

## POTENTIAL FOR COMPUTER ASSISTED DISTANCE LEARNING IN ZAMBIA: WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

The Education System in Zambia is failing to provide education opportunity to the growing population leaving many illiterate and school drop – outs. Efforts have been made by the Government to provide alternative education through distance learning both at general education and higher education levels.

Since the introduction of distance learning in the mid 1960's course material has been made on hard copy and delivery by post to the intended target. The other method that has been used is Radio and Television. However, since the early 1990's course delivery has been hampered by several factors. For example, the Zambia National Broadcasting Cooperation has been charging high fees for Air-time, making it expensive to transmit course material. Another problem is that Government Public transport, which used to deliver postal material to remote parts of the country, has been discontinued under the current economic era. This has resulted in erratic delivery of the post, affecting delivery of course material by distance learning.

With the establishment of ZAMNET Communication System, the University of Zambia has been able to deliver course materials to students, who are following 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate courses by distance learning, through the e-mail and the Internet. In addition the Department of Technical Education and Vocational Training (DTEVT) has started Bachelors Degree programs at two of its training institutions. Course material is prepared by the Bolton Institute of Higher Education, UK, and delivered through the e-mail and Internet to students.

The above examples clearly indicate that the technology is available in Zambia for computer assisted distance learning. In addition, the growing number of illiterate children as well as school drop-outs and the unemployed adults point to the potential there is in distance learning.

This method of computer assisted delivery of course material can be extended to General education. However, this mode of delivery is currently being hindered by the following factors:

- The general lack of telecommunication infrastructure in the rural areas
- The lack of electricity in the rural areas
- The inability to afford computer hardware and software by the target group
- Untrained providers of distance learning in Information Technology

These factors need to be addressed in order to promote and enhance computer assisted distance learning in Zambia. This paper discusses the potential for computer assisted learning in Zambia, constraints and how these can be minimized as a way of promoting computer assisted learning.