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**Research Article**

# Adoption of New Information and Communication Technology: Implications for Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe's Tertiary Education

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**Abstract:** The increasing enthusiasm to catch up with the fast technological growth and invention enabled academic world to pursue a growing crisis of relevance in the twenty first century academia. Besides, the need to have a globalised open and distance learning university with learners who are technologically equipped and can compete on global scale motivated the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) to adopt MyVista, an intranet platform, where student learning can be enhanced. The major thrust of the study was to explore the impact of MyVista to Open and Distance learners at the said institution as they embark on their academic journey. In this study, the researchers adopted the descriptive design within the qualitative methodology in order to have in-depth understanding of the effects of MyVista to the open and distance learners enrolled at the Matabeleland North Regional campus. Observations and in-depth interview guides were the main instruments used to collect data from 30 participants (N=30) who were purposively selected to gather the required quality information to close the identified gap. The study found out that leaners faced a number of challenges largely due to limited or no computer background, resulting in them facing other challenges such as failing to navigate the MyVista platform including failing to submit their assignments during the stipulated period as a result of lack of technological knowledge and due to other commitments. Despite the challenges, the study established that the ability to navigate within the network system designed effective opportunities by creating a conducive learning environment without face to face interaction. The study concluded that MyVista, is a significant intranet platform to Open and Distance learners as it enhanced positive evolution to the learners by changing their perceptions towards MyVista in particular and ICT enhanced education in general. The MyVista facility was noted to be a convenient tool in ODeL since learners effectively interacted with the institution in general and their lecturers in particular, including enabling them to access their assignments and results at the most convenient times. Among other recommendations, the researchers recommended that the ZOU should introduce and capitalise on continual staff development in the use of MyVista in order for staff to effectively assist students while also offering short computer courses for students, thereby reducing time to educate learners on how to use a computer and circumnavigate through the intranet.

**Keywords:** Information and Communication Technology (ICT), MyVista, Open and Distance Learning (ODL), e-learning, Open and Distance electronic Learning (ODeL).

## 1.0 BACKGROUND AND ITS SETTING

### 1.1 Introduction

The creation of MyVista; an intranet platform at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), an Open Distance electronic Learning (ODeL) institution has come with mixed aftermaths, including its challenges, though, largely, it provides increased opportunities towards the educational achievement of learners. The full utilisation of MyVista at the institution started in the year 2017 (Chirume and Thondhlana, 2019), thereby enabling learners to download and upload learning resources such as modules and assignments, among other materials online. MyVista fulfils online learning activities by providing an interactive and deliberative platform to learners. However, learners sometimes delay to submit their coursework for marking due to poor network connectivity and other social commitments.

Some learners travel to Regional Campuses to access technologies such as computers, internet and Wi-Fi services in order to submit assignments through

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MyVista; which is the typical case with learners in the area under study. Also, to beat the assignment submission deadlines, learners may send their assignments to their counterparts in urban centres to submit on their behalf. Sometimes they use their mobile phones and data which is expensive and generally not permissible. As a result, the availability of ICTs has come as a great opportunity to utilise time and distance amongst the learners. Despite the challenges faced by the utilisation of MyVista, the study aimed at establishing how it has technologically empowered and enabled the ZOU learners to meet their day to day learning needs and global competition.

**1.2 Background to the Problem**

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is the leading Open and Distance Learning tertiary institution in Zimbabwe and second largest in Southern Africa after University of South Africa (UNISA) (Mafa and Gasva, 2016). Some learners at the ZOU particularly in Matabeleland North region live in rural areas that are in dire need of electrical power and have poor network connectivity; which poses a great challenge to open and distance learners as, for example, they delay to submit assignments in time, hence, travelling to the Regional Campus to get the internet and computers to enable them to log into the MyVista platform. Besides, some learners would not have ever used a computer in life; let alone moved a Computer mouse, despite being exposed to their mobile smart phones. Consequently, the encounter with MyVista exposes such learners to a new learning environment and challenge which might be adventurous and wearisome to them at the same time.

