Teacher development through open and distance learning: The Case for Zimbabwe

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Introduction

“Zimbabwe has 20,000 unqualified teachers!”, screamed a headline in the Herald of 11 March 2015. In this article, it was reported that the government was going to recruit more than 20,000 untrained teachers of which 10,341 would be at primary school level, while 11,519 were to teach at secondary school level. Stepping back, in 2012 Zimbabwe had 12,713 unqualified teachers out of nearly 100,000 in the country’s schools. The shortage of trained teachers facing Zimbabwe is an issue that has been experienced in many other developing countries, despite the fact that more and more teachers’ colleges continue to be established. This is a clear indication that conventional colleges are failing to meet the demand for qualified teachers. To meet the challenges of teacher shortage, several countries including Zimbabwe have implemented projects and programmes in the training of teachers through distance education. Despite huge successes achieved by these projects and programmes, teacher development through ODL in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, continue to meet with skepticism, mixed feelings and negative attitudes from some sectors of society (Kangai and Bukalia (2012). Skeptics of ODL argue that teacher development through ODL increases the quantity of trained teachers at the expense of quality. Much of the arguments against teacher development through ODL are raised by people who have very little or no experience with ODL either as tutors or students. This illuminative research paper, written by an ODL practitioner, argues that: (1) ODL has been widely used, in other countries, for teacher development with high degree of success. (2) ODL offers the best alternative in teacher development especially for countries experiencing a perennial shortage of school teachers, (3) Teacher development through ODL has more advantages and benefits to a developing country like Zimbabwe.

Background of the study

The history of teacher education in Zimbabwe can be divided into three phases. Although Zimbabwe had had previous experience in correspondence education that was offered by private correspondence colleges such as Central Africa Correspondence college and Rapid Results Colleges through which people attained primary and secondary education, its first experience with distance teacher – the first phase - was in 1981 when the country began to train primary school teachers through a UNICEF funded programme called Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC). Gatawa, (1986). ZINTEC was a four teacher education programme meant for the initial in-service training of primary school teachers. The ZINTEC programme was implemented between 1981 to 1988 and was hailed as a great success (Chivore, 1989). Because of negative attitudes towards distance education, all the ZINTEC colleges, except Morgan.
ZINTEC, were turned into conventional colleges. The second phase of distance teacher education began in 1993 when the Centre for Distance Education (CDE) at the University of Zimbabwe started to offer the Bachelor of Education in educational administration, planning and policy studies for the training of practising school heads and administrators. When the CDE transformed into the College of Distance Education and then the present Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) more teacher development programmes were introduced. These programmes like the post graduate diploma in education (PGDE) were meant for graduate temporary teachers who wanted to become teachers. These programmes have also been very successful. The third phase started in 2013 when ZOU started to offer a pre-service teacher training course for the training of primary school teachers, the Diploma in Education (Primary). Although Zimbabwe had had experience with distance teacher education, the initial training of teachers through open and distance learning (ODL) methods was received with mixed feelings and scepticism (Gatawa, 1986). The main concern of stakeholders (government, parents, teachers) is about quality. A number of critical questions are raised. Can teachers be trained through distance education? Is the quality of teachers trained through ODL comparable to those trained through conventional education? Can teachers trained through distance education deliver? Answers to these and many other questions about the feasibility of training teachers through ODL have not been readily available and convincing. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to provide answers to these critical questions. This paper, therefore, argues that distance education has the potential to improve both the quality and quantity of teachers in Zimbabwe and ZOU has the capacity to offer both pre-service and in-service teacher development programmes through ODL.

**Statement of the problem**

In Zimbabwe the training of teachers through distance education has been called to question. This is because different people perceive the quality of ODL differently and their perceptions have influenced attitudes towards the acceptance and use of ODL in teacher education. The greatest problem facing distance education today is how it is perceived by stakeholders. This is because the success of open and distance education programmes could be affected by how it’s perceived by the individuals involved in it. This illuminative research paper argues that distance education offers the best alternative in teacher development and has more advantages and benefits to a developing country like Zimbabwe.

