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An Analysis of Challenges Faced by Part-time Postgraduate Block Release Students at Institutions of Higher Learning

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to analyse the challenges faced by postgraduate block release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. The challenges were measured against the following indicators (i) nature of challenges faced by part-time postgraduate block release students (ii) factors that influence these challenges and (iii) impact of these challenges on part-time postgraduate block-release students. The research employed a mixed research approach in order to triangulate the results. The study used a case study research design to solicit information. The target population were part-time postgraduate block release students who were currently pursuing the following programmes; Masters in Strategic Management, Masters in Supply and Chain Management, Masters in Applied Entrepreneurship and Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education. A sample of 42 part-time block release students and 4 key informants were used to collect data. The sampling techniques employed were convenience and purposive samplings respectively. Findings revealed that part-time postgraduate block release students are facing challenges that include family, work, finance and social. Factors contributing to these challenges were identified as inflexibility of block-release programmes, lack of information, advice and guidance. Because of these challenges, students were failing to submit their assignments in time, having poor quality results and some students dropping out of the programmes. The study recommends the institution to ensure a flexible payment plan to assist students who are failing to manage their finances and school. The university must also introduce flexible programmes like weekend and holiday classes to accommodate students who cannot make it to the block release programmes. The institution must also introduce satellite campuses in bigger towns like Harare, Masvingo, Bulawayo and Mutare to accommodate students who are failing to manage school and family. Finally, the university must ensure postgraduate block-release students are well informed about their programmes in advance before enrolling to avoid inconveniencing them during their studies.

Keywords: Challenges, part-time postgraduate students, block-release, institution of higher learning

1. Introduction

This study evolved against the background of challenges faced by part-time postgraduate block-release students at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe which offers block-release programmes. The target population were students currently studying for the following postgraduate degree programmes; Masters in Strategic Management, Masters in Supply and Chain Management, Masters in Applied Entrepreneurship, Masters in Tourism and Hospitality and the Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education.

The part-time post graduate block-release programme has become familiar with local business people, politicians, senior government officials and managers of various organisations in Zimbabwe. It would appear they opt for block-release programmes because unlike the conventional class, block-release programmes are offered on part-time basis. These part-time learners have other responsibilities to take care of unlike their conventional counterparts. Such responsibilities include family and work. As such, it would appear block-release programmes are more preferable to them than conventional programmes.

In a study on challenges faced by part-time learners in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland Butcher (2015) identifies the following challenges; flexibility, motivation, discipline differences, information and guidance. Butcher's findings could be applicable to part-time learners at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Butcher (2015) also observes part-time identity, culture and community as some challenges that affect part-time students during their studies. It would seem some universities are failing to take into account part-time learner's circumstances.

In Zimbabwe, not much has been researched on challenges facing part-time mature learners indicating a knowledge gap in this area of study. However, Majoni (2014) generally identifies the following challenges faced by university education in Zimbabwe; dropouts, high tuition and accommodation fees, under funding, staff shortages and economic

decline, foreign currency shortages, hyperinflation and large public debt. From these challenges, school drop outs, high tuition and accommodation fees could be the ones directly linked to part-time postgraduate learners in Zimbabwe. This study paper analyses challenges faced by part-time postgraduate block-release students at institutions of higher learning with special reference to Chinhoyi University of Technology.

2. Statement of the Problem

There are challenges faced by postgraduate block-release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. This is evidenced by students who are failing to pay their fees in time, late submission of assignments and students absenting themselves from lessons. The most affected students are part-time postgraduate block-release students. To solve the problem, some researchers like Visser (2011) have proposed student support, both extrinsically and intrinsically as a necessary tool to overcome these challenges. For instance, student support services are offered at Chinhoyi University of Technology. However, in spite of these student support services, challenges of part-time postgraduate learners continue to mount. The study now seeks to carry out an analysis of the challenges faced by part-time post graduate block release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

3. Research Questions

- What is the nature of challenges faced by part-time postgraduate block-release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology?
- What factors influence the challenges?
- How do these challenges affect part-time postgraduate students?

4. Theoretical Framework

Igan (2010) argues that motivation energizes people to overcome setbacks. If a part-time postgraduate block-release student faces some challenges, such as financial, time, social and so on he/she may need some psychological support. Studies have shown that this theory is best suitable in these circumstances. This belief comes against the background of motivation, which ensures the student to remain focused. As such, motivation helps postgraduate students to stay focused and psychologically empowered to overcome obstacles and difficulties during their studies. It is against this background that this study employed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs motivational theory as its framework. The theory is shown in Figure 1 below.

