CHALLENGES IN THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at establishing the challenges that may have affected the training of teachers through ODL at the Zimbabwe Open University. The study was carried out in order to put in place a model that may be implemented to improve the quality teacher training programme. The study adopted the case study design for the gathering the in-depth perceptions held by the given population. Questionnaires, telephone interviews and documentary analysis were adopted for data collection. The population of the study consisted of the National Programme Leader, Regional Programme Coordinators and graduate diploma students and their former school heads. Thirty-three members of the population constituted the sample for this study. Among other findings, results of the study show that while the training of teachers was a very viable undertaking at ZOU, existing collaboration between the schools and the training institution was very informal. Teaching practice faced numerous problems such as inadequate funding and unavailability of teaching practice vehicles. The study recommended that there be collaboration among all the stakeholders. There is also need for the setting up of a Teaching Practice Department which should be fully equipped with to enable the smooth flow of teaching practice supervisory activities.

Keywords: Challenges, Teachers, Open and Distance learning, Quality

INTRODUCTION

The training of teachers through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is not a new phenomenon. Previously, teachers in Zimbabwe have been trained through this mode through the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) (Chivore, 1992). This was because of the realisation that the country needed large numbers of teachers to carter for the huge enrolments that were realised after the proclamation of the policy of Education for All at independence in 1980. There was increased access to education and within this context; innovations were needed to curb teacher staff shortages. Teacher numbers barely kept pace with rising pupils enrolments in the 1980s. Governments elsewhere have responded by adopting a variety of strategies of which open and distance learning is one (Perraton, 2010), hence the introduction of Open and Distance Learning in the training of teachers in Zimbabwe. In an effort to increase the teacher training opportunities, the open and distance learning mode of teacher training was introduced through the Zimbabwe Open University. Despite the positive intention of this noble idea which has been accepted by the public, the programme has of late been suspended by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education, a state constituted body to monitor quality in higher education institutions, for not meeting the required standards. This study therefore, aimed at establishing the shortfalls that have contributed to the suspension of the teacher training programme at the Zimbabwe Open University with the desire to put in place mechanisms that may be considered in an attempt to have the suspension lifted.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Despite the innovations and efforts to increase the number of trained teachers, the shortage of teachers has persisted unabated. The education sector as a whole has remained unattractive to personnel and so it continues to face high teaching staff attrition rates. Upon graduating with teaching qualifications a sizeable number of the teachers decide to join other jobs whilst on the other hand, some teachers are dying due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic (MOESC, 2000). In view of these problems, which exacerbate the teacher shortage, in 2002, ZOU started to offer a distance teacher education programme for the training of primary school teachers as a way of addressing staff shortages in the primary schools.

The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Zimbabwe, established to cater for a substantial component of people who, by design or unintentionally, could not be accommodated in conventional universities, by offering them the opportunity to study in their homes and in their workplaces through distance education. The ZOU was established on 1st March 1999 through an Act of parliament (Chapter 25:20), with an initial enrolment of 624 students registered for the Bachelor of Education degree programme. By 2004 ZOU had become the largest university in the country and second largest in Southern Africa compared to University of South Africa (UNISA), with a student enrolment of approximately 13 000. However, the student population, in the year, 2010, dropped to approximately 10 000. During the time of this study, in 2010, ZOU had 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 diploma courses, undergraduate degree programmes, masters` programmes and doctoral degrees. It is the Faculty of Arts and Education that is offering the teacher training programme that has of late been beset by challenges. In this section we present the structure of the Diploma in Education programme as offered by the Zimbabwe Open University.

Structure

The Diploma in Education for primary teachers through distance education offered by the Zimbabwe Open University is a completely different programme from the conventional and the ZINTEC programmes in the way it is structured and managed. The duration of the programme is three years divided into two semesters each.