**Research questions**

The present article was an attempt to provide answers to the following crucial questions:

1. Why use distance education for teacher development?
2. What is the role of distance education in the context of teacher education?
3. Does distance education deliver?
4. What are the challenges of distance teacher education in Zimbabwe?
5. What is needed for effective teacher education through distance education looking to the future?"

**Significance of the study**

Issues discussed in this article contribute vital information to the theory and practice of distance teacher education and helps to inform all stakeholders (government, educational policy makers, parents, students, and distance teacher educators) on the potential and the merits of distance education
in teacher development. This article also aims at generating research interest into distance education in general, and distance teacher education in particular.

**Literature review**

The Concepts “Open and Distance Learning” and “Teacher Development through Open and Distance Learning”

Saide and Saide (2003) has defined distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. In distance education students are unable primarily to attend fixed classes at a centralised venue and in the physical presence of a teacher but may attend periodic meetings, called tutorials, with their lecturers. Open learning, in turn, is an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimised in terms either of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these. Teacher education through ODL is considered as an umbrella term to cover educational approaches (print media, telephone, computers and television) used to provide teachers with initial pre-service or continuing in-service training in their schools, provide learning resources for them, and enable them to qualify without attending college in person. The flexibility inherent in open and distance learning, and the fact that it can be combined with a full or near full-time job, makes it particularly appropriate for the often widely distributed force of teachers and school managers.

**Teacher development: pre-service and in-service**

In discussing teacher development through ODL, it is useful to distinguish first between the initial training of teachers and their continuing professional development, and second between pre-service and in-service activities. Initial teacher education refers to the training given to a person who wants to become a teacher. This training, in normal cases is provided before the individual is engaged as a teacher. However, in some cases one is first engaged as an untrained teacher and then receives training on the job. This type of training is still initial but in-service. The purpose of this training is to turn an untrained teacher into a trained teacher. Continuing teacher development is the type of education a trained teacher receives on the job for professional development purposes. Programmes of continuing professional development have been offered for upgrading of teachers who already have a qualification, raising the skills of sub-qualified teachers, enabling qualified teachers to undertake new roles, reorientation of teachers for curriculum change, teachers’ career development and to train educational leaders and managers (e.g. head teachers). Thus while many teachers are trained before they start their service, others begin work without teaching qualifications and get their initial training in-service. Thus the purposes of teacher education include the following:

1. Initial training: pre-service or in-service
2. Continuing professional development: in-service

Teacher education generally includes four elements:

- improving the general educational background of the trainee teachers;
- increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach;
- understanding of teaching methods, children and learning; and the
- development of practical skills and competences.
Models of conventional teacher education

Basically, teacher education through Open and distance Learning has been dominated by three teacher education models; (1) Apprentice Model, (2) College Based Model and (3) Equal Partnership Model.

The apprentice model

The Apprenticeship Model is also known as school-based model. In this model, the training of teachers is school-based with the experienced classroom teacher playing the major role. All that is needed is for a trainee teacher to spend time with an experienced teacher in school to pick up “tips on teaching”. This idea of apprenticeship has been attacked by some educationists on the grounds that the training is carried out in individual schools and lacks uniformity. Each school has its own professional standards. The model emphasises the acquisition of practical teaching skills at the expense of theory. Wragg (1984) argues that this approach de-professionalises both teaching and teacher training because the model lacks training in theory of education.

The college based model

The College Based Model argues that much of the training must take place in the training institution with the school facilitating teaching practice for a shorter period (Booth, Furlong and Wilkin, 1990). In Zimbabwe, this has been the traditional method used by conventional teachers colleges. The training programme is three years. Trainee teachers spend the first year in college studying the theory of education and professional foundations, the second year on teaching practice in the schools and the third year back in college to write the research project and examinations. The major limitation of the model is that it puts more emphasis on theory of education at the expense of practice and takes too long to produce qualified teachers especially in the face of a national crisis of teacher shortage.

