



Mitigating the Effects of Dwindling Resource Base in Open and Distance Learning through Community Service Programmes

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ABSTRACT

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This study is a survey carried out to establish how community service programmes can mitigate the effects of the revenue base at the Zimbabwe Open University. Questionnaires and group discussions were used to solicit data from 39 faculty staff and 100 students chosen through a combination of the convenience and stratified simple random sampling technique. Data were presented and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The study found out that the majority of the students and faculty were willing to take part in organised resource mobilization activities for the Zimbabwe Open University. There were a lot of activities that could be undertaken by faculty and students together in an effort to boost the resources in the university. Faculties had different activities that they could undertake in different organisations and come up with resources for the institution. Some potent strategies that could be adopted include Internet resource mobilization, merchandising, resource mobilization letters and leaflets and sport. Resource mobilization needed to be planned and as much as possible groups should brainstorm and map the way forward together because resource mobilization is everyone's business. While there was light at the end of the tunnel, time, funds for startup, customer perception and the geographical dispersion of the students were possible inhibitors to the successes of the programme. On the basis of the findings, the present study recommended that the university should harnesses the student body for resource mobilization since they were willing takers to the activities that raise funds and other resources for the institution. There should be well planned activities involving the students and lecturers as well as management since resource mobilisation is no longer "their business" but "ours". All the activities brought forward by the respondents should be tried for resource mobilization. Internet resource mobilization should be implemented due its propensity to reach a wide clientele.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations, the world over are reeling from the challenges of underfunding as governments shift focus to other social services and needy areas. Universities have not been spared and hence they have to look for alternative funding to augment what the state offers. Kariuki (2000) established that African universities are financed from the government budget. As such one of the problems of funding is that the university competes with other demanding needs in the economy. However, distance education institutions are strategically positioned owing to the diverse nature of the student body as well as the geographical dispersion of these students. These characteristics can be utilised for resource mobilisation. Since the distance education student is literally everywhere, one way to mobilize resources for the ODL institution is to involve the communities in which the student is resident. This present study therefore, sought to establish how the Zimbabwe Open University could harness community interventions through community service work to mobilize resources which have become scarce in the institutions of higher learning.

Background to the study

Kendall (2005) argues that resource mobilization is a sociological theory in the study of organisations which emerged in the 1970s. It stresses the ability of organizations to acquire resources and mobilize people towards accomplishing goals. ODL institutions, therefore, have the right to mobilize resources in any legal way possible. In the light of this, the Zimbabwe Open University should seek means of overcoming the challenge of scarce resources through a number of strategies which include community service programmes.

ZOU is the only state Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Zimbabwe, established on 1st March 1999 through an Act of Parliament (Chapter 25:20). Initially, the university operated as the Centre for Distance Education at the University of Zimbabwe before its transformation to the University College of Distance Education. After this transformation, ZOU was granted its own charter to operate as a fully fledged university. ZOU is the largest university in the country and second largest in Southern Africa compared to the University of South Africa. Currently, in 2012, ZOU has four faculties; the Faculty of Arts and Education, the Faculty of Science and Technology, the Faculty of Commerce and Law and the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, offering over 60 diploma and degree programmes. Students are drawn from the country's ten geo-political provinces as well as the Virtual Region encompassing students outside the country, wherever they may be in the world. With this diverse background and sound upbringing, there is undoubtedly a firm base for resource mobilisation at ZOU. With international acclamation and recognition in the region as one of the powerhouses of distance education,

there is all the reason to believe that with a clear cut resource mobilisation policy and strategy, the diverse clientele is bound to chip in with whatever little they have so as to have vibrancy in the university's activities. The few and inadequate resources in the institutions of higher learning have therefore, prompted research into the effectiveness of resource mobilization through community service, hence this study attempts to come up with activities and strategies that could be used to garner support through community service programmes by various faculties of ZOU.

Statement of the problem

In the wake of diminishing resources amidst the economic problems facing the country and against a background of stiff competition from conventional institutions, there is need to be innovative and come up with new approaches to resources mobilization. This study aims at answering the question: What activities can be undertaken in communities as in an attempt to mobilize resources for the Zimbabwe Open University?

