



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT



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ISSN: 2226-6348

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David Pesanai Chipatiso, Simeon Chandirekera Marango

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v1-i2/11125>

DOI: 10.6007/IJARPED/v1-i2/11125

Received: 11 April 2012, Revised: 15 May 2012, Accepted: 28 May 2012

Published Online: 24 June 2012

In-Text Citation: (Chipatiso & Marango, 2012)

To Cite this Article: Chipatiso, D. P., & Marango, S. C. (2012). An Evaluation of the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education Programme offered at Great Zimbabwe University. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 1(2), 93–106.

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Vol. 1(2) 2012, Pg. 93 - 106

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An Evaluation of the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education Programme offered at Great Zimbabwe University

David Pesanai Chipatiso

Lecturer, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Great Zimbabwe University

Email: davechipatiso@gmail.com

Simeon Chandirekera Marango

Lecturer and Chairperson of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Great Zimbabwe University.

Email: scmarango@gmail.com

Abstract

This study was conducted to evaluate the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education programme offered at Great Zimbabwe University. The purpose of the study was to determine the relevance of the courses offered to the needs of the participant adult learners and also ascertain whether the training developed skills that contributed to better work performance. The research also sought to establish what motivated participants to enroll and persist in studies for the Diploma qualification. A descriptive survey design was adopted and data was collected using questionnaires complemented by a focus group interview as a means for verifying survey data. From a total of sixty four (64) graduates of the programme, eighteen (18) respondents were conveniently sampled and completed the questionnaires. Data was analysed quantitatively using frequency tables and qualitatively through content analysis. The study found out that eleven (11) courses served the learning needs of participants and hence were assessed as relevant to the programme. Three (3) religion courses were regarded as non-relevant to the learning needs of participants as they had no direct application at trainees' workplaces. Participants were influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors to enroll for the diploma studies. The study concludes that the programme was generally effective in providing the knowledge and skills relevant to most participants' work situations. However, the study recommends the inclusion of more development oriented courses and some course readjustments in response to the non-application value of religion courses.

Keywords: Adult Education, Evaluation, Motivations, Skills

Background

The Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education offered at Great Zimbabwe University was introduced on the premise that there was need to provide education to adults that would expand their intellectual horizons; develop new knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with changes in the work environments; develop a better understanding of society and its institutions and also upgrade their skills for them to even prepare for entirely new careers. The programme was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of the University Professor O.E Maravanyika, in August 2005.

The programme was designed for adults with relevant professional qualifications in their field of practice and is engaged in the practice of adult education in such fields as Health, Agriculture, Education, Community Development, Training, Theology, Commerce and Industry. The programme duration is two years on block release basis. Participants come for residential sessions three times each semester each session being two weeks. Since the programme focuses on mature candidates of 25 years and above, the entry requirements are passes in five "O" level subjects including English Language. Passes at "A" level would be an added advantage (Diploma in Adult Education Regulations, 2005-2011).

Since the programme's inception, it has attracted four (4) intakes whose profiles are indicated below:

Table 1: Diploma Students' Statistics (2005- 2010)

Intake	Year Started	Year Completed	Initially Registered	No. Dropped	No. Completed
1	2005	2007 June	18	6	12
2	2006	2007 Dec	25	2	23
3	2007	2009 June	29	12	17
4	2008	2010 Dec	15	3	12

Source: GZU Admissions Office Records (2010)

Up to 2010, sixty four (64) granduants have attained the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education of the University. There have also been 23 students who have fallen out/ dropped out of the programme. Reasons for dropping out ranged from failure to complete programme successfully to withdrawal for personal reasons which included time and financial constraints.

After a period of three years, it had become necessary that this programme be evaluated so as to assess its impact and relevance to the public. Field (2003) says programme evaluation may be conducted as a means of assessing whether the goals and expectations of participants (individual learners, group of learners, individual facilitators or group of facilitators) have been achieved. This study therefore, focused on the learners only basing on the objectives stated below.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Determine the relevance of the courses that are being offered in the programme.
- Find out the motivations which influence the adult participants to enroll in the programme.
- Determine the extent to which the programme has contributed towards the improvement of skills and work performance of the participants.
- Identify the areas which need to be improved in the programme.