Equal partnership model

The Equal Partnership Model involves the training institution, the school and the government. The training institution (e.g. teachers college) teach theory, the school facilitates teaching practice and the government provides funding. The training programme is normally four years. Students spent the first and third years in college studying theory of education and professional foundations. The second and fourth years are spent on teaching practice in schools.

These three perspectives (School Based Model, College Based Model and Equal Partnership Model) have characterised the development of teacher education in Zimbabwe. However, the demand for qualified teachers brought about by the expansion of the education system at independence (1980) and failure by conventional colleges to meet this demand, has forced Zimbabwe to search for new models in the training of teachers. The trend in training teachers is now shifting away from the traditional conventional mode to a more flexible approach through open and distance learning.

Country experiences

Teacher development through ODL has been used in initial training of unqualified teacher and upgrading of trained teachers. Country experiences include Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, China, Mongolia, Britain and Zimbabwe.
Tanzania calculated that it needed an extra 40,000 teachers but existing teachers’ colleges could produce only 5,000 new teachers a year. Secondary-school leavers were recruited to be trained on an apprenticeship model, partly on the job and partly through distance education. Trainees were posted to schools, given a reduced teaching load, and trained through correspondence courses backed by radio programmes. Their classroom practice was supervised and tested and the programme ended with a six-week residential seminar. Thus 38,000 trainees completed the course and passed their examinations. Distance education in Tanzania reached 45,000 teachers, nine times the annual output of conventional teachers’ colleges giving a success rate of 84 per cent.

South Africa has used a range of distance education technologies as it reformed its curricula. The Shoma Educational Foundation, worked with two universities to provide satellite television broadcasts for teachers which were backed by computer-based lessons. The project’s aims included developing teachers’ computer literacy and helping them adapt their teaching strategies to new curricula (Perraton, 2007). Between 1994 and 2000 the numbers reached by Interactive Radio Instruction grew from 14,500 to 680,000. South Africa also used the Open Learning Systems Educational Trust (OLSET) as a means of offering in-service teacher education (Perraton, 2007). Between 1994 and 2000 the numbers reached by Interactive Radio Instruction grew from 14,500 to 680,000. South Africa also used the Open Learning Systems Educational Trust (OLSET) as a means of offering in-service teacher education (Perraton, 2007). Between 1994 and 2000 the numbers reached by Interactive Radio Instruction grew from 14,500 to 680,000. South Africa also used the Open Learning Systems Educational Trust (OLSET) as a means of offering in-service teacher education (Perraton, 2007).

Zambia followed suit and launched a comparable radio project “Learning at Taonga Market”, addressed to both in-school and out-of-school audiences which was reaching 74,000 learners by 2006 with the prospect of being extended to all Zambian schools. As in South Africa, the programme provided support to teachers as well as teaching their pupils. (Sitali, 2008). Malawi, for example, used open and distance learning for teacher training from 1997 to 2004 (Lewin, 2004).

Nigeria set up a single-purpose, distance-education, National Teachers Institute in 1976, which has become a permanent part of the federal education system. It has been involved both in initial training and in upgrading qualified teachers (Bako and Rumble, 1993; Perraton, 2007). Rwanda has trained secondary school teachers at a distance through the Kigali Institute of Education (Mukamusoni, 2006).

Uganda used distance education to upgrade untrained teachers through the Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project ran from 1993 to 1997 in northern Uganda where it integrated its distance teaching with the work of ten conventional teachers’ colleges. Trainees attended two residential courses each year and twice-monthly tutorials and got help, guidance and support from tutor-counsellors. About 88 per cent of students completed the course which had a pass rate of about 75 per cent (Perraton, 2000). Uganda reported a 66 per cent success rate in its distance teacher education (Walker, 2007). In Pakistan the first phase of distance education for Primary Teachers enrolled over 83,000 and the second phase over 50,000 teachers. Over a period of twelve years distance-teaching methods enabled over a million teachers to gain qualifications.