Research questions

The present study undertook to answer the following research questions which stood as sub-problems to the main research question.

1. What community service programme activities can be undertaken by the institution as part of resources mobilization?
2. Who should be the participants in the community services programmes?
3. How should the activities be organised for optimum benefit?
4. What are the likely challenges of engaging in community service programmes for resource mobilization by the Zimbabwe Open University?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Defining Resource Mobilisation

Uganda Network of AIDS Service Organizations (UNASO) defines resource mobilisation as giving people the opportunity to give. It is therefore, a process whereby resources are transferred from those who are able to give to those who have the need to receive. According to Olson (1965), the term resource mobilisation describes the situation in which multiple individuals would all benefit from a certain action which, however, has an associated cost making it implausible that any one individual can or will undertake and solve it alone. The rational choice is then to undertake this as a collective action the cost of which is shared among all the stakeholders.

A brief overview of the Resource Mobilization Theory

A number of theories on the issues surrounding resource mobilisation do exist. This study is concerned with the Resource Mobilization Theory as explained by Kendall (2005). Kendall (2005) argues that according to resource mobilization theory, a core professional group in a social movement organisation works towards bringing money, supporters, attention of the media, alliances with those in power and refining the organizational structure. Social movements need the above resources to be effective because dissent and grievances alone will not generate social change. This theory assumes that individuals are rational. Individuals thus weigh the costs and benefits of movement participation and act only if benefits outweigh costs. When movement goals take the form of public goods, the free rider dilemma has to be taken into consideration (Kendall, 2005, Buechler 1999).

Social movements are goal-oriented, but organization is more important than resources. Organization means the interactions and relations between social movement organizations and other organizations such as businesses and governments. Efficiency of the organization infrastructure is a key resource in itself (Buechler 1999).

According to Kendall (2005), resource mobilization theory can be divided into two camps; on one hand, there is the classic entrepreneurial or the economic version while on the other there is the political version of resource mobilization.

According to Kendall (2005), the entrepreneurial model explains collective action as a result of economics factors and organisation theory. It argues that grievances are not sufficient to explain creation of social movements. Instead, access to and control over resources is the crucial factor. The laws of supply and demand explain the flow of resources to and from the movements and that individual actions (or lack thereof) is accounted for by rational choice theory.

On the other hand, Kendall (2005) points out that the political model focuses on the political struggle instead of economic factors. Groups clash for resources and the best takes all. There is use and abuse of power by those who hold it and thus distribute resources, if they do, as they wish (Buechler 1999). Therefore, which model to follow for ZOU? It was obvious for the researchers to want to adopt the entrepreneurial model, hence community service programmes.

The concept of Community service programmes

Higher Education Act of 1965 define the term as services which are identified by an institution of higher education, through formal or informal consultation with local nonprofit, governmental, and community-based organizations, as designed to improve the quality of life for community residents, particularly low-income individuals, or to solve particular problems related to their needs (Jacoby, 2006).

Community service programmes are therefore, services volunteered by individuals or an organisation to benefit a community or its institutions. Community service is donated service or activity that is performed by someone or a group of people for the benefit of the public or its institutions.

However, in some cases community service can be compulsory, unpaid work over specified number of hours of activities. Such can include conservation work, cleaning up graffiti or working with a charity. Volunteers may provide community service, however, not everyone who provides community service is seen as a volunteer, because some people who provide community service are not doing it of their own free will; they are compelled to do so. For example, their government as a part of citizenship requirements, in lieu of military service, the courts, in lieu of, or in addition to, other criminal justice sanctions; their school, to meet the requirements of a class, such as in the case of service learning or to meet the requirements of graduation, or, in the case of parents, required to provide a certain number of hours of service in order for their child to be enrolled in a school or sports team.

Some employers involve their staff in some kind of community service programming as part of the corporate social responsibility while other institutions take put in order to raise funds for their own activities. This may be completely voluntary or a condition of employment, or anything in between. Community service is a term used to describe the act of volunteering one's self in order to provide services and help benefit the community. Community service can be performed through cleaning roadways, helping the homeless, or even organizing charitable donations. These are therefore, some of the activities that will be put to test to establish how acceptable they are and to what extent they can be adopted for resource mobilization at ZOU.