Literature Review

Concept of Evaluation

In life, people like to reflect, ask questions and make conclusions about what they do or what they have done. Both the learners and facilitators enter a programme expecting to come out with something beneficial and satisfying (Gboku and Lekoko, 2005). These comments are relevant to the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education being offered at Great Zimbabwe University. Accordingly, a need has arisen to evaluate this programme and ascertain its relevance and impact to adult learners. Patton (1997) describes programme evaluation as “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programmes to make judgments about the programme, improve programme effectiveness and / or inform decisions about future programming.” Gboku and Lekoko (2005) also define programme as “the systematic process of investigating the value and quality of an adult education programme on such factors of accountability, suitability, efficiency and real world application”. Views similar to the above have also been made by Steele (1970), Knowles (1980), Kirkpatrick (1994) and others. Evaluation is therefore a way of checking if things are going as planned. There is need for people to reflect, make judgments and form conclusions about actions taken on a programme to see whether the anticipated outcomes are being met. It is a conscious and purposeful exercise in which questions are often asked to determine the effectiveness, impact, achievements and benefits of a programme. Some of the questions that are often asked on a programme are:

- What has worked and why?
- What has not worked and why?
- Is the programme meeting the needs of the learners?
- What do beneficiaries or users think about the programme?
- How can we use the learning to improve the programme?
- What could be done differently?

Purpose of Evaluation

There are many purposes for carrying out evaluation studies. Boyle (1981) asserts that in adult education, concerted efforts are made to develop programmes that make a maximum contribution to the growth and development of the learner and the society of which the learner is a part. Fewstein (1990) asserts that the purposes of evaluation are to help us see where we are going and if need be to change the direction; to measure progress; to see where our strengths and weaknesses lie and to help us make better plans for the future. The main purpose of this evaluation however was to determine the relevance of the programme to the learner including its impact on the skills and knowledge participants now possess. It was also aimed at establishing

what motivated participants to engage in the programme and also persist to completion. This objective was pertinent in view of some relatively high student dropout rates during the period under review. This study therefore used the concepts of Stufflebeams' (1971) Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) model of evaluation. With regards to context, this evaluation sought to determine the importance and suitability of the programme courses in meeting the learning needs of the participants. On inputs, the focus was on instructional resources / materials, programme content and programme facilitation. Regarding process, this evaluation sought to elicit comments and suggestions on design issues like duration and seasoning, motivation and participation and instructional methods. Lastly, with regards to product, the focus of this evaluation was on skill attainment and changes in behaviors at the work place (Stufflebeam, 1971).

Purposes of Adult Education

The overall goals and purposes of Adult Education can be deduced from a comprehensive definition provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1976 which states that the term adult education denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level, method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and Universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical and professional qualifications or turn in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in a twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

Nafukho, Amutabi and Otunga (2005) note that UNESCO, during its General Conference at the nineteenth session held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 1976, more specifically defined some of the more important aims of Adult Education the world over. These aims are:

- Promoting work for peace, international understanding and cooperation.
- Developing a critical understanding of major contemporary problems and social changes with a view to achieving social justice.
- Acquiring either individually, in groups or in the context of an educational establishment new knowledge, qualifications, attitudes or forms of behavior conducive to the full maturity of the personality.
- Promoting increased awareness of the relationships between people and their physical and cultural environment and respecting nature, the common heritage and public property.
- Developing the ability to critically use mass communication media in particular radio, television, cinema and the press so as to be able to interpret the various messages addressed to modern men and women of society.
- Developing an aptitude for learning how to learn.

The purposes expressed above are reinforced by Knowles (1980) who states that 'the mission of adult education is one of satisfying the needs of individuals, institutions and society'. He further notes that adult educators have the responsibility of helping individuals satisfy their needs and achieve their goals whilst on the other hand institutions that offer adult education programmes have a need to improve their ability to operate effectively and establish public understanding and involvement. Knowles contends that the overall development of society requires urgent programmes to equip adults with core competencies that can enable them to perform in an uncertain and changing work environment. Lindeman (1989), in Merriam and Brockett (1997) sums up two general purposes of adult education as individual improvement and societal development which represent the short term and long term goals respectively.

