

**PRACTITIONER RESEARCH AND EVALUATION SKILLS TRAINING IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (PREST): EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATES FROM ODL INSTITUTIONS FROM FOUR SADC COUNTRIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is an evaluation of the Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training in Open and Distance Learning programme (PREST) which was conducted by Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) between 2009 and 2010. The programme focussed on imparting research evaluation skills in Open and Distance learning (ODL) to practitioners from the Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC) countries through the internet. Practitioners with knowledge of Open, Distance Learning (ODL) research skills are vital to their institutions. Unfortunately a large number of personnel in ODL institutions in the SADC region have training in conventional methods rather than ODL. This study was guided by the question: How relevant is PREST to ODL institutions in the SADC region? A qualitative research paradigm was used focussing on the evaluation skills gained from the programme. The researcher was the main instrument and he used personal accounts from the other four research practitioner graduates. These were from Botswana, Tanzania, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Convenient sampling was used to collect information from research practitioner graduates who had completed and taken part at the graduation ceremony at BOCODOL in 2011. The findings and recommendations provide vital insights on the direction SADC ODL institutions should take if they want to benefit from the PREST programme.

**Keywords:** Evaluation; practitioner; open and distance learning.