Like other tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe that adopted ICTs, the ZOU created MyVista, an intranet based learning management system (www.myvista.zou.ac.zw). Despite the fact that learners can have online interaction with their tutors, learners' queries on MyVista are sometimes not responded to, compelling learners to use alternative means of communication such as WhatsApp, short message service (SMS), voice calls and electronic mails. However, Jimoh (2013), argued that some of the learners do not know how to use a computer and taking the advantage of its usage. Therefore, it can be premised that the adoption of MyVista is key for both effective communication and to essentially empower learners, such as ZOU students within the area under study with technologized knowledge which enable them to become acceptable in the electronic global world. Osaat (2012) says that in Nigeria, the National Open University of Nigeria, uses ICT in tandem with printed materials. This is in harmony with Chimedza (2006) cited in Mafa and Gasva (2015) who acknowledges that the ZOU is currently in the second generation of the evolution of mode of delivery in open and distance education; implying that the institution uses a dual mode characterised by use of the both face to face learner-tutor interactions and e-learning.

Besides, Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development called all universities to develop and deliver a knowledgeable and skilled human capital with an ICT knowledge-base (National ICT Policy, 2015). Rahman, (2014) maintains that the new technologies have come up with the advent of a new generation of distance education material such as voice mail, e-mail, teleconferencing, computer-based integrated telecommunications and multimedia technology. Notably, the significance of integrating ICTs is recognised in the Global Development Agenda, specifically in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9 on Innovation as well as SDG4 on Education. It is in line with these phenomenal advances and demands in technology and the Ministry's vision that the ZOU embarked on promoting e-learning through adopting MyVista in order to develop technological skilled human capital that suits today's industrial demands. Despite the studies by different scholars (such as, Chirume, 2019; Chirume and Thondhlana, 2019; Njaya and Murangwa, 2017; Tafangombe and Kaputa, 2015), none of them looked into opportunities and challenges of MyVista to learners in the competitive digitalized world. Therefore, this study aimed at filling the missing gap by exploring the impact of MyVista to Open and Distance learners as they embark on their academic journey with special focus on Zimbabwe Open University's Matabeleland North Regional Campus, where learners are, like other Regional Campuses, immersed in this phenomenal educational change.

Thus, regardless of the vast literature on ICTs' utilisation in tertiary institutions worldwide, there is however, limited literature on the use of MyVista as an intranet platform and its impact on learner success and comfort. The identified gap drew the attention of the researchers to focus on the implications of new ICTs to Open and Distance Learning with particular focus on MyVista at the ZOU'S Matabeleland North Regional Campus which has, to the knowledge of researchers, not been addressed by other scholars. The rate at which ICTs have been integrated in tertiary education including ODL proves how it is crucial to educate both the learners and the nation despite the geographical boundaries. Hence, the adoption of MyVista at the ZOU and other institutions of higher learning has been of great benefit to expedite strategies of community development since the government through Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology as well as communities' central focus is on innovational shift from paper to paperless world involving empowering the learners through innovative ICT programmes. It is worth noting that ICTs and education in any society are intertwined, hence, cannot be separated. Accordingly, the researchers noted the dire need to explore the impact of

MyVista to Open and Distance learners in the area under study largely in order to close the existing gap that other scholars have not addressed.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

The adoption of ICT in general and MyVista platform in particular in the context of open and distance learning has been a phenomenal development that has heightened Open and Distance learners' learning opportunities while making them more competitive globally. The problem at stake is to ascertain both the challenges and opportunities that have been associated with the utilisation of MyVista as a teaching and learning platform at the Zimbabwe Open University's Matabeleland North Regional Campus.

### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of MyVista to Open and Distance learners at the ZOU's Matabeleland North Regional Campus as they embark on their academic journey which is largely characterised by e-learning.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The researchers envisage that the study is an eye opener to a number of stakeholders within the higher education fraternity in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Basically, the study is expected to assist the ZOU as an ODeL institution to introspect on the challenges faced by its learners and find possible solutions to address such encounters; while at the same time considering the opportunities associated with the use of MyVista. Thus, the interactive nature of MyVista should be seen as an important innovation that provides for vast opportunities for ZOU learners to be electronically competitive within the global market. To innovators, this study brings to their attention the challenges faced by the users, hence, the need to create technologies conversant with the target arcade. Thus, the findings will also assist other tertiary institutions and learners to adopt effective intranets that students and the lecturers can engage as they share learning resources. To the policy makers, the study findings are expected to enhance a robust ICT implementation in tertiary institutions that still lags behind and also to amplify capacity building in the education sector to provide innovative and skilled human capital important to the socio economic growth of the nation and the world over.