In China, 11 per cent of primary and secondary school unqualified teachers were able to qualify through the China Television Teachers’ College. Between 1987 and 1999, 717,300 primary teachers gained certificates and 552,000 secondary teachers gained diplomas. (Perraton, 2007). A wider range of media was used in the Gansu Province of China, in a basic education project run through cooperation between the government and the European Union. The aim was to support curriculum reform, upgrade under-qualified teachers and use communication technologies as a means of modernising education. The project reached over 100,000 teachers and was organised through 686 teachers’ learning resource centres, equipped to allow for the use of satellite television and computer resources. Staff members were
trained to provide face-to-face support for teachers (Robinson, 2007).

As Mongolia changed from being a one-party state in the 1990s it introduced new curricula and teaching approaches and ran a radio-based project to reach teachers throughout the country. Radio programmes, appropriate for the country’s scattered population, were backed by print and some residential sessions; by 2000 the programme had reached over half of the country’s primary teachers (Robinson, 2007). The project in Mongolia made it possible to reorient teachers much more rapidly than would have been possible through the conventional approach of using residential summer courses in the capital city (Robinson, 2007).

Britain, too, has used its Open University as a means of initial teacher training. In 1994, with a government grant, it introduced a postgraduate certificate in education (PGDE) for graduates who wanted to teach in primary or secondary schools. Students were provided with a computer to facilitate computer conferencing, and also made use of printed materials. The course was school-based and students spent thirteen weeks doing teaching practice which was supervised by a mentor from the school staff. Examination success rates, were in the range 71 to 77 per cent for the first five cohorts. The primary level version of the course was criticised by the Office for Standards in Education (a national inspectorate) and subsequently abandoned by the university but the secondary-level version has continued (Walker, 2007).

The Zimbabwe model of distance teacher education

Distance teacher education in Zimbabwe is either used for initial teacher training or continuing teacher development programmes. ODL students are not housed in a college as done in conventional institutions. They are provided with learning materials where ever they are, in their homes, workplaces or schools. They do not attend regular classes but tutorials. They are provided with modules for their theory of education and they gain teaching practice experience from the schools in which they are teaching. If they are not in schools, an arrangement is made for them to be placed in a base school for the duration of their teaching practice supervision.

The Distance education mode of teacher education has been heavily criticised as inadequate in both theory and practice. However, research has demonstrated that there is no significant difference between conventional and ODL teachers with regards to quality and effectiveness. In fact Distance teacher education is now considered a better strategy for increasing the quantity and quality of teachers in a country experiencing a critical shortage of teachers and in which teachers skills and competencies constantly require upgrading.

Methods

Data for the present study was collected through the use of webometrics conducted through internet search engines and documents analysis of research articles published in international refereed journals. A Total of 85 distance teacher education programmes were identified and a sample of 20 programmes were analysed. Research data was organised into four categories: country, programme, reason for implementing the programme, objectives of the programme, evaluation of the programme, successes, weaknesses.

Discussion of findings

The present study was guided by the following five research questions or concerns. Data was collected in order to address these concerns.
1. Why use ODL for teacher development?

2. What is the role of ODL in the context of teacher education?

3. Does ODL deliver?

4. What are the challenges of teacher education through ODL in Zimbabwe?

5. What is needed for effective teacher education through ODL looking to the future?

1. Why use distance education for teacher development?

The analysis of case studies we undertook revealed a number of reasons why different countries introduced distance education methods in the training of teachers.

In many developing countries (90%) distance teacher education was introduced so as to solve the problem of teacher shortage. Traditionally, teachers were trained in teachers colleges using the conventional college-based model. However, conventional methods can no longer meet the present and future demands for teachers. Factors responsible for the shortage of teachers include the following:

• In Africa for example, the attaining of political independence saw many countries adopt educational reforms that democratised each country's education system. This resulted in an unprecedented increase in school enrolment. Therefore, a faster and cheaper method had to be found to train teachers on the job.