Adult Education programmes are therefore formal learning programmes designed to meet the needs, interests and learning styles of adults. Some of these needs express themselves in the form of improving work performance. In such cases, both structured and informal formats are employed. Structured formats include trainings, conferences and seminars.

Through these trainings individuals learn how to perform work tasks according to the organization's specifications. There may also be a need to improve family life. It should be noted that life does not come with a handbook hence as adults assume different roles in their life span, they learn how to adapt to these new situations. Adult Education programmes can help nurture the developmental routes that shape an adult's life. A further need may be to improve personal life. Personal experiences in the life of an adult can present challenges that require extra guidance and education. For example, an individual might decide to get a graduate degree so that he/she reaches others in a formal setting or get a promotion or pay increase. In such instances, adult education programmes serve as a device of social action and change (Merriam and Brockett, 1997).

Concept of Motivation

Motivation is a feeling of interest or keenness in doing something' (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwane, 2010). Fasokun, Katahoire and Oduaran (2005) also define motivation as " the degree of energy behind an action or behavior". One of the objectives of this research was to establish the motivations which influenced the adult participants to enroll in the programme and also persist to completion.

Six motivation theories have been found to be relevant to the context of adult learning namely: cognitive theory, intrinsic theory, extrinsic theory, behaviorist theory, process theory and content theory. A brief explanation of each is given as follows:

Cognitive Theory

According to Fasokun et al (2005) this theory enables individuals to do what they want basing on their rational evaluation of likely effects of the course of action. This theory assumes that for every action there must be a motive that precedes it. An example of a study of adult literacy learners conducted in Senegal by Fagenberg-Diallo (2002:45-60) showed that adult learners

enrolled in a programme because they needed to be able to read their letters, apply their knowledge of calculation in everyday life and contribute effectively to their community life. This development signifies the impact on the community through influence and control of the achievements through learning and planning of programmes.

Intrinsic Theory

This theory explains that the actions individuals take to achieve their goals usually come from within authority. Psychologists argue that internally determined purposeful and self directed goals provide the stronger motivation for behavior for an adult learner.

Extrinsic Theory

The theory emphasizes that the behavior is dictated by the amount of reward/incentives that an individual receives. The extrinsic motivation derived its ideas from Skinners experiments in which animals were used and acted in a way that experimenters knew very well that the successful performance of a given action would result in a reward. However Skinner (1957) further showed that it was not only the reward that motivated the action, but also the desire by the experimental subject (the rat) to avoid failure and punishment.

Process theory

This theory is directed at the understanding of the initiation, sustenance, or termination of behavior. Practically this would explain why an adult learner enrolls for a programme and persevere it up to the point when he decides to withdraw. Basically the theory states that individuals engage in actions because of what they stand to gain. Therefore adults enroll in programmes because of what they expect to gain from such a decision (Obe and Asiedu, 1988: 146). If there was nothing to gain, it is asserted that they would rather stay at home or engage in other pursuits.

Content Theory

This theory considers drives as the actual needs that result from the interaction between individuals and their physical, economic, social and psychological environment (Fasokun, Katahoire and Qduaran, 2005:88). Since the individual is a social organism, the content of the prevailing social environment determines the extent to which individuals can satisfy these needs. Human beings are therefore driven by the desire to satisfy one need after the other, throughout life.

Maslow (cited in Morris and Maisto, 1999), contends that the satisfaction of self esteem needs leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world. Thwarting of these needs, he argues, "produces feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness"

Behaviorist Theory

This theory asserts that the environment controls our behavior or actions. Skinner (1957), argues that every event in the life of any individual is caused by something in the environment, hence needs are a creation of the environment. These needs provide a drive which simply is an attempt

to adapt to prevailing conditions in the environment. Therefore individuals are motivated to learn by conditions prevailing in their environments vis-a-vis stimulus-response theory.