### 1.6 Research objectives

The following research objectives were used to guide the study;

- To examine the role and influence of MyVista on the acquisition of globalised knowledge by open and distance learners at the ZOU
- To explore challenges faced by ODL learners at the ZOU in navigating MyVista during their study journey
- To establish opportunities of adopting MyVista to Open and Distance learners at the ZOU and how such opportunities may be capitalised to enhance ODL quality education.

## 2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### *2.1 Conceptualising ICTs and MyVista*

The revolution of ICTs and its integration in tertiary education has ushered in new approaches to teaching and learning in the global village. The use of ICTs in open and distance learning is emphasized and is a major amplifier to tertiary education and the socio-economic development of nations. Rao (2012) opines that ICTs are a group of technologies by which different support services are provided at different stages of student's learning life cycle. ICTs can also be defined as "the system of technologies, tools, and devices that are used to transmit, process, create, store, share, display or exchange information by electronic means" or the "combination of informatics technology with other, related technologies, specifically communication technology' (UNESCO, 2009: 13). Hence, ICTs can be considered as most essential tools for promoting knowledgeable learners and mechanism that can provide an approach to rethink and redesign the learning systems and processes that lead to quality education and the ultimate product. ICTs can be considered through their complexities as the convergence of audiovisual and telephone networks unified through computer networks or networking system.

Considering the above definitions, it can be computed that ICTs comprise and encompass a broad array of technologies which include computers and its accessories, network hardware and software, radio, television, videos, digital video disk (DVD), compact disc (CD), telephone and mobile phone, digital cameras, personal digital assistants (PDA), satellite systems, as well as social networking sites associated with these technologies, such as electronic mails, video-conferencing, Web logs (blogs), Facebook, WhatsApp, Friendsters, YouTube, MySpace, and Twitters, among others. It is these technologies that enable users to communicate within and outside the institutions through enabled ICT connectivity and interaction. Hence, the enhanced benefits provided by MyVista are there to augment the effectiveness of Open and Distance teaching and learning globally. Besides, ICTs assist institutions to facilitate admission by offering potential and returning learners with programme details, admission procedure, registration and re-registration and fee structure on their websites. On part of the learning, the learners get updates and uploaded learning schedules and programmes, lectures through video-conferencing, audio and video programmes, multi-media presentations, and case studies, examination schedule, internal and external assessment, examinations, improvement, valuation, revaluation, and

examination results, and marks or grades updates, among other uses.

From the foregoing, ODeL contextually means that Open and Distance Learning is merged with technology or electronic devices for impartation of fundamental knowledge, skills and values that are comparable globally. Thus, among other things, MyVista technologies facilitate learners to access information about their assignments and examinations, studying materials (modules), account statements, make online payment through Pay now, access and personal data and so on.

### *2.2* THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF ICTS IN EDUCATION

Today, the role of ICTs in the tertiary institutions play an important role especially in the process of empowering the learners to incorporate technology into educational activities. The study by Rahman (2014) asserts that ICTs have the potential to increase access to and improve relevance and quality of education in developing countries and Zimbabwe is no exception. The inclusion of ICTs in education is significant in the revival and sustainability of regional communities as they are now largely connected by ICT (Simpson and Hunter, 2001 in Kasigwa, Williams and Baryamureeba, 2018). The same source notes that, besides, ICTs can empower learners, transform learning processes from being teacher-dominated to student-centered and this transformation results in amplified learning which creates opportunities for improved analytical skills, creativity, ability to solve problems, communication skills, informational reasoning skills, vocabulary creation and other higher-order thinking and learning skills amongst the students. In support, Rahim, Begum and Tie (2014) purport that learner centered learning environments based on ICTs provide learners with opportunities to construct knowledge and carefully compete for knowledge bases. It is in this same vein that ZOU adopted MyVista for teaching and learning purposes in order to technically engage learners for improved learner outcomes and success.