Table 1. Diploma in Education Programme Structure

Year	Semester 1	Semester 2
1	Tpde	Tpde
2	Tpde	Tpde
3	Tpde	Tpde

Key: TPDE -Teaching Practice with Distance Education

The major distinguishing features of the programme are that the programme has no residential course. Students are on teaching practice in the schools throughout the duration of the training programme. They learn theory through the distance mode, through modules and face to face tutorials. There is also the use of CDs with the requisite material and students can access other relevant learning materials in the libraries and the computer laboratories in all the ten geo-political regions of the university.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The implementation of distance teacher education programme at ZOU has met serious challenges, especially with respect to quality with the major concern of those who oppose the introduction of the programme being it's potential to dilute quality. This study therefore, aims at establishing the shortfalls that have contributed to the suspension of the programme with the view of recommending solutions for programme improvement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In an attempt to answer the major research problem, the following 6 sub problems were asked and these guided the researchers in data collection:

1. Is there any collaboration among all the stakeholders?
2. What is the nature of micro-teaching in the programme?
3. How is mentoring undertaken in the programme?
4. How is teaching practice implemented in the programme?
5. Is there any external assessment for the programme?
6. What is the organisational structure of the teaching practice department?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Through research on the various models of teacher education, document analysis, focus group discussions and observations, the researchers managed to develop the following model that can be adopted for the teacher training programmes at the Zimbabwe Open University.

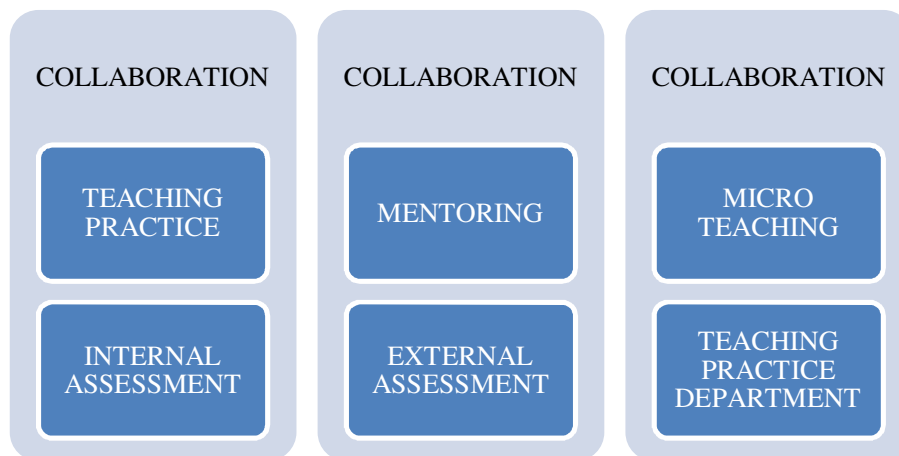| COLLABORATION	COLLABORATION	COLLABORATION
TEACHING PRACTICE	MENTORING	MICRO TEACHING
INTERNAL ASSESSMENT	EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT	TEACHING PRACTICE DEPARTMENT

Figure 1. A model of the components of a teacher training programme

The model presented above has six components all of which carry equal weight if a teacher training programme is to be effective and let alone recognised. There is also need to acknowledge the existence of collaboration in all these components. There should be collaboration during teaching practice, mentoring, micro-teaching, internal and external assessment as well as in the formation of the teaching practice department. Stakeholders in the training of teachers should be considered in all these aspects. Key stakeholders include the training institution, the school offering facilities for teaching practice and the Ministry of Education as the prospective employer. Jointly, a Memorandum of Understanding is entered into.

Below, we present an analysis of each of the components of the teacher training model in detail.

Teaching Practice

Teaching practice equips the student teacher with the practical hands on experience of what obtains in the classroom as well as school situation and the whole education system. It facilitates the meaningful integration of theory and practice as opposed to decontexualised learning that characterises many teacher development programmes (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992, cited in Bertram, Foteringham & Harley, 2000). According to the ODL model presented above, teaching practice is from day one of attachment up until the end of the attachment period. This implies that supervision by the university staff takes place throughout the duration of teaching practice. A teaching practice file shall be kept by all student teachers and this should have the syllabi, schemes of work, classroom timetable, lesson plans, mark lists/progress records, social records, remedial records, inventory lists, lesson notes and observation crits, among other documents.

While on teaching practice, there is need for collaboration among the stakeholders who are the school, the training institution and the Ministry of Education.

Mentoring

Mentoring is an integral aspect of any world acclaimed teacher training programme. Anderson (1987:29) defines the mentoring process as;

> A nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and or personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the on-going, caring relationship between mentor and protégé.

A number of mentoring models do exist and the training institution is at liberty to select any one of these models. Below, we present two of these models.