At the bottom, the *physiological* needs of post-graduate students include sex, food, sleep and so forth. A part-time postgraduate student may fail to be satisfied sexually because he/she will be studying. The student may also not have enough sleep along the study journey. For *safety* a post graduate student must feel he/she is in a stable environment relatively free from threats, for instance accommodation which may be threat both at school and at home. Children or rather the family is always mingling within the home as the part-time postgraduate student studies. As such, the home may not be safe for studies. At school, for instance at CUT, accommodation is a challenge and one is forced to go and stay in locations. In that case the environment is not stable. *Socially*, there should be affectionate relations with others and status within a group, be it within the family or fellow postgraduate students.

Figure 1: Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Adapted from Saul McLeod, 2014)

If the partner is angered because 'you are wasting resources towards the post graduate programme' it means socially, the student is not stable. As for *esteem*, the post graduate student must have self-respect, self-esteem, and the esteem of others; desire for confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, recognition, and reputation. Finally, the

postgraduate student reaches the *self-actualization* stage, which is the stage for self-fulfillment, attainment of the postgraduate degree.

McLeod (2014) states Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has made a major contribution to teaching and classroom management in schools. Rather than reducing behaviour to a response in the environment, Maslow (1970a) adopts a holistic approach to education and training (McLeod, *ibid*). Maslow looks at the entire physical, emotional, social and intellectual learning and how these have impacted on learning. Maslow's applications of hierarchy theory in the classroom are relevant to post graduate challenges. Before a postgraduate student's cognitive needs can be met, he/she must fulfill his/her physiological needs, for example sex, food, sleep et cetera. A tired and hungry postgraduate student will find it difficult to focus on learning. As highlighted by McLeod (2014), students need to be emotionally and physically safe and accepted within the classroom to reach their potential. Maslow also believed that students should be valued and respected in the classroom. The teacher should create a conducive environment.

5. Literature Review

5.1. Nature of Challenges Faced by Part-Time Postgraduate Students

Philips & Pugh (2010) believe that part-time postgraduate students face a number of challenges in their career transitions. As they are learning, part-time students may be transferred and this has some serious consequences on their studies. Part-time postgraduates may also be laid off or fired from a job (Phillips & Pugh, 2010). The next thing is that the student will not be able to complete his/her studies. Wendler et al (2010) are of the view that the period taken to complete the degree programme, political and economic shifts, unclear career pathways, and family situations may affect postgraduate students.

In her study, Igan (2010) looks at difficulties and obstacles confronting Nigerian post-graduates students. She identifies the following areas; prolonged semesters or sessions due to strikes and student unrest, getting research materials, interaction between lecturers and students, the need to for understanding and knowledge to satisfy curiosity, explore, and discover and to find solutions. In another study on the analysis of problems faced by postgraduate students, Duze (2010) concludes that postgraduate students encounter deep-rooted problems which hinder their studies thereby delaying the timely completion of their programmes. He also identifies problems related to lack of equipment as the most critical stumbling block to post-graduate studies in universities. In a study on challenges faced by married students in Nigeria, Lasode and Awode (2014) observe that schooling for married females can indeed be very tedious and challenging. The study discovered that the challenge that is most common among married female students is managing multiple roles and that the major cause of it is role contagion. Lasode and Awode (2014) conclude that combining work commitment, family responsibilities and school obligations leads to stress among the married female students and this has the greatest effect on them.

Chao (2007) reports that adult learners face significantly different challenges in completing an education programme than students who enroll in college immediately after high school. Children who enroll immediately after high school depend on their parents financially, unlike part-time postgraduate students. Traditional students work part time or less while at school whereas the majority of part-time postgraduate students may be fully controlled. Chao (2007) gives a highlight of a 1998 study by the Mathematical Policy Research which found four consistent and powerful barriers to further education for working adults, lack of time to pursue education, family responsibilities, scheduling of course time and place; and cost of educational courses. These challenges pose a serious threat to both accesses to college credential programmes and to persistence and success, especially to students who work full time and attend college part time.