In essence, MyVista enables and offers flexibility to learners to learn while detached from their campus and tutors. As a result, it stands to reason that the creation and adoption of MyVista can sustain learners by enabling them to be technologically competitive at a global scale. As noted by Trucano, (2010), the integration of ICTs is a known and developmental concept in education since the advent of chalkboard and printing press. Many developing and developed countries have and are still investing on ICTs and are calling for their integration in education (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013). The new and emerging ICTs such as internet applications, computer soft wares, video technology and others have not just changed in technical nature but also in structural nature, hence, the need for learners' adaptability. Notwithstanding Rao (2012)'s argument that institutions that are dependent on ICT need to upgrade their ICT regularly to operate efficiently, the technological features used in ODeL should be designed in such a way that it is easy to upgrade and accessible in rural district campuses considering that most developing countries are predominantly rural. The importance of new ICTs in providing and necessitating easy learning environment to learners can, therefore, not be disputed.

Generally, ICTs have various roles in educating the marginalised learners as proved by their convergence despite geographical location. Technology promotes interactive and collaborative opportunities to team-centered pedagogy in an appropriate learning environment and style. Trucano (2010), Summak, Bağlıbel and Samancıoğlub (2010), Kadijevich and Haapasalo (2008) believe that ICTs provide positive effects on critical thinking, career, problem solving, and collaborative learning which resonates great strides to embrace the evolving learning environment. Further, ICT in open and distance learning enhances faculty-student communication, provides everyday accessibility and availability, student oriented teaching environment while also providing methods to assess and evaluate student progress and aid fast contact with the authority (Mazumdar, 2012). Due to lack of technological infrastructure development, it has been observed that most of the ODL learners have no computer education background making them to suffer from *technophobia* that forces some of them to hire other learners to write assignments, register and complete other documents at a cost as they embark on their academic journey largely based on e-learning. The advent of ICTs has capacitated tertiary institutions to provide flexible and open learning environments to learners despite their locations. One of the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s overriding aims is to ensure that developed and developing countries have access to best educational facilities necessary to prepare young people to play full roles in modern society and to contribute to knowledgeable and ICT based nations (UNESCO, 2009).

### *2.3 Challenges Associated With The use of ICTs in ODL*

The effective incorporation of ICT into the educational system is considered a multifaceted process that involves not just technology- indeed given enough initial capital, getting the technology is the easiest part- but also curriculum and pedagogy, institutional readiness, teacher competencies and long term financing, among others (Rahman, 2014). Onwe (2013) agrees that, the use of ICTs in teaching and learning in sub-Saharan Africa is seriously hampered by lack of expertise, lack of infrastructure, and a largely technologically illiterate user group. Despite the indicated, ICTs are known to come with great opportunities amongst the institutions and learners.

Apart from learners' encounters, Akande and Sofowora (2011) note that poor ICT infrastructure in rural areas and epileptic power supply negatively affects the development and integration of ICTs in distance and open learning.

Even though technology-driven pedagogy in schools and colleges alike is largely characterised by enormous benefits such as in the case of the utilisation of MyVista for teaching and learning purposes at the ZOU, research has also revealed that it is not spared from facing some challenges. In that regard, findings by Mafa and Mpofu (2013) indicate that the major challenge associated with the adoption of technology-driven pedagogy is lack of financial resources which may not be readily available for the purposes of;

- acquiring and setting up appropriate infrastructure;
- training lecturers (tutors) and support staff;
- training learners expected to use the adopted ICT platforms;
- Attracting personnel with requisite qualifications to upload learning resources and maintain infrastructure; and
- To pay ICT service providers.