Previous studies

Previous studies in this area are very scanty suffice to say that the only literature available was obtained from UNASO (2005) which argues that leadership in fundraising starts with the leadership. If the leadership does not take an active interest in the planning and implementation of fundraising activities, it has lost control of the organization and its resources.

UNASCO also states that effective long-term fundraising has to be planned. Every non-profit organisation that is serious about its funding future has to have an organization plan and a fundraising strategy. You cannot raise money or non-financial support if you are not confident and enthusiastic about the organisation and its future.

Furthermore, resource development and fundraising is an emerging profession (Jacoby, 2006). No longer can you afford to be casual about this activity. Those organisations that apply a planned, businesslike approach to the task will succeed, and they will develop

the capacity and skills of staff and volunteers to get the job done effectively and efficiently.

Resource mobilization is also as important to the structure of any institution as its service programme or its administration and finance and this implies that it is no longer someone else's responsibility more so the overburdened management. This therefore means that everyone in the organization should take part in the resource mobilization activities (Jacoby, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The current study was a qualitative study that employed the case study design. This qualitative approach assisted the researchers to study the phenomenon in its natural setting. This enabled the researchers to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and interpret it and derive meaning in a natural setting. A mixed methodology approach to gathering data was adopted and made it possible to triangulate data and collect the data from a variety of stakeholders so as to produce findings which are almost as possible to views of the participants on the resource mobilisation activities. The study employed the focus group approach in which the participants went into brain storming to come up with their views on the need to mobilize resources. They brain stormed on the activities as faculties and prepared a blue print of the possible

activities, their merits and demerits, time frame and the drivers as well as the services and goods they were to sell.

Apart from the focus group discussions which aimed at brainstorming, a questionnaire was also used to solicit other views whose scope was not defined in the group discussions.

Population and sample

The population for the current study was made up of the key actors in open and distance learning at the Zimbabwe Open University's Mashonaland East Region. These key players included the current 450 students, 14 full time lecturers and 88 part time lecturers from all the four faculties of the Zimbabwe Open University. Out of the total population, 100 students were selected through a combination of convenience and stratified random sampling techniques. Depending on availability, students were put into 4 strata according to faculties. From each faculty a convenience sample was selected. All the 14 full time lecturers made it into the sample. Out of the 88 part time lecturers, a sample of 25 lecturers was selected through the same procedures as that which was adopted to select the student sample that is by faculty and availability. Therefore, the sample for the study consisted of 139 respondents as depicted in Figure 1 below.