• The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also taking its toll and reducing the number of trained teachers.

• The poor salaries and conditions of service have also made the teaching profession less attractive to prospective teachers. Hence there is a marked decline in the number of people training as teachers.

One strategy many countries have adopted is to train more teachers. To this end distance education has been found to be the most appropriate and desirable approach. A number of reasons have been put forward in support of distance teacher training. Distance education is cheaper than conventional education. No facilities such as classrooms or hostels are required to house students like as is the case in conventional colleges. In distance education, the average cost of educating a student actually decreases as the enrolment increases. In a country experiencing a critical shortage of trained teachers like Zimbabwe, distance education is the way to go as teachers are trained on the job and do not have to leave their work or take study leave. Distance education also addresses the theory/practice question more effectively in that learnt skills, methods and techniques are applied in the classroom immediately rather than wait for the future when students are on teaching practice. As students are trained on the job, they get to master the practical skills of the organization and management of the different school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To meet the demand for qualified teachers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In service training of teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service training of teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up grading teachers skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low training costs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased access to higher education and attainment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More teaching practice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Reasons for Introducing Distance Teacher Education  N=20
activities. New developments in information communication technology also make distance education more attractive and convenient as people can now study in the comfort of their homes and at their work places. In Malawi, for example, distance teacher education was introduced at Domasi Teachers College in order to increase access to higher education and to reduce gender disparity (Chakwera and Saiti, 2005). In Nigeria the National Certificate in Education (NCE) programme offered through distance education by the National Teachers Institute, provides an alternative but equivalent route to initial teaching qualifications for working primary school teachers in a country very short of qualified teachers and where conventional college output cannot meet demand (Aderinoye and Ojokheta, 2004).

It is increasingly clear that the conventional system of full-time, contact-based Colleges of Education and Education Departments in Universities is unable to meet the growing need for teacher development. Some of the reasons for this include that the numbers required exceed the physical capacity of institutions to accommodate them. Potential and current teachers need to be able to continue to work while they learn, especially in a context in which more of the cost burden for higher education has shifted to student fees in light of declining real state subsidies. Distance education methods, which facilitate learning that does not require students and teachers to necessarily be in the same place at the same time and can support the expansion of school-based teacher education programmes, are seen as a logical solution to this challenge. Often a key motivation for the use of distance education methods is purely economic: a desire to make more efficient use of existing facilities coupled with an inability to replicate or expand these facilities. Research into the costs of educational delivery suggests that teacher education can be one of the more cost-effective uses of distance education able to achieve reasonable student success rates at unit costs that may be lower than in the conventional system. (Oliveira and Orivel, 2003; ADEA, 2005) This is due in part to the often large and recurring numbers of teachers involved which can lead to economies of scale; and a consideration of the opportunity costs involved in not removing practising teachers from their classrooms and therefore not having to employ an additional cadre of temporary replacements.

Craig and Perraton (2003) note that distance education has been used extensively for the continuing professional development of teachers in particular and seems to have the following advantages (which would presumably also be true for the initial training of unqualified teachers/para-professionals while in-service): An ability to reach teachers, who are often isolated, and provide them with professional development without taking them away from their home or workplace. Providing teachers with learning and teaching resources. Providing a programme in which learning can immediately be integrated with day-to-day teaching. The possibility of achieving economies of scale. Even traditional contact-based institutions involved in teacher education need to engage with distance education issues, such as materials and learner support, for extended teaching practice and so interest in the use of distance education methods in teacher education has grown. This is part of a general trend towards more open practices in education provision in which distance education methods are seen to provide more flexibility in learning options, especially in light of growing access to increasingly more sophisticated and increasingly less costly information and communication technologies.
2. What is the role of distance education in the context of teacher education?