However, ODL institutions, including ZOU, are not at all dissuaded by the various challenges associated with the use of technology-driven pedagogy such as use of MyVista for the use of technology-driven pedagogy is apparently the in-thing in modern educational delivery as it was noted by research to essentially increase access to and quality of ODL programmes (Mafa and Gasva, 2015)

Furthermore, the political, cultural, socio-economic and geographical background of learners can have an impact on their ability to learn using various forms of ICT tools. Agreeing to this assertion, Jimoh (2013) says that most of the open and distance learning students have no computer education background and suffer from *technophobia* to the extent that they hire experts at a cost to fill their admission forms, register and complete other documents, upload assignments and do other tasks meant for them to accomplish online. Since most of the learners in open and distance learning tend to have overwhelming social responsibilities apart from education such as a family, employment, or other issues which occupy their time, ICTs can, therefore, provide room for the learners to commit themselves to complete their studies.

### *2.4 Opportunities Associated With ICT use in ODL*

The ability to receive education hundreds or thousands of miles away from a classroom in a convenient and efficient manner is the blessings of ICT in the twenty-first century. Mafa and Mpofu (2013) state that tertiary institutions are on wheels adopting ICTs objectively to create a conducive learning environment for learners. The need to create ICT related knowledge-based information demonstrates the importance of ICT in education and its existence cannot be ignored. Technologies in distance education provide cost effectiveness, liberated time and place, quality of education, access resulting from the mass production of course materials, teaching a lot of learners simultaneously and finding a lot of educational resources. ICTs also offer amplified possibilities for codification of knowledge about instruction and for innovation in teaching activities through the delivery of learning and cognitive activities anywhere at one's convenient time (Igwe, 2012). Igwe (2012) adds that learning at a distance can be self-paced, learner-centred and problem solving-based than direct teaching using traditional instructional media, social media through networking to create open space interaction between the lecturer and the learner without face-to-face lectures.

However, it is also factual that some learning activities such as presentations, teaching practice supervision among others cannot be coordinated by virtual means. Although, face-to-face discussions are crucial to enable sensory perception to be stimulated, it is important to note that the influence of distance and time is waning now that the technological capacity is available for knowledge-sharing, remote access and teamwork as well as organising and coordinating tasks over wide areas (OECD, 2004a). Thus, the different and vast uses of ICT, thus, add value to teaching and learning by enhancing the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition, application and behaviour change. Although it is not easy to perform these same tasks using the traditional institution systems due to limited resources such as space and teaching and learning resources (Moore and Kearsley, 1996 in Igbokwe, 2015), the institution's adoption of MyVista endavours to electronically establish learning into the public sphere. It is against this background that MyVista is premised to provide a virtual role in open and distance learning in the endeavour to meet the requirements and expectations of learners at the ZOU and worldwide. Therefore, it can be premised that the creation of ICTs and their adoption in tertiary institutions comes with a number of implications particularly for the learners and institutions in general, with most of the implications being positive.

## 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researchers adopted the descriptive research design under the qualitative paradigm in order to have an in-depth understanding of the effects of MyVista to Open and Distance learners at the ZOU's Matabeleland North region. Creswell (2013), views the descriptive research design as a useful way of obtaining descriptive and explanatory information regarding phenomena. Observations and in-depth interview guides were the main instruments used to gather the required data. The research focused on learners from rural Hwange and Binga Districts only

within Matabeleland North Province due to the fact that the selected participants use MyVista and are believed to provide quality information required for this research since they are enrolled at the institution and are learners who are predominantly affected by the adoption of MyVista due to the related challenges they tend to face. From a total population of 300 learners, 30 participants were purposively selected to gather the required data meant to close the identified gap left by previous studies. The selection of 30 participants is supported by Palinkas, et al, (2015 cited in Mutale, 2018) who note that in descriptive research, any sample size from 10% to 20% of the population in question is representative enough to warrant generalization of results. Thus, this study adopted the descriptive design in order to organise the findings so as to fit them with explanations and validate those explanations to attitudes, behaviours, opinions and other defined variables among the learners in question.