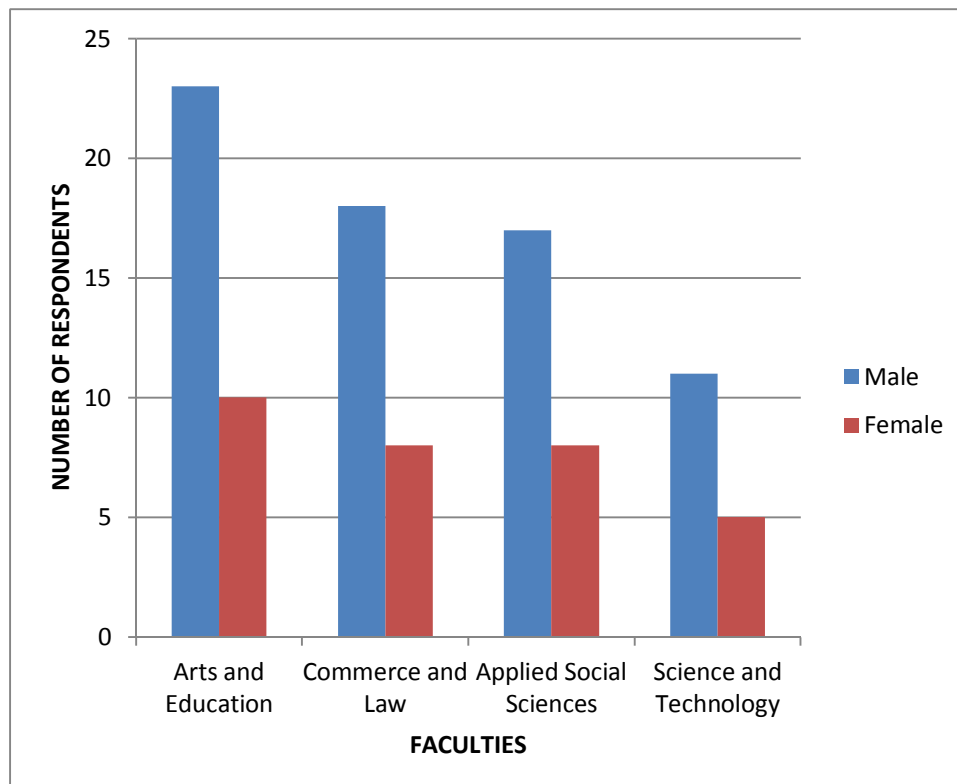


Figure1: Representation of students by sex and faculty

Figure 1 shows that the Faculty of Arts and Education had the highest number of student respondents. These were 33(33%) and made up of 23 male and 10 female lecturers. The Faculty of Commerce and Law had 18 male and 8 female students giving a total of 26(26%) respondents. The Faculty of Applied Social Sciences had 25(25%)

represented by 17 male and 8 female students. The Faculty of Science and Technology accounted for 16 (16%) represented by 11 male and 5 female students. Male students therefore, were in the majority as they were 69(69%) while only 31(31%) were female.

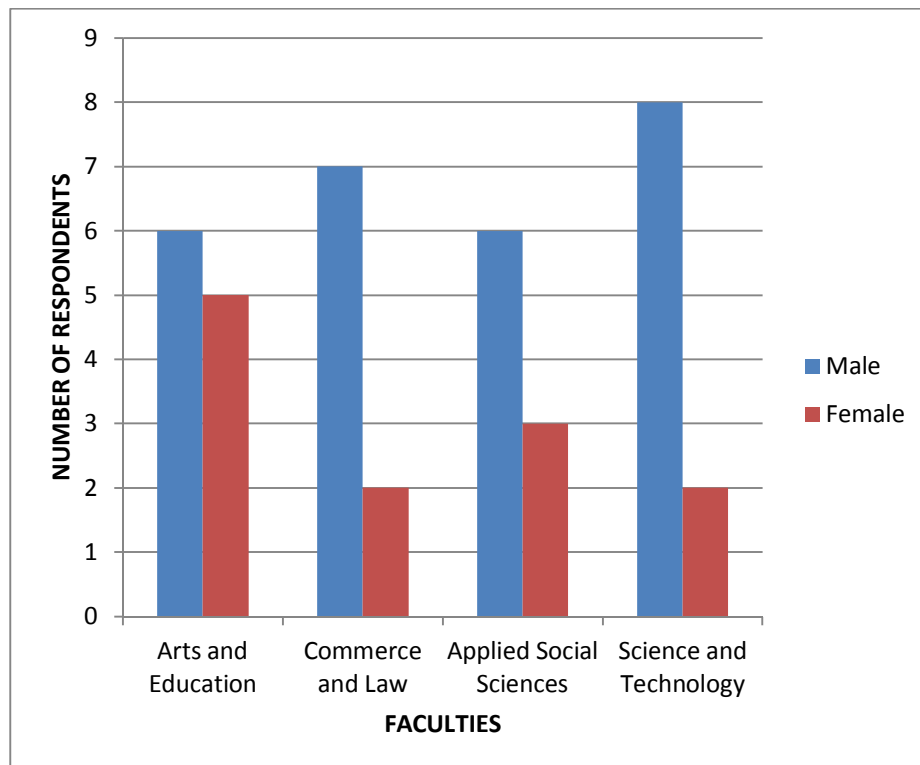


Figure 2: Representation of lecturers by sex and faculty

Figure 2 also shows the dominance of the Faculty of Arts and Education which had the highest number of respondents. These were 11(28%) and made up of 6 male and 5 female lecturers. The Faculty of Commerce and Law had 7 male and 2 female lecturers giving a total of 9(23%) the same as the Faculty of Applied Social