The Competency Based Model of Mentoring

Kerry and Mayes (1995) view Competency Based Model as systematic training because there are set procedures that should be followed to achieve success. According to them, the set procedures are:

a. The mentee has to be initiated to teaching through collaborative approaches before competency based approach.

b. Mentor and mentee gradually introduce concepts on a continuum from high dependency of mentee on mentor to high independency following set procedures.

c. There is practical training based on predefined competencies or expected teacher behaviours initially introduced to the mentee.

d. Competency based model is effective as a subsequent phase after imitation through collaborative teaching.

The Apprenticeship Model

Stones (1984) views apprenticeship approach of teacher training as learning to teach by observing practitioners. This view is shared by Furlong et al (1992) who see this model is an approach to learning to teach by emulating practitioners through supervised and guided practice. Furlong et al argue that the apprenticeship model is all there is to learning to teach.

According to their belief, one has to work alongside an experienced practitioner. The Hilgate Group (1989) upon where Furlong et al based their arguments made the following conclusions;

This hands-on experience is critical in the early stages to enable the trainee to form concepts of the teaching process. However, for the trainee to 'learn to see' they need an interpreter. In other words, as a mentor, at this stage, you work alongside the mentee explaining and clarifying activities in the classroom and their significance, to enable the mentee to begin to 'see' from working side by side with the mentor. The mentee begins to see sense and fit into the daily routines. Furlong et al (1992) argue that for all this to be achieved, the trainee needs to model themselves on someone – the mentor, who acts as guide, articulating and presenting recipes that will work. The duties of the mentor at this stage are modelling and interpreting, instructing and acting as co-enquirer.

Micro-Teaching

According to Allen and Eve (1968), micro-teaching is defined as a system of controlled practice that makes it possible to concentrate on specified teaching behaviour and to practice teaching under controlled conditions. Another definition of the term comes from Singh (1977) who defines microteaching as a scaled down teaching encounter in which a teacher teaches a small unit to a group of five pupils for a small period of 5 to 20 minutes. In both definitions, there is the issue of the teacher teaching in an unnatural setup. There is a reduced number those taught and some instances; the concentration of the instructional process is on only one aspect that the observers need to look and scrutinise so that when done in the actual class set up, is it is done perfectly well by the teacher. Micro-teaching can also encompass the teacher teaching a small group of peers who would then discuss the teacher`s strengths and weaknesses as a group.

Characteristic of Microteaching

a. Microteaching is a highly individualised training device.

b. Microteaching is an experiment in the field of teacher education which has been incorporated in the practice teaching schedule.

c. It is a student teaching skill training technique and not a teaching technique or method.

d. Microteaching is micro in the sense that it scale down the complexities of real teaching.

e. It entails practicing one skill at a time.

f. It entails reducing the class size to 5 – 10 pupil.

g. It also means reducing the duration of lesson to 5 – 10 minutes.

h. It further entails limiting the content to a single concept.

i. Immediate feedback helps in improving, fixing and motivating learning.

j. The student are providing immediate feedback in terms of peer group feedback, tape recorded or is beamed on CCTV.

k. Microteaching advocates the choice and practice of one skill at a time.

The figure below shows the micro-teaching cycle according to Allen and Eve (1968),
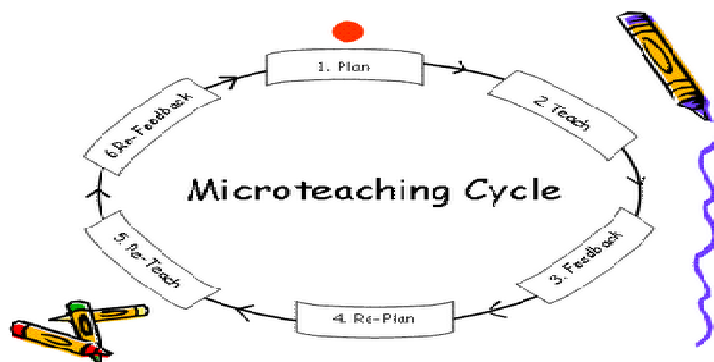
Figure 2. The Micro-teaching Cycle (Adapted from: http://2.bp.blog spot.com/_sPSfT2UDY)

A number of merits and demerits exist in the adoption of micro-teaching in the classroom. Below are some of these merits and demerits.