The gathered data was presented and analysed qualitatively by narration as interviewed and observed. The information was treated with utmost confidentiality where privacy and anonymity of participants was observed and names were not included on data collection tools. The researchers made an effort to address the consent from respondents before their participation and also informed them the purpose of the study as prescribed by Creswell and Maietta (2013) that the purpose of any study should be made clear to would-be participants in order to allow them to make informed decisions regarding their involvement or not. As a further protocol for conducting fieldwork in line with Creswell (2009), a research letter from Zimbabwe Open University warranting permission to conduct the study was given to the researchers and was presented to the respondents before commencing the data collection process.

## 4.0 STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *4.1 The role of MyVista in the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills by ODL students*

Through an interview, the research inquired whether the respondents understood the role of MyVista in the teaching and learning process within the context of ODL. The results showed that the respondents were knowledgeable and understood the role of the MyVista platform. Respondents indicated that they largely used MyVista to interact with the institution particularly their tutors. This included downloading assignment questions and uploading written assignments. In addition, learners indicated that they accessed modules, past examination papers, assignment and examination results, academic transcripts and tutorial letters. The tutorial letters communicated the course outline, assignments details and appeals, among other issues. It was also observed that immediately after submitting assignments, learners received a prompt message on MyVista which updated them concerning their coursework submissions. The system facilitated learners to raise queries to their Programme Coordinators and Tutors concerning their academic work including progress and challenges. Besides, the respondents noted that MyVista provided them as learners with requisite cognitive skills as learner-centred approaches were enabled.

Related to the downloading of marked assignments, learners also received feedback concerning their assignments. As an example, information that affected their learning is posted on the wall of MyVista page as indicated:

*The Deadline for **Assignment 2** Submissions has been extended to **24 April 2019, 23:55**. To all those students with outstanding assignment 2 submission, please submit before the deadline. Please note that **no extensions** will be issued beyond this date. All those with challenges, make sure that those are addressed between now and the due date* (An extract from MyVista site news - www.myvista.zou.ac.zw – 01 May 2019).

Thus, the learners' benefit from MyVista in the 21st educational system cannot be overemphasized. There is indeed learners' technological development as they were observed navigating through the platform with easy although some still required assistance.

One of the *techno-savvy* commended that:
*The transformation into the competitive world of technology has been visible and viable but overdue. The domination of traditional education needs to be replaced by modern learning enabled by paperless inventions. This does not only change educational perceptions but cognitive skills development of individual learners, particularly OD learners who need to penetrate the global market.*

On a different note, one of the learners emphasized that scholars were supposed to embrace the modern technologies and MyVista in particular so as to blend ICT driven teaching and learning with the print module delivery mode. The learner indicated that:

*Until when should we continue demanding hardcopy modules? Yes, they are worth for our learning but I think ZOU has done something worth emulating. Let us support the institution in embracing technology for our own advantage.*

The evolution of MyVista has capacitated the OD learner and transformed the traditional learning to modern technological inspired education (ODeL). There is strong evidence that computer-based training results in an equal or higher quality of learning over traditional instruction (Planty, et al., 2009). Learners enjoy their learning both in classroom setting (tutorial) and the e-learning platform. The learner is given time to do more productive work on his own on the e-learning platform. In addition, self-paced learning materials leads to higher

retention rate as learners digest the content at their own pace rather than the tutors' pace. Rangan and Sengul, (2009) provide that ICTs expedite the transference of knowledge worldwide. Thus, the adoption of MyVista is a major initiative to the ZOU in particular and Zimbabwean tertiary education and community in general as it is meant to promote one of the major pillars of socio-economic development and growth.