Extensive and increasing use is made of distance education for teacher development globally (Robinson and Latchem, 2003) and in Africa in particular in pursuit of EFA goals and a global shortage of teachers in general and primary level teachers in particular (Mattson, 2004). Distance education is used in the initial professional education of teachers and in the continuing professional development of teachers (Sayed, 2006).

Research has shown that distance teacher education can play a crucial role in two different but sometimes overlapping areas of teacher education: initial professional education, and continuing professional development.

There are a number of countries that have used distance education in initial teacher education - the China Television Teachers College, the National Teachers Institute in Nigeria, the PGCE programme of the UK Open University are good examples. In these countries distance education programmes are used to provide initial training (pre-service or in-service) for different levels of student teachers, for those with secondary-level entry qualifications in China and Nigeria to graduate entry in the United Kingdom. In pre-service programmes student teachers are trained before they are engaged as teachers in the schools, whilst in-service programmes are meant for teachers already employed as untrained teachers in the schools. Both teachers study for the initial teaching qualification.

In Zimbabwe distance education was used in the initial training of teachers through the ZINTEC programme. The Zimbabwe Open University offers initial teacher training through the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Degree programme for pre-school teachers, the Diploma in Education for Primary teachers and Diploma in Education for Secondary teachers.

Distance education can also be used for teachers’ continuing professional development. This training is characterised by a diversification of provision, in terms of types of programmes, duration, management, technology and audience, and is an area in which distance education can also play a significant role. One good example of continuing professional development through distance education is provided by the Burkina Faso case. In Burkina Faso over a quarter of the country’s head teachers (whose professional development is increasingly seen as a key element in school effectiveness) developed new knowledge and skills through distance education within four years. This served at least three functions: it furthered their careers, built capacity in the head teacher cohort and provided professional development.

At the Zimbabwe Open University continuing professional development of teachers is provided through the Bachelor of Education in Educational Management (BED-Management), Master of Education in Educational Management (MED-Management) and Doctor of Philosophy in Education (DPhil Education). The BED-Management, MED-Management and DPhil programmes are in-service teacher programmes aimed at capacity building by equipping officers in the educational administrative positions with relevant administrative, planning and policy skills.

3. The third question was “Can distance education meet the quantitative and qualitative demand for teachers?” Does distance education deliver?

Research suggests that distance education programmes have shown a positive impact on teachers’ general and subject specific knowledge gains (Robinson and Latchem, 2003). Distance education programmes for teachers can provide acceptable courses and
qualifications on a larger scale than conventional programmes and over a wider geographical area in countries with very differing infrastructures and for a wide range of purposes and learner levels. Successful completion rates for ODL programmes vary between 50-90 per cent. Examination pass rates tend, on the whole, to be similar to those in conventional programmes (though completion rates tend to be lower). In general, distance education programmes have demonstrated that they are effective in teaching academic subjects, though some subjects, such as science, mathematics or music, need greater elements of face-to-face teaching, interaction with tutors, coaching and practical work. Teachers on distance education courses have achieved results equivalent to conventionally trained teachers, (Chivore 1989; Nielsen and Tatto, 1993). Unqualified serving teachers on distance learning courses for initial qualifications are often rated more highly on classroom teaching than newly qualified college equivalents. Self-report data by teachers on distance education courses generally rate them useful and relevant to their teaching, and report increases in teachers’ confidence, knowledge and teaching skills.

Quantitative output of distance teacher education programmes

Distance education programs seem to be the best tool to bring down teacher shortage. For example the distance teacher education programme implemented at Domasi Teachers College in Malawi was able to increase its annual intake from 180 to nearly 914 because the distance education program was recruiting at least 734 student teachers in the two years of its operation. The output of Domasi College alone was more than what all colleges were producing together through their regular programs (Chakwera and Saiti, 2005). In Burkina Faso a programme meant for the development of head teachers trained seventy head teachers in the first year, 920 heads in the second year and 1275 in the third year (Jean-Francois, 2004). In China, China television teachers college between 1987 and 1999, assisted 717 300 unqualified primary teachers to gain teacher certificates and 552000 unqualified secondary school teachers gained a teaching diploma. Another programme to develop primary school teacher knowledge and skills in child guidance in India, churned out a total of 6546 teachers between 1993 and 2001.