Merits of Microteaching

When a teacher training programme incorporates the microteaching components, the following merits accrue. Wilkinson (1996) and Wahba (1999) state that mentoring:

   a.   helps to develop and master important teaching skills
   b.   helps to accomplish specific teacher competencies
   c.   caters the need of individual differences in the teacher training
   d.   is more effective in modifying teacher behaviour
   e.   is an individualised training technique
   f.   employs real teaching situation for developing skills
   g.   reduces the complexity of teaching process as it is a scaled down teaching
   h.   Helps to get deeper knowledge regarding the art of teaching.

Internal Assessment and External Assessment

A very critical aspect of teacher training is the manner and form of assessment. The present study through document analysis and focus group discussion established the need for both internal and external assessment hence the model that the researchers presented above. For the purposes of ensuring quality, supervision and assessment play an integral part in the programme. Different stakeholders and supervision teams should be involved in the supervision and assessment of students. The National teams to supervise the students should comprise the following:

   a.   Programme Leader for Teaching Practice/Supervision
   b.   Programme Leaders for relevant courses
   c.   At least one officer from Quality Assurance
   d.   At least one representative from sister universities
   e.   Regional Coordinators from all courses relevant to TP and Quality Assurance
   f.   Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture and Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education representatives.

The present model also involves region based supervision which should involve Regional Coordinators, Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture at Provincial level,

Representatives from teachers' colleges and or universities. There is also an aspect of school based supervision. The students should be mentored and supervised/assessed by the School Head, Deputy Head, and Head of Department. It is important that the initiative to be supervised comes from the student. Assessment reports should be kept in the Teaching Practice File.

Peer Supervision is another aspect in student assessment. It is important for students to organise themselves into learning and supervision clusters. The clusters and lecturers at the Regions should organize tutorials and or micro teaching. Tutorials and micro teaching are important components of the programme as they assist you in your preparation to become a teacher. Whilst cluster supervision crits may not officially contribute towards the students' final assessment marks, they contribute to developing you towards a well balanced teacher. However, in distance education there geographical dispersion of the students may militate against this arrangement though some strategies can be put in place to make sure students meet and assess each other.

The Teaching Practice Department

The Teaching Practice department (TP) is a very critical department for the coordination of all teaching practice activities. Being ODL and having lecturers trained in different settings and through modes, there is bound to be a diversity of ways in the assessment of students on teaching practice. The TP department therefore, has to come up with policy guidelines on teaching practice that are uniform and be followed by all Regional Programme Coordinators. All the assessment instruments should be generated from this TP national command centre, of course with the input of the coordinators based in the regions.

Appropriate resources should be provided for the TP department and these include among others, vehicles specifically reserved for TP, adequate funds for the travel and subsistence of the travelling teams as well as fuel and for the production of TP material such as observation instruments.

Previous Research Studies

Literature on distance education and teaching practice is sparse thus Robinson (2003) notes that subsequently ongoing evaluation and impact analysis of teacher education programmes is generally weak and that these weaknesses are exacerbated by the complexities of distance education delivery. As Robinson (2003) notes, most reports are largely descriptive, only sometimes including detailed statistics and often lacking well-evidenced findings on outcomes. Robinson (2003) states that some problems in the training of teachers through ODL arise specifically from the nature of distance education among which are the factors to do with its scale, distribution of learners, tutors and schools, range of stakeholders and partners responsible for different tasks.

Groundwater-Smith (1997) notes that the assessment of students` competences during teaching practice remains problematic. A number of issues remain contentious. Additionally, debates about the assessment of the practice of student teachers often reflect ongoing philosophical debates about the nature of teacher education (Brown, 1996) and traditional barriers between teachers and academics (Groundwater-Smith, 1997). For example, several studies in distance teacher education reveal that the organisation of practice teaching for teacher trainees presents both logistical and educational difficulties. Despite this, practice teaching is regarded as a pillar of teacher education as it provides opportunities for evaluating in-service teachers in authentic environments.

In-service teachers enrolled in distance programmes are usually in their place of work when they attend the teacher training programmes. However, finding the means to assess their teaching practice eludes most institutions. Educational difficulties arise from the old problem of integrating theory and practice. Educational difficulties also arise from the fact that the task of supervising coupled with other duties makes it almost impossible for the teacher educator to witness as an in-classroom observer the wide range of instructional strategies that form the basis of an inquiry learning environment (Duschl and Waxman, 1991).