Sciences though it had 6 male and 3 female lecturers. The Faculty of Science and Technology accounted for 10(26%) represented by 8 male and 2 female lecturers. Male lecturers therefore, were in the majority as they were 27(69%) while only 12(31%) were female.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Results of the brain storming exercise indicating the community service programmes by faculty

Faculty	Activity
Arts and Education	• Tutoring children with learning disabilities. • Offering examination guidance and tips • Supplementary teaching in the mainstream system
Applied Social Sciences	• Cleaning nursing home gardens • Helping out at a local library. • Helping the elderly in nursing homes. • Cleaning a park. • Collecting items for charity such as clothes, food, or furniture. • Offering counselling services
Science and Technology	• Cleaning nursing home gardens • Helping the elderly in nursing homes. • Cleaning parks. • Cleaning roadside verges. • Engaging in environmental awareness campaigns • Sponsored walks for the benefit of various disadvantaged organisations • Reclamation of wasted land through, for example, donga closures
Commerce and Law	• Providing small scale traders, vendors and flea market stall owners with basic accounting procedures and entrepreneurship skills • Marketing and sale of modules and readers produced by faculty

In Table 1, it can be seen that all the faculties had at least more than one activity that they could undertake in the process of resource mobilization. More activities though were in the Social Sciences and Science and Technology faculties.

In the same groups which included both faculty and students, the respondents were asked to identify a product or service that you feel as ZOU can be marketed as a form of resource mobilization for the institution. Table 2 below shows the results.

Table 2: Products and services that can be marketed by ZOU for resource mobilization (N=139)

Product/Service	Freq	%
Regalia (T-shirts, caps, souvenirs)	139	100
Modules and readers	110	79
Examination tips for O and A level students	123	88
Commentaries for O and A level literature set-books	78	56
Question and answer booklets for primary and secondary school students	123	88
Research services to the private and public sector enterprises	134	96
Programme evaluation for NGOs	66	47
Other consultancy works	56	40

The table shows the products and services that all the respondents from each of the four faculties targeted at producing and selling to the potential customer. Most popular among the respondents was the need to sell the

university regalia. This accounted for all the 139(100%) and carrying out other consultancy works was the least popular with only 56(40%) respondents subscribing to the idea.

Table 3: Respondents` views on who the potential clients for the product or service are

Faculty	Potential clients
Arts and Education	Schools and play centres, the general public, NGOs
Commerce and Law	Banks, industries, informal traders, the general public
Applied Social Sciences	Schools, Nursing homes, NGOs, the general public
Science and Technology	Farmers, NGOs, the general public

Table 3 shows that depending on the faculty, the services and the products produced in the faculty determined the potential clients. The Faculty of Arts and Education targeted mostly schools, play centres, the general public and NGOs. The Commerce and Law faculty targeted banks, industries, informal traders and the general public whilst the Applied Social Sciences Schools focused on nursing homes, NGOs and also the general public. Science and Technology set to target farmers, NGOs and the general public, as well.

The respondents were also required to identify any distinct groups that had a significant impact on the existence of the institution to which they could go for possible assistance. Prevalent among the views were the following groups:

- The government
- Private enterprise sector

- Independent sector

The respondents were required to demonstrate how these could contribute to the resource mobilisation of the institution. Among the most popular responses were:

- Partnering NGOs in the provision of research and services to Community based organisations and home based care, which was suggested by 133 (96%) respondents.
- Assisting private sector business units in research work, which was brought forward by 128 (92%) respondents.

Respondents` views were sought on what they thought were critical factors towards successful resource mobilization. The views are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Respondents` views on critical factors that determine successful resource mobilisation (N=139)

Critical factor	Freq	%
Proper planning	122	88
Broadening of client base	109	78
Building good relationships with people	132	95
Giving people services and goods that they require: people will support the work that people do to help other people.	125	89
Top management commitment and active participation	135	97
Effective communication, mostly face to face as opposed to telephone and written form	122	88
Resource mobilisation is effectively handled by volunteers	132	95
A well argued case for support	115	83
Creating a committee for the exercise led by a resource/fund raiser	136	98

