

Challenges and Opportunities for Women in Distance Education Management Positions: Experiences from the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU)

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ABSTRACT Concerns about women under-representation in positions of decision making, strategic planning, organizational development and their performance within distance education institutions has been the major focus of debates in higher education. The current study sought to investigate the challenges faced by women in distance education management positions, which were formerly dominated by males. The qualitative study examined and analysed the social, economic, traditional, political and religious factors influencing the degree of women advancement in Open Distance Learning (ODL) senior management positions. Data was collected through face to face interviews with one hundred and twenty staff members employed at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) using the purposive sampling technique. The major finding from the study was that women in senior management positions were affected by their multiple responsibilities which include the gendered nature of society, family influences and culture. The study recommends the holding of open and honest discussion forums on gender and equal rights issues involving both men and women and the development of family friendly culture in universities.