In some cases, some institutions, supervision of teaching practice have been abandoned because of organisational difficulties. However, various alternative strategies have been put in place in attempts to meet the supervision needs of the teacher training programme. According to Holmes, Karmacharya and Mayo (1993), in Nepal, peer-teaching sessions would be arranged to introduce a practical element to teacher education. Oliveira and Orivel (1993) report that in Brazil where one of the teacher training programmes had no capacity to supervise teaching practice, microteaching was incorporated into face-to-face sessions with teachers. The Open University in United Kingdom, does not supervise teaching practice but has tried to link theory and practice by inviting teachers to report on their classroom experiences of ideas and practical activities covered in the course (Perraton, 1993).

While advocating for microteaching in the teacher training programme, Allen and Kevin (1969) and Wilkinson (1996) state the need for microteaching as a course in the teacher-training institutions. It readily combines theory with practice. When one considers that teacher trainees in many training programmes do their practice teaching under inadequate supervision with no student feedback, the relative merits and economy of microteaching become more and more apparent. Microteaching offers the advantages of both a controlled laboratory environment and realistic practical experience. It is hardly a substitute for teaching practice, but it offers advantages such as close supervision, manageable objectives established according to individual trainee needs and progress, continuous feedback, an unprecedented opportunity for self-evaluation, immediate guidance in areas of demonstrated deficiency, and the opportunity to repeat a lesson whenever desired. When these advantages are combined with the economy of resources required to obtain them, microteaching becomes a valuable training method under many conditions throughout the world (Wilkinson, 1996).

Stakeholder collaboration in the teacher education programme serves to maintain a clear understanding of the value of their programme with people who may well be their future employers. In many countries where there are several providers of teacher education there can be competition for the use of schools. Under such pressure the school/institutional links are especially vulnerable to the effects of misunderstanding. The supervision that occurs during field experience also reflects theoretical and practical conditions. During supervision both the mentor (also known as the cooperating) teacher and the lecturer, need to cooperate and find solution to the problems that may be affecting the teaching practice for teacher students. In some cases, it is also often the case that it is difficult for a teacher education institution to find sufficient schools in which to place their students (Morine-Dershimer & Leighfield, 1995).

Referring to mentoring, Banks & Burgess (1996) state that the mentor generally takes on the role of mentoring and supporting student teacher from a sense of commitment to their profession rather than of commitment to any institution or for the remuneration. Such arrangements usually require the school or the mentor teacher to work exclusively with the contracted institution and thus close that link for other institutions and their students. Mentors need special preparation for their role so that the experience they provide links with the programme goals (Morine-Dershimer & Leighfield, 1995).

Training of mentors is also a critical aspect before the mentors can be assigned to particular student teachers. There is need for the development of special training packages and allocation (Banks & Burgess, 1996). Despite the crucial role of mentoring and its gradually being accepted Mattson (2004) reports that some resistance is reported for example in Zambia, Malawi and Gambia, especially where "allowances" are involved. Alternative 'rewards' could rather be in the form of reduced teaching loads and clearly there is a need for monitoring of school-based support. The particular context needs always to be borne in mind: in Malawi and Zambia, for example, "... schools function poorly as training sites because of the scarcity of basic resources and the lack of support from mentors and other teachers." (Mattson 2004:12).

METHODOLOGY

The present study was a case study undertaken at the Zimbabwe Open University`s two regions of Mashonaland East and West. Questionnaires were filled in by the Regional Programme Coordinators and the National Programme Leader. Also for the investigation questionnaires for graduate students and their former school heads were used. Furthermore, in attempt to obtain valuable information, the practical document analysis of teaching practice was also undertaken to consolidate and crosscheck the data obtained through the other research instruments.