Table 4 shows that proper planning was a critical factor for determining the success of resource mobilization. This was according to 122 (88%) respondents. According to 109 (78%) respondents broadening of client base was also critical. Building good relationships with people was advocated for by 132 (95%) respondents whereas 125 (89%) respondents indicated that giving people services and goods that they require would make the people support the work that people do to help other people. According to 135 (97%) respondents, top management commitment and active participation were critical while 122 (88%) respondents felt that effective communication, mostly face to face as opposed to telephone and written

form was very significant. According to 132 (95%) respondents, resource mobilization is effectively handled by volunteers meaning to say that if students and lecturers were to be forced into resource mobilization, the process would not succeed. There was also need for a well argued case in support of the resource mobilization as the potential interveners would need to be convinced on why their support was critical. This was according to 115 (83%) respondents. Creating a committee for the exercise led by a resource/fund raiser was also an important factor according to 136 (98%) respondents.

The other segment of the brain storming exercise wanted the informants to come up with a resource

mobilisation strategy that would see them go out in the community and undertake activities that would bring resources to the institution. The information from the group discussion was analysed and the following are the major issues to be adopted in a typical resource mobilisation strategy.

Step 1: Have a plan in which you decide on the following:

- how much money/resources you need;
- what the money/resources will be used for;
- who the target for money/resources donation is;
- what methods you use on each donor;
- by what time you would need the resources;
- how much it will cost to raise the support from sponsor or donor; and
- who has the responsibility for raising the money/resources with each method.

Step 2: Field work in which the groups effectuate the plan in step 1

Step 3: Evaluation

- You need to measure the successes and failures of the undertaking.
- Measure the results of income and expenditure.
- Justify continuation or termination of the programme.

The strategy suggested can have its merits and demerits and it is outside the scope of this paper to analyse and discuss the strategy.

Other interesting strategies coming from the discussion groups included the following:

- internet resource mobilization;
- merchandising;
- resource mobilisation letters and leaflets; and
- sport as a form of resource mobilization.

Respondents were further asked what they thought were the reasons that could compel prospective donors to fund or respond positively to the call for resource mobilization. Prevalent among the reasons or factors that may compel prospective funders were 6 factors and these are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Respondents' views on reasons compelling prospective funders to sponsor the activities (N=139)

Compelling factor	Freq	%
Corporate image building	123	88
For publicity	130	94
Tax evasion	15	11
Sympathy or empathy	130	94
For recognition	115	83
Relationship and partnership building	135	97

Results in the table show that corporate image building accounted for 123 (88%) while the need for publicity accounted for 130 (94%). Tax evasion was the least popular factor compelling prospective funders to come on board and fund the institution. One hundred and thirty (94%) felt that funders were obliged to fund activities due

to sympathy or empathy towards the institution and 115 (83%) felt that these potential sponsors would come on board out of the need for recognition. Relationship and partnership building was brought forward by 135 (97%) respondents.