Visser (2011) identifies the following challenges faced by post-graduate students in her study; time, conflicting commitments, for instance home/job/studies/social, institutions that are insensitive to the realities of mature part-time students, lack of support in these challenges and financial challenges. It is true that there are conflicting commitments during the studies. Being an adult learner, a part-time postgraduate may also be responsible with family issues as highlighted earlier. Part-time students also face financial challenges in completing their studies.

It was the objective of this study to determine the nature of challenges faced by part-time postgraduate block-release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

5.2. Factors That Contribute to Challenges That Affect Part-Time Post Graduate Students

Butcher (2015) claims that flexibility remains a problematic concept in the context of part-time higher education. For example, Chinhoyi University of Technology offers block release programmes only, yet some students may be comfortable with weekend classes. Butcher (2015) believes that institutional systems and structures should be responsive enough to interact with flexible pedagogies to meet the personal flexibilities required by part-time students. Institutions must do more to take account of part-time learners' circumstances so that they do not feel like being inconvenienced or being shoe-horned into existing full-time structures.

Information, advice and guidance seem to be inadequate for part-time postgraduates (Butcher, 2015). Visser (2011) agrees with this perception when she states that part-time students feel higher education institutions are not supporting them properly. As they enrol, part-time students need enough information, advice and guidance pertaining to the intended programme of study. It would seem these support services are dysfunctional or if the support services are there, Visser (2011) claims that students do not know where to access support or the support systems. The researchers would want to agree with this contention because the Zimbabwean society is not yet serious with the psychological counselling philosophy. As such, it would seem institutions of higher learning are equally affected.

There is no doubt that inaccessibility of resource and guidance support provided by school, faculty or university contributes to low quality of post graduate student's studies (Abiddin, 2011). Institutions should ensure that the services and facilities provided are always appropriate. Abiddin (2011) believes that this enables students to work and study in a conducive and comfortable environment. What institutions of higher learning should know is that the benefit in having good physical and human resources is that it can be a factor in students choosing the institution to pursue their study. Studies have also shown that there are circumstances where students face personality clashes, barriers to communication, cultural and language difficulties or personal differences in working approaches. Institutions of higher learning should ensure that these have been handled effectively to facilitate the learning by these students. Good facilities for post graduate students also affect them. They are very important for an institution to become a center of academic excellence.

This research had to find out nature of challenges faced by part-time postgraduate block-release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

5.3. The Effects of the Challenges on Part-Time Postgraduate Students

Some people are not able to manage course requirements and maintain a personal life, resulting in them either dropping out or losing motivation to complete the degree (Eisenbach, 2013; Klenowski, Ehrich, Kapitzke & Trigger, 2011; Phillips & Pugh, 2010 Wendler et al., 2010). It is easy for advanced degree students to stall on research projects that do not capture their interest. Duze (2011) believes that part-time postgraduate students are affected in many ways in that they graduate long after the stipulated time, some dropout and their grades are affected. Duze (2011) observes that most postgraduate students in Nigeria tend to graduate long after the stipulated time period for their programmes. As highlighted earlier, postgraduate students do not have enough time to concentrate on their studies. Lasedu and Awetedu (2013) posit that adjusting to an academic setting can be difficult for all students, especially part-time female students. These students are employed elsewhere and they are parents. Consequently, it becomes a challenge to adjust to an academic setting.

Abiddin and Ismail (2011) are also worried with the attrition of postgraduate students. The rate of school dropout among postgraduate students becomes higher because of several challenges. In a similar study Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) observe that the attrition rate for completion of advanced degrees in the United States of America ranges from 40% to 70% based on the various specialties. Over the last 40 years 50% of the students who enrol in advanced degree programmes have not finished them (Bayley, Ellis, Abreu-Ellis & O'Reilly, 2012).

Access to further studies is in some cases facilitated by financial support from their employers, failure of which they can fail to enrol. Abrahams (2013) believes that the forever shifting of education and training policy environment generates levels of uncertainty, shifts institutional foci and re-allocates or limits resources that affect these students directly. Consequently post graduate students decrease or limit their own engagement with their studies by skipping class.

This study also looked at how the challenges affect part-time postgraduate students.