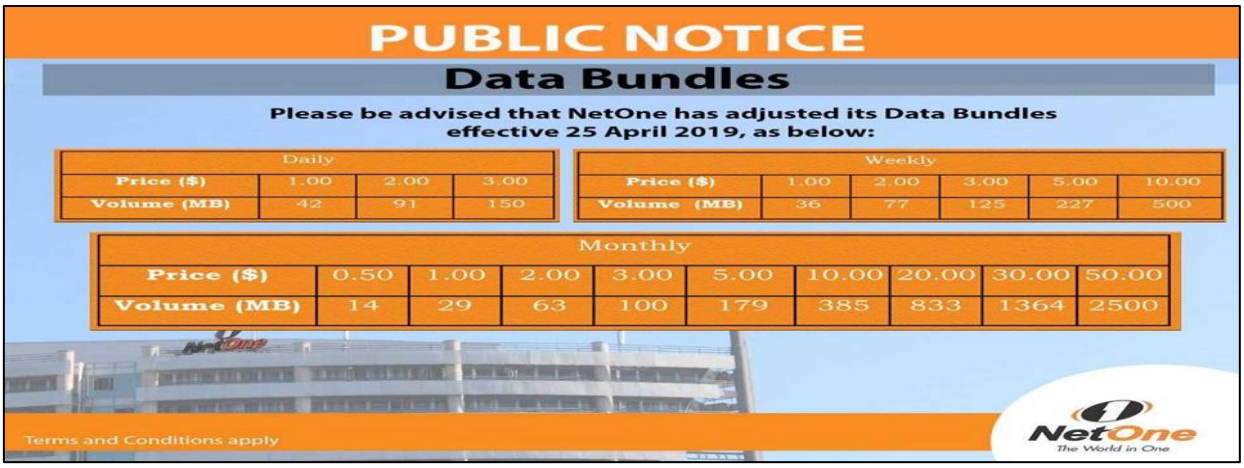
While the e-learning platforms are expensive to develop, the benefits discussed above indicate the cost saving measures attached to it. It can be predicated that refining the technological aspect in the tertiary institutions of Zimbabwe particularly at the ZOU will not only improve service to the nation but will technologize human capital worth to invest their knowledge worldwide. Apart from the above, it was established that MyVista enables fees account settlements through Pay-now online facility linked to Financial Banking Corporation (FBC) bank and Ecocash services from Econet service provider. The facilities provide a detailed account statement of how an individual student would have paid his or her fees. Chirume and Thondhlana (2019) support that, through use of MyVista, learners can access individual data from any locality. Further, there is effective deliberation, collaboration, and exchange of notes, documents, as well as contacts, updates of matters affecting learners' academic expedition among other data. Based on these findings, it can, therefore, be ascertained that MyVista platform is an essential tool that can be relied to provide the ODL field and industry in general with both academic and technological skills.

### *4.2 Challenges faced by Open and Distance learners in navigating MyVista during learning*

One of the respondents' indicated that:

*Internet is a dream but we survive due to availability of Econet and NetOne networks. Otherwise, without these service providers, the issue of online interactions was impossible. We convert our airtime to daily data for online purposes including learning.*

The above sentiment shows some of the challenges faced by learners when accessing the MyVista platform. Although, the respondents noted that purchasing data for surfing was the way to go, the increase of data cost by Econet, NetOne and Telecel service providers is an impediment to digital learning. The diagram below is but an example of the cost of data that confronts most ODL learners including ZOU students in the area under study:




*Source: Online (Extracted on 01 May 2019:1430hrs)*

Despite the ability to connect to various networks, the participants were observed to travel long distances to areas where they could access networks including going to Regional campuses. It was also observed that some learners could not manage to simply move a Computer mouse, hence, the need to register online as a first encounter provided room for first practice. These findings concur with other studies that revealed that some ODL students in third world countries particularly rural areas are challenged with both lack of experience in the application of technology and absence of these technologies (Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza, and Zebron,, 2015; Mbukusa, 2009). Unlike their counterparts in developed countries and urban areas, the learners in the rural setup who were studied could not manage to access the MyVista facility due to several limitations including lack of knowledge as well as lack of internet and Wi-Fi services at District Learning Centres. In addition, it was discovered and observed that inadequate computers, lack of technological confidence, missing courses upon registration, registration of wrong courses and other social commitments were among the challenges faced by most of the learners.

As supported by Tafangombe and Kaputa (2017), most of the Open and Distance learners are adults who might be technophobic, lack technology preparedness and have inadequate technology competences. Some of the noted challenges include

failure to manage time and lack of self-motivation as these have influence on learner participation and performance; particularly among ODL students. Mostly learners have encountered network slowdown and breakdown during assignment submission due to submission overload. Infrastructural development is key to enhance productive education in tertiary institutions.