Population and Sample

The population for the current study consisted of the National Programme Leader in charge of the Diploma in Education programme, the 2 Regional Programme Coordinators from Mashonaland East and West Regions and the 15 graduates of the diploma programme from the two regions under investigation. The 15 heads of schools where the students did their teaching practice were also part of the respondents. This gave a total population of 33. All these prospective respondents made it into the sample as it was felt that the number was very manageable and in order to get a more clear perspective of the diploma programme, the majority of the key stakeholders needed to have been involved in the study.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In view of the above model and literature on the basic requirements of a teaching practice model, the present study, therefore sought to establish those challenges affecting the smooth flow of the training of teachers through distance education. The model provided above and together with literature on teaching practice elsewhere were the basis for the assessment of the present model that has been adopted by the Zimbabwe Open University. Results obtained from the study are presented below.

Collaboration among All the Stakeholders

Results of the present study reveal that there was no collaboration at all among certain groups of stakeholders. Though collaboration existed between the school heads and the training institution, no collaboration existed between the training institution and the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture, which is the employer. However, the existing collaboration between the schools and the training institution was very informal as no communication was documented for the purpose of student teacher deployment to the schools. It was a mutual understanding mostly between the school heads and Education Officers on one hand and the training institution (ZOU) on the other. All the 15 heads of schools admitted having to accept the ZOU students on the understanding that ZOU was a national programme and also 13 of these heads were former ZOU graduates. To add to that,

the majority of the District Education Officers in the two provinces are also former ZOU students and are also part time tutors who saw no problem in assisting the ZOU trainee teachers. This therefore, goes to show that while at the lower levels of the education system there appears to be some remarkable collaboration, the same cannot be said of the higher levels.

The Nature of Micro Teaching In the Programme

Results also show that there was no meaningful microteaching in the ZOU teacher education programme. The component, though being very crucial was overlooked by the programme pioneers. This is contrary to the assertions by Wilkinson (1996) and Wahba (1999) who advocates for the component if the teacher education programme is to be accepted. However, the student teachers themselves acknowledged having come together several times to do peer teaching where a number of them happened to be working in the same cluster. Ten of the students reported having carried out peer teaching which though in the absence of college supervisors proved to be very helpful especially given that some experienced teachers in the clusters were always willing to assist through attending the sessions and providing comments after each and every presentation. The National Programme Leader, the Regional Programme Coordinators and school heads acknowledged the existence of this arrangement though it was also relatively informal.

Mentoring Is Undertaken In the Teacher Training Programme

Out of 15 students who responded to the questionnaire, all indicated that there was no meaningful mentoring. They were not assigned to mentor as they had to teach full classes as temporary teachers. This was supported by the school heads and coordinators. Asked what could have been the reason for this, the National Programme leader stated that it was a result of there being no collaboration among stakeholders. According to Mattson (2004) there has been general resistance to mentoring in some countries such as Malawi and Gambia. However, the Zimbabwean issue could be attributed to oversight by the programme pioneers.

Teaching Practice in the Teacher Training Programme

The table shows the results from the findings on teaching practice as perceived by the students.

Table 2. Teaching practice in the teacher training programme

Variable	Responses			
	Yes		*No*	
	Frequency	*%*	*Frequency*	*%*
1. Did university lecturers come to supervise you on teaching practice?	15	100	0	0
2. Were you supervised by the lecturers regularly?	9	60	6	40
3. The lecturers were full time lecturers	12	80	3	20
4. Did the university look for the deployment vacancies in the schools for you?	0	0	15	100
5. Were you supervised by the head, TIC or senior teacher at the school?	15	100	110	0
6. Was the supervision beneficial towards your training as a teacher?	14	93	1	7
Was the supervision arranged by the university?	4	27		73

Results in table 1 show that all the 15 students indicated that university lecturers came to supervise them while on teaching practice. This was confirmed by both the National Programme Leader and the Regional Programme Coordinators. However, only 9 students stated that they were you supervised by the lecturers regularly. The non supervision of other students was attributed to non availability of resources by the Programme Leader as the affected students could have been working in far off schools. The majority of 12 students said that they were supervised by full time lecturers while only 3 stated that the lecturers who supervised them were part time. The Regional Coordinators indicated that at times the university had no resources to go out for teaching practice supervision; hence they could assign the part time tutors in the vicinity of the students to do the supervision.