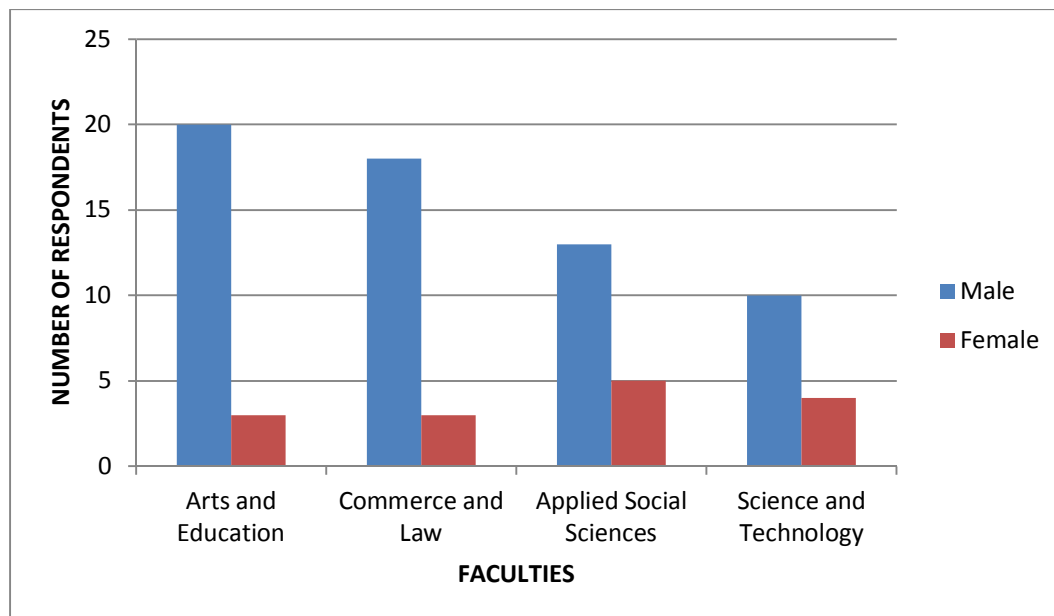


Figure 3: Responses on students' views on their willingness to undertake resource mobilization activities

According to Figure 4, more male students were willing to take up the challenge and mobilize resources for the university. From the Faculty of Arts and Education, 20 (20%) male student and only 3 (3%) female students expressed their desire to be part and parcel of the activities. In the Faculty of Commerce and Law, 18 (18%) male and 3 (3%) female students desired to take part whereas in the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, 13

(13%) male and 5 (5%) female students expressed their willingness. Ten (10%) males and 4 (4%) female students from Faculty of Science and Technology wanted to participate. There was therefore an overwhelming majority of 76 (76%) students out of the 100 (100%) student respondents who took part in the study. This opportunity was therefore, not to be missed by the university authorities.

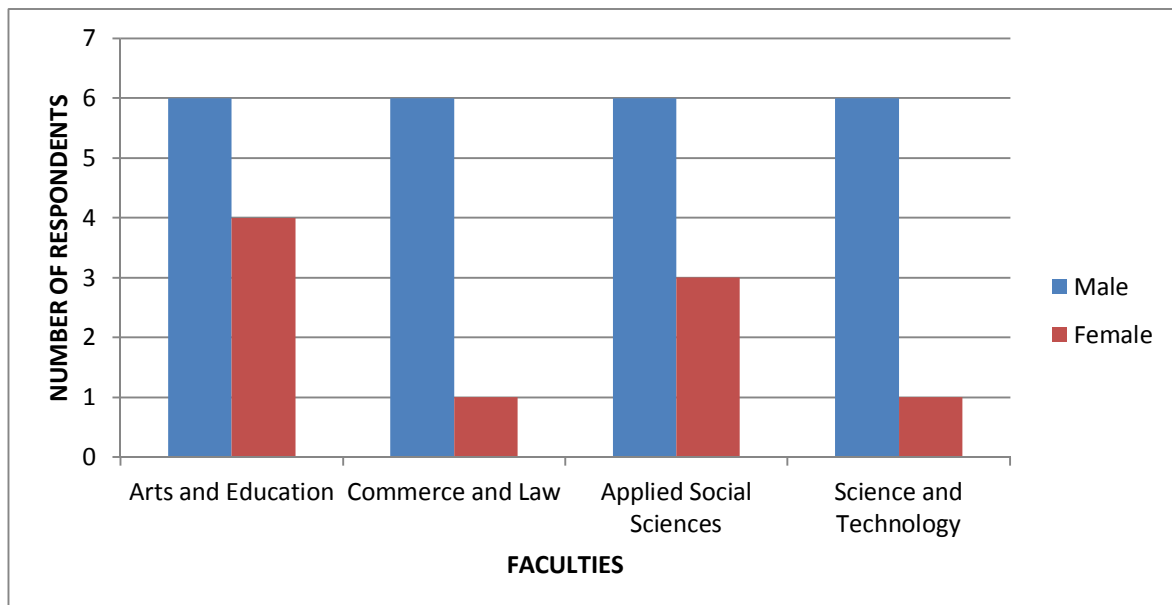


Figure 4: Responses on faculty's views on their willingness to undertake resource mobilisation activities

Figure 4 shows that generally more male than female lecturers were willing to participate in the resource mobilization activities. In the Faculty of Arts and Education for example, 6 male against 5 female were

available for the activities. The situation was worse in the Commerce and Law and Science and Technology where only 2 female lecturers from each faculty volunteered service. This is much against the Social theory of

resource mobilization as propounded by Kendall (2005) who argues for a united community.