6. Methods

This case study research design employed a mixed research approach. Convenience and purposive sampling were employed to select a sample of 54 postgraduate students drawn from Masters in Strategic Management, Masters in Supply and Chain Management, Masters in Applied Entrepreneurship and the Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education. Only 42, (80.7%), of the 54 participated in the study. A pilot tested structured-questionnaire and semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to collect the required data. Data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively using SPSS and emerging themes permeating the study respectively.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. The Nature of Challenges Faced by Part-Time Postgraduate Block-Release Students

Participants were asked if there were facing any challenges or not and. A thorough analysis of these challenges faced by part-time block release students was made.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	8	19.0	19.0	19.0
	Agree	22	52.4	52.4	71.4
	Not Sure	1	2.4	2.4	73.8
	Disagree	6	14.3	14.3	88.1
	Strongly Disagree	5	11.9	11.9	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Responses as to Whether Part-Time Block Release Students are Facing Challenges or Not N=42

Table 1 above shows that the majority of the students (n=30; 71, 4%) agreed that they are facing challenges. Key informant interviewees also strongly agreed that postgraduate students were facing a number of challenges. What this implies is that postgraduate block-release students were facing challenges in their academic career. This is true considering the observations by Igan (2010) and Visser (2011) who posit that postgraduate students endure a lot of

challenges during the course of their studies. These challenges are balancing school and family, balancing work and school, balancing finance and school and balancing social life and school.

Participants explained that balancing family and school at the same time was a major challenge. They reported that since they were married, they find it difficult to serve both masters at the same time (school and family). Key informants also agreed with this finding. This shows that part-time postgraduate students are facing challenges in balancing family and school. This agrees with Visser (2011), Chao (2007) and Igan (2011) that indeed balancing family and school is a major challenge for many postgraduate students. On one side, the student need to ensure family needs are met, and on the other he/she should attend to studies. These conflicting interests are a big challenge to the part-time postgraduate block-release student, especially female students.

Findings from this study also revealed that the issue of balancing work and school is another challenge faced by postgraduate block-release students. The majority of them are in the middle level, some in the low level, non-managerial and upper level at their workplaces. Whichever way, they were employed and the study indicates that they are failing to balance work and school. A further analysis on the results proved that the most affected were workers in the middle level category. However, key informants were of the opinion that there were company policies that support workers in their endeavour to further education. Aligning work and school becomes easy if one follows proper procedures in applying for permission to study whilst at work. Be that as it may, study results showed that postgraduate block release students were failing to balance work and school. Eisenbach (2013), Holmberg (2013), Phillips & Pugh (2010) and Zumeta, Breneman, Callan & Finney (2012) agree that working in a full-time career while enrolled in an advanced degree programme is a problematic issue because it is difficult for adults to incorporate higher learning into their busy lives. As such, it can be concluded that postgraduate block release students are failing to balance work and school.

Findings from the study also revealed that participants were failing to balance their finance and school. Part-time postgraduate block-release students are mature students who have families to look after. Some participants reported that their employers were not helping to finance their postgraduate programmes. Hence they failed to register in time and some students had dropped out of the postgraduate block-release programmes. Others could not get proper accommodation because of limited finances. Visser (2011) agrees with this finding when she identifies the following as challenges faced by post-graduate students in her study; time, conflicting commitments, for instance home/job/studies/social, institutions that are insensitive to the realities of mature part-time students, lack of support in these challenges and financial challenges. Duze (2010) also posits that postgraduates face a lot of financial challenges that may be a barrier for them to complete their studies. This study thus concludes that postgraduate block-release students were facing financial challenges during their studies.

The study revealed that participants were failing to balance their social life and school. Naturally, any normal functioning human being needs some time to socialise with their counterparts. What it shows is that postgraduate block release students were failing to balance their social life and school. Igan (2010) argues that postgraduate students do not have enough time to rest. Visser (2011) also claims that time, conflicting commitments, for instance home/job/studies/social are some of the challenges affecting postgraduate students. This clearly indicates that postgraduate block-release students are having challenges in balancing their social life and school.

7.2. Factors Influencing Challenges Faced by Postgraduate Block-Release Students

Challenges identified in this study were family, work, finance and social. Participants were asked if there were any factors that were contributing to these challenges. Table 2 below presents responses on factors contributing to these challenges.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	7	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Agree	22	52.4	52.4	69.0
	Not Sure	1	2.4	2.4	71.4
	Disagree	6	14.3	14.3	85.7
	Strongly Disagree	6	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Responses as to Whether There Are Factors Contributing to These Challenges or Not
N=42

Table 2 above shows that participants (N=29; 69%) agreed that there were factors contributing to the challenges identified above. Key informants were all in agreement that there were a number of factors contributing to the challenges faced by postgraduate students in higher education. What it then shows is that indeed there were factors contributing to the challenges faced by postgraduate block-release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. Abiddin (2011), Butcher (2015) and Visser (2011) in the reviewed literature believe that there are a number of factors that contribute to challenges faced by postgraduate students. Findings revealed that factors that were contributing to the challenges noted above are inflexibility of block release programmes, lack of information, advice and guidance.