Asked whether the university looked for the deployment vacancies in the schools for them all the 15 said no. All the 15 students also indicated that they were supervised by the head, TIC or senior teacher at the school and according to 14 of these students the supervision was beneficial towards their training as teachers. Only 4 remarked that the supervision was arranged by the university. This implies therefore that the students looked for places all by themselves which is not the case with other students in the conventional colleges whose institutions looked for places in the districts for the students. The National Programme Leader stated that since there was no Memorandum of Understanding between the university and the Ministry of Education, students had to find their own teaching vacancies. More often the students found themselves without teaching posts since they were only appointed as temporary teachers whose appointments were for a fixed term.

The National Programme Leader was asked about the state of resources in the Teaching Practice Department. The response was that there were no vehicles specifically designated for teaching practice. Those intending to go for teaching practice had to rely on the Regional Director`s truck, the only one in the regional centre. Funds the travel and subsistence inadequate thereby hampering efforts to visit the students on teaching practice.

The Organisational Structure of the Teaching Practice Department

Results from the questionnaires responded to by the National Programme Leader and the Regional Programme Coordinators show that there was no teaching practice department at ZOU. Accordingly, therefore, no coordination was effective. Regional programme Coordinators undertook activities in the manner that was appropriate for their region hence at times there was no uniformity in the university operations relating to teaching practice. The respondents advocated for a national programme leader for teaching practice to be based at the National Centre. This is unlike the ZINTEC programme that had a teaching practice department which coordinated and guided the operations of concern to teaching practice (Chivore, 1992).

Internal Assessment and External Assessment Procedures Exist For the Programme

From the responses, it would appear that there were no problems with internal assessment. The available documents were clear on the assessment procedures which involved university lecturers. Internal assessment involved marking assignments, examinations, research projects, supervision of teaching practice and practicum and in-class tests. The aspect of external assessment was a challenge. External assessment only was almost non-existent thereby giving no external credibility to the programme. The National Programme Leader and the Regional Programme Coordinators remarked that other universities` staff, teacher training colleges` lecturers and officials from the Ministry of Education could be used as external assessors of the teacher training programme at ZOU.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While there is no doubt about the potential to train teachers in ZOU, the findings from the study indicate that the challenges besetting the teacher training programme at ZOU were a result of the following issues which could impact on the quality of teacher graduates:

1. There was no formal collaboration among certain groups of stakeholders

2. The existing collaboration between the schools and the training institution was very informal as no communication was documented for the purpose of student teacher deployment to the schools

3. There was no meaningful microteaching in the ZOU teacher education programme a component, which is very crucial but was overlooked by the programme pioneers

4. Teaching practice faced numerous problems such as inadequate funding and unavailability of teaching practice vehicles

5. There was no meaningful mentoring the student teachers were not assigned to mentor but they had to teach full classes as temporary teachers

6. There was no teaching practice department at ZOU to coordinate the teaching practice activities, hence this led to lack of uniformity among the regions

7. External assessment was almost non-existent thereby giving no external credibility to the programme

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings presented above, it can be concluded that:

1. lack of formal collaboration among certain groups of stakeholders resulted challenges that have confronted the teacher education programme at ZOU

2. the existing informal collaboration between the schools and the training institution is a cause for the problems affecting the teacher development programme through ODL

3. the non-existence of a teaching practice department at ZOU to coordinate the teaching practice activities has led to lack of uniformity among the regions

4. lack of meaningful microteaching in the ZOU teacher education programme militates against the acceptance of the teacher training programme

5. inadequate funding and unavailability of teaching practice vehicles are major challenges in the training of teachers through ODL

6. the unavailability of meaningful mentoring of the student teachers is also a major contributor to the weakening of the programme

7. lack of external assessment gives no external credibility to the teacher training programmes

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions, the present study recommends that:

1. There is also need to work in collaboration with all the stakeholders which include the Ministry of Education, the Public Service Commission, School heads, Education Officers and other training institutions.

2. There is need for the setting up of a Teaching Practice Department that should be manned by qualified staff which should also be fully equipped with vehicles and

other relevant material to enable the smooth flow of teaching practice supervisory activities.

3. The department should include mentoring and micro-teaching in the Diploma in Education programme as these are an integral part of an effective teacher training programme.

4. The Teaching Practice Department should be adequately funded so as to cater for vehicles, staff allowances and other resources.

5. External examiners should be appointed in order to quality assure the product of the teacher training programme. The external examiners should include Education Officers, lecturers from other universities and those from teacher training colleges.

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