The six theories discussed above demonstrate the existence of diverse reasons for adult engagement in educational programmes. It is shown that adults are driven by both inner and outer needs which encompass personal goals and needs derived from the prevailing environment within which the individual finds himself or herself.

Research Methodology

The research sought to gather opinions and attitudes of past students alumni of the Great Zimbabwe University Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education programme. These graduands had been drawn from diverse fields of practice and hence were scattered throughout the country. A descriptive survey design was therefore adopted for the study. The design was found to suit this type of inquiry in which views on relevance of courses offered, participant motivations, skills acquired and their relevance at work and areas of programme improvement could be ascertained as observed by Nachmias and Nachmias (1997). The study targeted sixty-four (64) former graduands. The geographical scatter of the population presented locational challenges hence the researchers resorted to convenient sampling. Data was therefore collected from those who could be easily located and near enough to allow for personal contact. The study sample was also augmented by assigning those personally contacted, to pass on and also collect the data collection tool from their colleagues. In all, eighteen (18) respondents were reached.

A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the selected sample. In order to increase the validity of the data and also to gain an in-depth understanding of the opinions and attitudes of the respondents, a face to face group interview was conducted with seven (7) respondents. This group constituted post diploma students who had now embarked on the Bachelor in Adult and Continuing Education degree programme at Great Zimbabwe University and were on a residential session.

The data were analyzed according to themes, adopting both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings were thus presented accordingly.

Findings and Discussion

The personal attributes of the respondents indicated that eleven (61%) respondents were male and seven (39%) were female. On marital status, thirteen (72%) respondents were married whilst five (28%) were widowed. This finding could have an influence of participation in the programme since payment of fees posed a major challenge to accessing University education.

With regards to age of the respondents, eleven (61%) fell in the age range of 36-45 years, four (22%) were in the age range of 25-35 years and three (17%) fell in the age range of 46-55 years. This finding confirms what Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Wilson and Hayes (2000) and Caffarella (2002) suggest in their more recent definitions of adult education that its purpose is to help individuals become knowledgeable, skilled and dedicated citizens who are willing to work,

individually and collectively towards achieving and maintaining an improved quality of life. The Adult Education programme suits middle aged adults who have had some wide work experience and would wish to further improve their knowledge and skills at work.

Respondents were asked on their highest educational qualifications prior to enrolment in the programme. Eleven (61%) respondents had other Diploma qualifications, three (17%) had “O” levels only whilst another three (17%) had first degrees. One respondent (5%) had a Masters Degree qualification. This finding shows that the programme is pursued by people with different educational backgrounds who seek to develop new abilities or competencies or enrich their knowledge or improve their technical and professional qualifications with a view to respond to practical problems and issues of adult life (Gboku and Lekoko, 2007).

Relevance of Courses Offered in the Programme

The study sought to assess the relevance of courses offered in the programme to the needs of the participants. Respondents were required to rate each course on offer using a scale ranging from 1 to 7 with 1 being most relevant and 7 being least relevant. For purposes of presentation, ratings were grouped as follows: ratings 1,2 and 3 indicating “Relevant,” 4 (Not sure or neutral) and 5,6 and 7 indicating “Not relevant.” Course ratings are thus presented below.

Table 2 Course Ratings for Relevance

Course Narration	Relevant	Not Sure	Not Relevant	Total
Introduction to Foundations	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Information and Communications Technology	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Introduction to World Religions	8(44%)	3(17%)	7(39%)	18(100%)
Design and Delivery of Instruction	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Programme Planning	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Research Methods and Statistics	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Gender Studies	17(94%)	0(0%)	1(6%)	18(100%)
Supervision of Personnel	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
HIV/AIDS Education	17(94%)	1(6%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Community and Rural Development	17(94%)	0(0%)	1(6%)	18(100%)
Pastoral Care, Guidance and Counseling	10(55%)	1(6%)	7(39%)	18(100%)
Research Project	17(94%)	1(6%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Human Rights Education	14(78%)	2(11%)	2(11%)	18(100%)
Understanding the Bible for Pastoral Work	4(22%)	4(22%)	10(56%)	18(100%)