### *4.3 Opportunities of adopting MyVista to ODL learners and tertiary education in Zimbabwe*

Through interviews and observations, the findings presented that MyVista provided exploratory opportunities of ODL students while learning. The study established that the use of MyVista promoted technologized learners who can manage to operate electronic devices and engage in online interactions. In the global world, learners are able to impart the attained knowledge to people of same interest. Similarly, MyVista allows practical shift from a teacher-lecture to learner-centred education, thereby promoting cognitive development, analytical skills, innovation, student achievements, among other proficiencies achieved through the integration of curriculum and instruction. The other opportunity enhanced by MyVista is the ability to share research materials, proving that many learners see it as a valuable learning resource particularly for conducting studies. In today's society, it is a requirement within many industries to be a technological savvy, hence, MyVista promotes skills important for one to be easily discoverable across all industrial and social networking sites.

Apart from emailing services, MyVista enables the sharing of knowledge through messaging amongst learners within a programme or across programmes. To show the importance of digitalized education, one of the participant said:

*Nyika ilokucinca sure, sunu obuno twabukonzya kufunda katukkede kunganda. Cabota kwinda mazuba ngitwakali kuddubeka kupulintisya akwinkisya malembe ku*campus *kuti akakumakwe";*

Which in English means; "The world is really evolving and today we can manage to learn while in our homes. It is now better than those days when we faced challenges to print our assignments and take them to campus for marking."

Although the technologies are sometimes criticised for some negative social implications, the acquired knowledge can assist leaners to effectively network while professionally developing through personal branding, marketing, and applying for jobs directly to companies and potential employers. Furthermore, the ability to navigate MyVista makes it easier to conduct video conferences or face-to-face interviews with potential employers and other people around the world. In particular, MyVista makes it easier to forge relationships with like-minded learners and form communities of learning and shared interests. In as much as ICTs impact on organisations and education, it is vital to invest in them to assist in physical investment and innovativeness. Despite the identified challenges, it is important to consider MyVista not only as a tool of learning but inevitable technology to provide human capital with the desired needs to resuscitate the economies of nations. Thus, despite the challenges, the study established that the ability to navigate within the MyVista and other ICT network systems designed effective opportunities by creating a conducive learning environment without face to face interaction between learners and tutors.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that MyVista is very important to education in general and Open and Distance learners in particular as it evolved learning and changed their perceptions towards e-learning. The study, thus, concluded that MyVista is a significant intranet to Open and Distance learners as it enhanced positive evolution through altering perceptions towards the platform and participation higher education in general. The study further concluded that the MyVista platform is an essential tool that can provide industry with both academic and technological skilled personnel from ODL institutions including the Zimbabwe Open University. Apart from the identified limitations, the study avers that the evolution of MyVista capacitated the OD learners at the ZOU and transformed ODL to modern electronically inspired education which is dubbed Open and Distance electronic Learning (ODeL).

Accordingly, the researchers recommend that;

- All ZOU staff members and learners should hold constant MyVista training workshops in order to assist students to effectively navigate through the MyVista platform
- The ZOU should introduce and capitalise on the short computer courses in all Regional campuses in order to instruct learners on how to use computers and the Internet
- There is need to introduce audio modules, video conferencing and audio visual learning models that captivate the learning modes and reduce the module learning mode
- There is need for the ZOU to expand its computer infrastructure in all Regional campuses while at the same time initiating robust intervention to revamp the District learning centres in order to reduce distance travelled to access the computers, internet and Wi-Fi services while at the same time taking advantage to create conducive ODeL learning environments
- The Regional campuses should create research hubs in line with the institution and Ministry's vision in order to encourage innovation and

production of scientific quality products that promote socio-economic development

- The Ministry should ensure that tertiary institutions are supported in their ICT initiatives such as MyVista to enable them to adhere to ministerial policies and ensure that the policy demands are implemented
- Future researchers are encouraged to do further research in the same area of study or any related field in order to close the gaps left by this study particularly in terms of advancing knowledge in the field of new ICTs in ODL in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

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