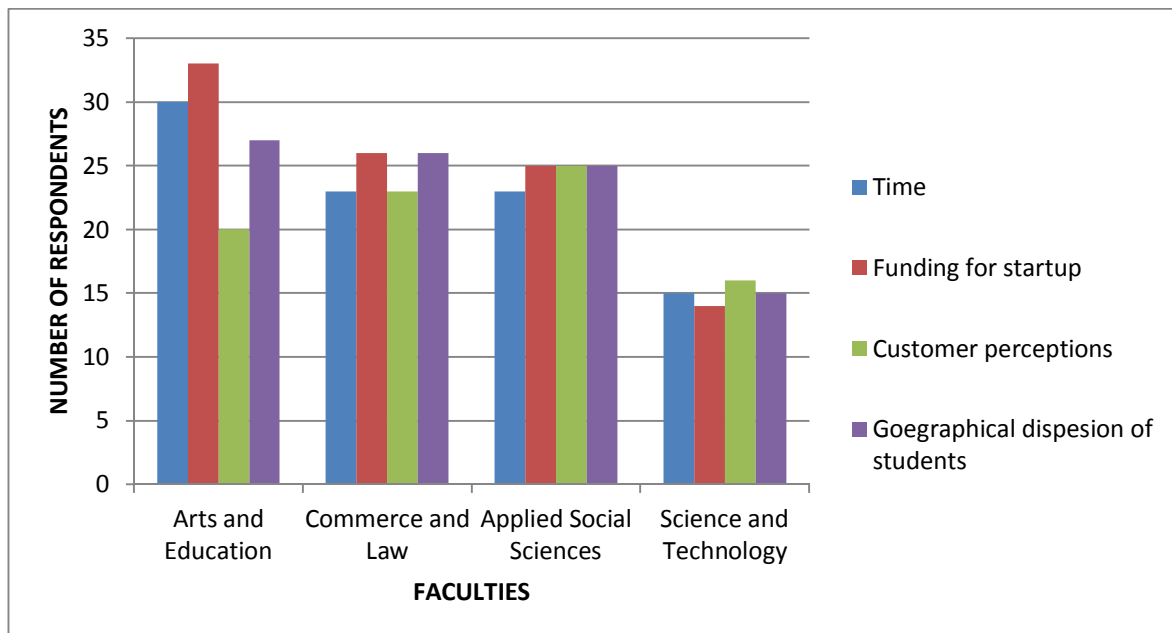


Figure 5: Respondents' views on the challenges likely to be encountered in the resource mobilisation activities

Figure 5 above shows some of the impediments to successful resource mobilisation. All the four challenges, that is, time, funding for startup, customer perceptions and the geographical dispersion of the students were very much prevalent among the respondents from the four faculties of ZOU.

and map the way forward together because resource mobilization is everyone's business.

- While there was light at the end of the tunnel, time, funds for startup, customer perception and the geographical dispersion of the students were possible inhibitors to the successes of the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above findings, it can be concluded that:

- The majority of the students and faculty were willing to take part in organised resource mobilization activities for the Zimbabwe Open University.
- There were a lot of activities that could be undertaken by faculty and students together in an effort to boost the resources in the university.
- More men than women were willing to take part in the resource mobilization activities.
- Faculties had different activities that they could undertake in different organizations and come up with resources for the institution.
- Some potent strategies that could be adopted include Internet resource mobilization, merchandising, resource mobilisation letters and leaflets and sport.
- Resource mobilisation needed to be planned and as much as possible groups should brainstorm

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of these conclusions, the present study recommended that:

- The university harnesses the student body for resource mobilization since they are willing takers to the activities that raise funds and other resources for the institution.
- There should be well planned activities involving the students and lecturers as well as management since resource mobilization is no longer "their business" but "ours".
- All the activities brought forward by the respondents should be tried for resource mobilization.
- Internet resource mobilization should be implemented due its propensity to reach a wide clientele.

- More women student and lecturers should be brought on board and have their attitude towards community resource mobilization changed.

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