Participants complained that block-release programmes at Chinhoyi University of Technology were not flexible for the students. Some participants were of the view that the university should introduce weekend and holiday classes to cater for students who could not make it on block-release programmes. Some participants reported that they were failing to attend some classes because their bosses could not allow them to do so. As such, these weekend and holiday classes

which are not offered were a factor contributing to the challenges faced by postgraduate block release students at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

Asked to comment on the above finding, key informants noted that the university was still behind in coming up with flexible programmes. One interviewee cited an example of Africa University, Midlands State University and National University of Science and Technology that have established some satellites campuses in Harare and some major towns. According to him, programmes offered by a university become flexible. Those who could not make it on block-release programmes could join weekend classes or even evening classes. (Butcher 2015:06) agrees that flexibility remains a problematic concept in the context of part-time higher education when he opines that:

Institutional systems and structures should be responsive enough to interact with flexible pedagogies to meet the personal flexibilities required by part-time students. What it shows is that institutions must do more to take account of part-time learners' circumstances so that they don't feel like being inconvenienced or being shoe-horned into existing full-time structures.

Butcher's argument makes a lot of sense given the current block-release programmes offered by Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. Part-time block-release students feel like they are shoe-horned into this block-release programme. One key informant had this to say vis-a-vis Butcher (2015)'s argument:

Indeed students, especially those pursuing the Masters in Strategic Management programme are kind of being shoe-horned. This programme is quite popular in Zimbabwe and as such we have business people, politicians coming for it. The challenge now is, it is only offered at CUT and there are no weekend and holiday classes.

What it then shows is that block-release programmes at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe are not flexible to students. This is contributing to the challenges faced by postgraduate students, particularly those who are failing to balance work and school.

Participants reported that they were not getting enough information on postgraduate programmes. Some claimed they were not advised on the challenges discussed above before they began the block-release programme. For some, guidance and counselling at Chinhoyi University of Technology is not effective. Key informants were asked to comment on these findings. For one key informant, it was true that students were not properly informed on the consequences associated with their postgraduate programmes. Key informant two did not agree with this perception, as postgraduate programmes are advertised in the newspapers. He cited an example of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education which clearly stated that participants must be practising university lecturers. Some non-practicing lecturers joined the programme and consequently felt inconvenienced. Key informant four was of the opinion that the school's advice and guidance system is not helping postgraduate block-release students to address their challenges. Butcher (2015) is of the opinion that information, advice and guidance seem to be inadequate for part-time postgraduates. Visser (2011) also agrees with this perception when she states that part-time students feel higher education institutions are not supporting them properly. What it shows is that as postgraduate block release students enrol they need enough information, advice and guidance.

Abiddin (2011) also states that there is no doubt that inaccessibility of resource and guidance support provided by school, faculty or university contributes to low quality of post graduate student's studies. Institutions should therefore ensure that the services and facilities provided are always in an appropriate manner. As highlighted by Abiddin (2011), this enables students to work and study in a conducive and comfortable environment. What institutions of higher learning should know is that the benefit in having good resource is that it can be a factor in students choosing the institution to pursue their study.

Participants also claimed that there were circumstances where students faced personality clashes, barriers to communication, cultural and language difficulties or personal differences in working approaches. Visser (2011) and Abiddin (2011) posit that institutions of higher learning should ensure that these have been handled effectively to help these students. As highlighted by one key informant, good facilities for post graduate students also affect them. They are very important for an institution to become a center of academic excellence.

