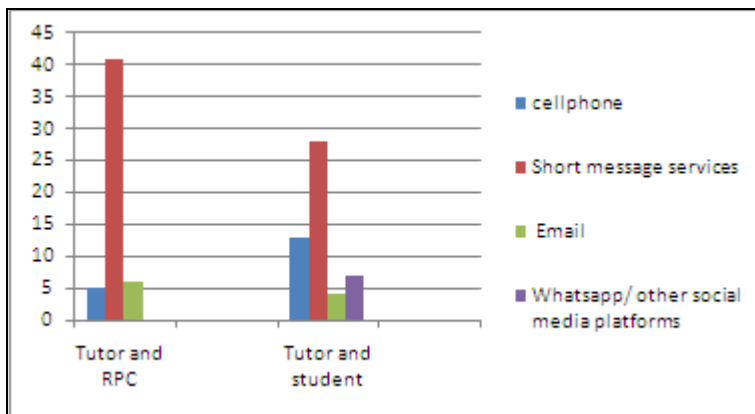


Figure 2: Means of Communication Used Among Tutors, Programme Coordinators and Students

The dominant means of communication between tutors and RPCs is the SMS while there is an almost equal use of the cellphone and email. On the other hand tutors mainly use the SMS 28 (54%) followed by the cellphone 13(29%). The Whatsapp is used by only 7(13%) of the respondents with the email being the least used. RPCs were asked on the means of communication they used with tutors and students. The RPCs pointed that they used SMS with tutors but used Whatsapp with most students followed by SMS for those students who do not access to Whatsapp. The low rating of communication between tutors and students might be attributable to the means of communication used. According to Rupande and Nyenya (2014) the Whatsapp platform and SMS are the most preferred means of communication by students yet only the SMS is heavily utilized. The limited use of the Whatsapp may be limiting communication between tutors and students.

- Does the delivery of tutorials in ODL lend itself to the development of a quality culture?

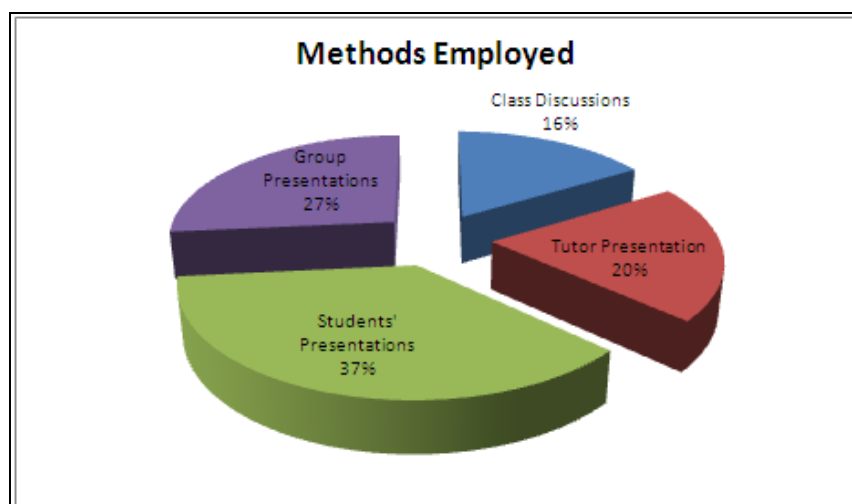


Figure 3

The respondents indicated that there is substantial use of student centred approaches confirming Rupande and Nyenya's (2014:556) contention that effective communication within the tutorial context is achieved through, "techniques such as group discussions, presentations, demonstrations and explanations." Tutor presentations are also present, an indication tutors may be coming in to deal with challenging concepts. The techniques can entrench communication between student-student, student-tutor and student-content. The findings concur with the EUA (2005:10) which states that "communication, discussions and devolved responsibility" among tutors and students are principles that promote a quality culture.

- To what extent can the evaluation of tutors help to develop a quality culture in tutorials in an ODL institution?

In their response to how their work is evaluated, tutors pointed out that there are two instruments used to assess their performance. There is the tutor evaluation instrument filled-in by students. The tutor evaluation form filled-in by students was designed by the institution which rates the tutor on various aspects such as the use of time, preparedness of the tutor, clarity, approachability and sensitivity of the tutor to the learners' needs. The instrument is filled-in and sent to National Centre for analysis. Asked on the areas that have been pointed out by students as needing improvement, the tutors responded that they have not been given feedback since they joined the institution. This mainly left the instrument to serve one purpose that is for managerial decisions. The instrument also measures parameters deemed important from the institution's point of view. Students may have some aspects not covered by the instrument which have not been covered. A narrative student evaluation form may be needed where students indicate from their own perspective tutor behavior they do not approve of or reinforce. For instance, the instrument does not cover student concerns with regard to tutor absence for evaluation is done on a present tutor.

The second instrument is the peer evaluation form. This one is filled-in by peers who observe tutors perform. The process is initiated by tutors. They also get the filled-in copy of the instrument. This instrument was deemed effective by part-time tutors. However, some tutors may not care much due to the fact that most of tutors are employed elsewhere and as such do not need this at their work places. Asked how effective the peer evaluation and the tutor evaluation instrument are, RPCs pointed out that the peer evaluation seemed to be more effective as the tutors get instant feedback on their performance. The drawback with the tutor evaluation form is that oftentimes we do not receive feedback so that the concerned members can take corrective action.

## 11. Conclusions

The findings of the research indicate that;

- The Department of Development Studies, Geography, Commerce and Law (Bachelor of Commerce), and Agricultural Management have at least twenty percent of their tutors inexperienced in ODL practices.
- Both experienced and non-experienced ODL tutors feel the need to be adequately training to teach ODL students.
- Forty-three (83%) of the respondents indicated that they still needed training at least once every semester.
- Development Studies and Nursing have the highest number of courses per tutor (5), which however still within the international standards of between five and six per year.
- Sometimes tutors are given loads for tutors who are absent without prior or alternative arrangements and this compromises quality culture.
- There is very good communication between RPCs and tutors but weak communication between students and tutors due to inefficient platforms of communication used by tutors.
- Tutors use student-centred approaches which are varied, an indication of the quality of tutorials
- While the peer evaluation form is effective the tutor evaluation form is not that effective due to the fact the feedback has not been reaching the tutor.



## 12. Recommendations

- Both experienced and non-experienced ODL tutors need to be re-trained at least once every semester.
- Tutors' workload should be maintained for sustained periods.
- Absent tutors should make alternative arrangements in time, failure to which disciplinary measures should be taken.
- Tutor student communication should be improved by making use of the student preferred platforms such as the Whatsapp.
- Tutors should continue perfecting the student-centred approaches to maximize on the students' benefits on tutorials.
- Tutor evaluation forms analysis should be returned to the regions for the benefit of the tutors and students.
- The tutor evaluation forms can be complimented with students' written submission which can be accessed by tutors so as to cater for the elements not covered by the tutor evaluation form.

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