

**“Turning Challenges into Opportunities:  
Research and Education Success Stories  
During Covid-19”.**

**Dr. Chiyaba Njovu**  
**Dean – School of Open, Distance and eLearning (ODeL)**  
**ZCAS University**

# Background to the Presentation

- **ZCAS University was established in 2016 with the sole purpose of facilitating ZCAS to offer Academic Degrees using different modes of study.**
- **In 2019, the School of ODeL was established with the sole purpose of ensuring good support and academic experience for students on Distance Education Study mode.**
- **As such, ZCAS Management embarked on a serious investment programme in ICT Infrastructure and Teaching/Learning resources required for students on Distance Education study mode.**
- **Part of this investment went into staff capacity building trainings in online pedagogy and blended learning modes.**

# Background to the Presentation

## ZCAS ODeL Business Strategy in a Nutshell

- **ZCAS University currently has three Schools offering academic programmes:**
  - **Business**
  - **ICT**
  - **Social Sciences**
- **All programmes are offered on three study modes – FT, PT and DE**
- **School of ODeL – Setup in March 2019**
  - **The aim is to offer enhanced learner services to all Open, Distance and eLearning students.**
- **This was ZCAS/ZCAS University strategy before the outbreak of the Covid – 19 pandemic.**

# Background to the Presentation

- To operationalize the activities of the School of ODeL, key staff were identified manage the key activities that had to be undertaken in order to support students on Distance Education learning mode.
- **These activities were:**
  - 1. Ensuring students' access to learning materials**
  - 2. Lecturers preparedness for supporting students on Distance Education study mode**
  - 3. Quality and structure of learning materials to support Distance Education students**
  - 4. Overall coordination and management of activities to support Distance Education students**
  - 5. Visibility of the ZCAS ODeL programmes in all provinces to support Distance Education students' learning and assessments**

# **Role and Readiness of Educators in an evolving COVID-19 – ZCAS University Strategies, Practices, Skills and Competencies**

- **In early 2020, government announced measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus and institutions were ordered to shut down.**
- **ZCAS University plan for the School of ODeL was deemed appropriate to support continuity of learning.**
- **The infrastructure was available, staff were partly prepared and most learning materials were available.**
- **However, before the change could be effected, there were issues of awareness and technological training that had to be conducted.**
- **ZCAS University management dedicated a week to such activities to ensure students and staff were adequately prepared for such a change.**

# **Role and Readiness of Educators in an evolving COVID-19 – ZCAS University Strategies, Practices, Skills and Competencies**

- **In complying with the government lockdown measures, ZCAS University Management announced the suspension of all face to face classes and a shift to online learning for all students irrespective of study mode.**
- Essential software plugins (for Moodle) were acquired for audio/video delivery of lectures (WIZIQ) on eLearning portal and all students were attached to the eLearning portal.
- **The revised academic Calendar was published and all students were trained on how to access their lectures as timetabled except that these lectures were to be delivered online.**

# **Role and Readiness of Educators in an evolving COVID-19 – ZCAS University Strategies, Practices, Skills and Competencies**

- As part of offering enhanced learner services, the School of ODeL embarked on a number of initiatives.
  - **Ensuring learner resources are available to all students via the eLearning portal – A dedicated Officer in charge of these activities was employed.**
  - There have been and continue to be continuous capacity building training among lecturers for effective use of online resources for teaching.
  - **Capacity building is an ongoing activity throughout ZCAS/ZCAS University. All lecturers can now teach using technologies supported on the eLearning portal.**
  - Capacity building and sharing good practice with other members of the ACDE for effective use of online learning resources continue to be undertaken by ZCAS University lecturers and these have proved to be very helpful.

# Covid – 19 Pandemic Breaks Out

- Soon after the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, ZCAS/ZCAS University decided **not to suspend the calendar and disrupt student progression**. Face to face classes were all cancelled and all students were transferred to the ODeL mode of study.

As resources were already available online and lecturers had been trained , it was easy for ZCAS to transition to online teaching without disrupting the Academic Calendar.

- All assessments were done via the eLearning portal and exams were conducted via the eLearning portal.
- This activity was successfully undertaken and exams completed.
- A survey conducted among students showed that above 60% of the respondents were satisfied and that most of the students were comfortable with this mode of study.

# Conclusion

- **The COVID-19 pandemic was a great challenge that had to be met with high levels of innovations.**
- It really presented opportunities that may never be reversed going forward.
- In education, eLearning shall now be the norm rather than the exception.
- **Notwithstanding our challenges with power supply and cost of internet connectivity, there is still room to leverage on innovative techniques to make online learning and teaching our mainstay in education.**
- For ZCAS, some of the strategies employed by management in this direction did pay off after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# **Thank you for Listening**

- **Any Questions, Comments or Observations are most Welcome**