7.3. The Effects of the Challenges on the Postgraduate Block-Release Students

So far the study has identified the nature of the challenges faced by postgraduate students and the factors that contribute to these challenges. Respondents were asked whether they are being affected by these challenges or not.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	7	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Agree	22	52.4	52.4	69.0
	Not Sure	1	2.4	2.4	71.4
	Disagree	7	16.7	16.7	88.1
	Strongly Disagree	5	11.9	11.9	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Responses as to Whether Part-Time Block-Release Students Are Being Affected With These Challenges or Not N=42

Table 3 above shows that majority of students (N=29, 69%) agreed that they were being affected by the challenges identified in this study. Key informants also agreed that postgraduate students were affected by the same challenges. Eisenbach (2013), Klenowski, Ehrich, Kapitzke & Trigger (2011), Phillips & Pugh (2010) and Wendler et al.

(2010) have all observed that postgraduate students were affected by these challenges in one way or the other. The effects of these challenges were late submission of assignments, poor quality results and university dropouts.

Participants disclosed that they were failing to submit their assignments in time. Key informants also agreed that postgraduate block-release students were in the habit of failing to submit their assignments in time. Phillips & Pugh (2010) and Wendler et al. (2010) made similar observations. Hence part-time postgraduate block-release students had the challenge of failing to submit their assignments in time as compared to conventional students. Lasedu and Awetedu (2013) also believe that adjusting to an academic setting can be difficult for all students, especially part-time female students. These students are employed elsewhere and they are parents. Consequently, it becomes a challenge to adjust to an academic setting and this affects their academic career, for instance submission of assignments in time

Findings also revealed complaints of poor quality results. Some participants claimed that they were not happy with their results. Key informants also agreed that results from part-time block-release students were not that pleasing as compared to conventional students. Klenowski, Ehrich, Kapitzke & Trigger (2011) attribute this to the pressure experienced by postgraduate students. This includes failing to manage their time to do their school work, failing to balance school and family, failing to balance finance and school, failing to balance social life and school and failing to balance work and family. However, some participants attributed poor quality results to the internet that was not effective at the campus. Some were of the opinion that they did not have enough time to interact with the lecturers. Igan (2010) agrees with this finding when he says poor interaction between students and their lecturers can result in poor quality results. Duze (2011) also believes that part-time postgraduate students are affected in many ways. He observes that some graduate long after the stipulated time, others dropout and their grades are affected. Duze (2011) also notes that those most postgraduate students in Nigeria tend to graduate long after the stipulated time period for their programmes. As highlighted earlier, postgraduate students did not have enough time to concentrate on their studies.

Some participants claimed some of their fellow part-time postgraduate students had dropped out because of these challenges. Some students believed that these challenges had affected their motivation to attend lectures with others indicating that they had no library time. Several studies confirm that some postgraduate students lose motivation and drop out. For example, Eisenbach (2013), Klenowski, Ehrich, Kapitzke & Trigger (2011), Phillips & Pugh (2010) and Wendler et al. (2010) agree that some postgraduate are not able to manage course requirements and maintain a personal life, leading some to either drop out or lose motivation to complete the degree. Eisenbach (2013) adds, it is easy for advanced degree students to stall on research projects that do not capture their interest. Wendler et al. (2010) further identifies inadequate financial support as one reason for the high incompleteness rate in post graduate programmes. Abiddin and Ismail (2011) explain that these challenges affect the attrition of postgraduate students. What it shows is that the dropout rate among postgraduate students becomes higher because of these challenges. In a similar study Ampaw & Jaeger (2012) observe that the attrition rate for completion of advanced degrees in the United States of America ranges from 40% to 70% based on the various specialties. Over the last 40 years 50% of the students who enrol in advanced degree programmes have not finished them (Bayley, Ellis, Abreu-Ellis & O'Reilly, 2012).

8. Conclusions

Basing on these findings, the study concludes that;

- Part-time postgraduate block release students are facing challenges during their academic career and these challenges include family, work, finance and social.
- There are factors contributing to these challenges and these are inflexibility of block release programmes, lack of information, advice and guidance.
- Because of these challenges, students are failing to submit their assignments in time, they are having poor quality results and some students are dropping out.

9. Recommendations

Basing on these conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations;

- The university must ensure flexible payment plans to assist students who are failing to manage their finances and school.
- The university must introduce satellite campuses in bigger towns like Harare, Masvingo, Bulawayo and Mutare to accommodate students who are failing to manage school and family.
- The institution must consider recreational and sports activities that specifically focuses on part-time postgraduate block release students to enhance their social life.
- The institution must put in place a guidance and counselling system which specifically focuses on part-time block release students.
- The study finally recommends further studies on challenges faced by part-postgraduate students.

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