The table above indicates that nearly all the courses offered in the Diploma programme address the needs of the learners. However, two religion courses namely: Introduction to World Religions and Understanding the Bible for Pastoral Work, were regarded as not relevant to learner needs. Pastoral Care, Guidance and Counseling were regarded as marginally relevant with only 55% of the respondents rating it as such. In a follow up question on which courses the respondents felt

needed to be replaced in the programme, 11(61%) of the respondents identified Understanding the Bible for Pastoral Work; 10 (56%) of the respondents identified Introduction to World Religions and 6 (33%)of the respondent mentioned Pastoral Care, Guidance and Counseling.

These findings signify that participants in the programme are more concerned with the extent to which they will be able to utilize (or apply) the knowledge, skills or attitudes they acquire back in the work environment than acquiring knowledge for its own sake.

Motivation to Enroll for the Diploma Programme

One of the objectives of the study was to find out what motivated respondents to enroll in the diploma programme and pursue the studies to completion.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Enrolment into the Programme

N = 18.

Reason for enrolling	Agreed	Not Sure	Disagreed	Total
Encouragement from own organization	11(61%)	4(22%)	3(17%)	18(100%)
Felt inadequate educationally and professionally	14 (77%)	1(6%)	3(17%)	18(100%)
Family pressure	4(22%)	1(6%)	13(72%)	18(100%)
GZU offers a diversified programme	13(72%)	3(17%)	2(11%)	18(100%)
Programme opens up new opportunities	18(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
Only programme 1 qualified to enroll in	7(39%)	0(0%)	11(61%)	18(100%)
Programme has knowledgeable and experienced facilitators.	16(89%)	2(11%)	0(0%)	18(100%)
GZU offers a conducive learning environment	12(66%)	5(28%)	1(6%)	18(100%)
Enables upward mobility in current organization	11(61%)	6(33%)	1(6%)	18(100%)
Intend to change jobs for the better	14(78%)	2(11%)	2(11%)	18(100%)

Table 3 above shows the factors which influenced participants to enroll. Indicated against each factor is the number of respondents who agreed, were not sure or disagreed with the statement. These numbers of respondents are expressed in percentages of the total sample of 18.

From table 3 above, it can be deduced that the factors which influence an individual to enroll in a programme are many. These range from feeling of inadequacy, educationally/professionally as indicated by 77% of the respondents; facilitation of upward mobility in current organization (61%); intention to change jobs (78%) which all emanate from intrinsic motivation. There are also extrinsic motivations like the programme opens up new job opportunities (100%); programme is manned by knowledgeable and experienced facilitators (89%) and programme is diversified (72%). It can therefore be said that both the intrinsic and the extrinsic theories of motivation are key to adult participation in learning programmes (Fasokun et al 2005). Brookfield (1986), stresses the need for programmes to address learner needs; provision of a conducive environment for learning and provision of high quality facilitations. In this study, respondents echoed similar sentiments but wished for an augmented, gender balanced facilitation team to be put in place. This aspect could as well serve as an important marketing tool for the programme.

Development of Skills

The study also sought to determine the extent to which the Adult Education Programme developed specific skills of the respondents. Respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which skill development occurred using the following variables: very great extent, (VGE) great extent (GE), some extent (SE), little extent (LE) and not applicable (NA).

Table 4 Extent of Skill Development

Skill Specification Variables	VGE	GE	SE	LE	NA	Total
Writing Skills	9(50%)	6(33%)	3(17%)	NIL	NIL	18(100%)
Analytical Skills	8(44%)	9(50%)	1(6%)	NIL	NIL	18(100%)
Understanding life issues	8(44%)	7(39%)	3(17%)	NIL	NIL	18(100%)
Relating theory to practice	8(44%)	9(50%)	1(6%)	NIL	NIL	18(100%)
Coping with complex tasks	9(50%)	7(39%)	2(11%)	NIL	NIL	18(100%)
Interpersonal Skills	7 (39%)	9(50%)	2(11%)	NIL	NIL	18(100%)

Table 4 above indicates that skill development occurred in between 83% and 94% of the respondents if ratings of great extent (GE) and very great extent (VGE) are considered together. The greatest development occurred in skills related to ability to analyze situations and also to relate theory to practice (application). This development confirms the realization of specific programme outcomes among which fall development of participants' analytic skills and ability to apply adult education concepts in various fields from which participants are drawn, (Diploma Regulations, 2005).

Suggested Changes for improving the Diploma Programme

Respondents suggested some changes in the content of the programme; instructional resources, instructional methods and facilitation.

Content

A broad recommendation was made to upgrade some courses which fell under optional offering to core status. These courses are Community and Rural Development, Human Rights Education and Guidance and Counseling. It was also felt that there was need to include more courses which focus on development. Another change that was considered to be very important was allocation of more time for hands on practice in the Information and Communication Technology course. This could have been prompted by the congestion experienced in pursuance of this course due to resources available against the number of students taking the course at undergraduate level.

The Supervision course was considered very relevant to the majority of the programme participants hence more detailed content was needed. There was also a general view that Religion courses should be removed from the programme. The argument presented and verified in the group interviews was that the spiritual needs of the individuals were provided for in denominational activities which respective participants engaged in. Participants did not see themselves being expected to perform religious functions which needed skills and knowledge related to the courses they undertake in the programme.

Instructional Resources

Concern was raised on the shortage of reference books in most of the areas offered in the programme. The few books that were available were shared among many students at both the Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Teachers College making them unavailable to adult education students when needed. A suggestion for a Departmental library was mooted as a long term measure to address this problem.

To access relevant information, there was also a suggestion for acquisition of more computers which are connected to the Internet facility. In the interim, respondents felt the provision of more handouts could however fill in the gap.

Instructional Methods

Respondents acknowledged the strengths in diversity of their learning groups. Programme participants for each group are recruited from diverse fields of practice and hence possess different experiences. The respondents believed that more effective learning could be achieved if methods which encouraged group learning were adopted.

Facilitation

This was regarded as generally good. However improvements were envisaged on recruiting a specialized facilitator on HIV/ AIDS education, having a gender balance in lecturing staff and improving the staff position which fluctuated between two and three lecturers over the period under review. This position exerted much pressure on facilitators and interfered with contact time with learner groups.

Others Issues Needing Attention

Respondents underscored the need to be involved in learning needs assessment so that they make a positive contribution on the courses that are offered in the programme. This suggestion reaffirms Knowles's (1980) observation that adults are aware of specific learning needs generated by real life tasks or problems.

It was also commented that provision of a conducive learning environment both physically and psychologically was a prerequisite for effective learning. Respondents therefore called for more efforts to be directed towards improving teaching venues.

Last but not least, the respondents felt that the diploma programme was 'overpriced' in terms of the fees charged. This was the case in spite of the diploma being an undergraduate programme.

Fees structure for undergraduate degree programmes were lower than that of the diploma programme hence there was some need to review this situation.

Conclusions

The findings revealed that the courses offered in the programme generally serve the learning needs of programme participants and hence are very relevant. However, three religion courses

did not serve the immediate learning needs of the adult learners. The programme was effective in developing participants' skills that applied in their "daily lives" as well as at their work places. This has been facilitated by inclusion of need meeting courses in the programme. Programme participants enroll for studies and persist to completion because of a number of factors. These motivations are both intrinsic and extrinsic. However there were some institutional factors which hindered effective learning such as shortage of relevant reference books, inadequacy of teaching venues, high fee structure for the Diploma programme and restricted practice time for practical courses such as Information and Communication Technology.

In view of these findings, it is recommended that;

- i. The course structure of the programme be revised to ensure that all core courses meet the "relevance" criteria most important of which is "can the knowledge and skills acquired be used to improve work performance?"
- ii. Courses that are biased towards development such as Development Studies be added to the programme.
- iii. The institution pursues the issue of providing relevant resource books for the courses on offer in sufficient numbers to allow for student loaning. The institution also augments the provision of Internet connected computers to facilitate student research.
- iv. The high fee structure for the Diploma programme needs to be examined as it is an impediment to adult participation in the programme.

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