Data available for Zimbabwe indicate that of the original 7 353 candidates admitted into the ZINTEC programme, 5 887 (80.0%) passed. Of these, 236 (3.2%) obtained distinctions. The average failure rate was 1.5%. according to Gatawa (1986), the pass rates for the ZINTEC programmes were so impressive that they compared favourably with those of the conventional system. (See Table 4).

Table 4: Candidates admitted and those who completed the course between 1981 and 1988 under the ZINTEC Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Admitted</th>
<th>Passed</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>2559</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marymount</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>2413</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwanda</td>
<td>1461</td>
<td>1224</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Louw</td>
<td>1518</td>
<td>1236</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7353</td>
<td>5887</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Gatawa (1986:21), the dropout rate for the ZINTEC programme was given at .3% and this was statistically insignificant. In fact, the programme was so attractive that its numbers were continuously augmented by “drop-ins” from the conventional system (Gatawa, 1986:21). What Gatawa termed “drop-ins” were student teachers who left conventional colleges to join the ZINTEC programme.

The ZINTEC programme was structured in such a way that teachers had to spend more time on teaching practice in the schools. This was a deliberate move to alleviate the shortage of teachers in the schools.

At the ZOU between 1997 and 2002 a total of 622 school heads graduated with a Bachelor of Education in Educational Management and a total of 325 students graduated with a Master of Education degree in educational management between 2001 and 2002 (ZOU graduation Handbook from 1997 – 2002).

### Quality, effectiveness and outcomes of distance teacher education at the ZOU

An issue that has continued to attract attention of open and distance learning (ODL) educators, scholars and researchers is how ODL institutions, whatever their structure, context or circumstances, can assess their own quality (Myrdal, 1994). Kangai, Bukaliya, Musika and Mapuranga (2011), note that some critical questions that continue to fuel the “distance education” quality debate are; what makes distance education an experience that would be described as one of quality? How can distance education improve the quality of the ODL it offers? How can an institution providing ODL assess its own quality effectively? Agreeably, all institutions providing ODL will have some existing systems and procedures for assessing the quality of what they do. But not all have addressed the assessment of quality within their organizations in a systematic way as much as they need to (Mertens, 2005). Challenges facing ODL institutions are that procedures for assessing quality can be ad hoc, piecemeal, unsystematic, too reliant on individual discretion, and standards of practice can be unnecessarily inconsistent and variable.

The ZOU is one of the few ODL institutions that have established a department responsible for quality assurance of its programmes. Quality assurance measures include (1) use of the course team approach in the production of learning materials, (2) external assessment of courses and modules, (3) the external moderation of question papers and examination scripts and adhering with ZIMCHE and ISO quality standards. To keep the study materials up-to-date, the modules are revised every five years and content reviewed by external assessors. Turnaround of assignments takes two weeks to give students’ feedback within a specified time. Quality assurance for
teaching practice is provided by the students teaching practice files, in which students record their activities and lesson plans and the assessment of teaching practice according to a common set of criteria plus a report by the student’s mentor to ZOU. ZOU teacher programmes, like those from conventional institutions, enrol students with 5 ‘O’ levels including English, Mathematics and Science. The programmes and materials are developed with the input of external assessors who are also involved in assessing students’ work and performance. The materials are of high quality and widely used outside the programme by schools and other training providers.

According to a top Zambian academic, Professor Richard Siaciwena (2011), teacher education at the Zimbabwe Open University was among the best in Africa. Siaciwena, a proponent of distance education, argues that ODL as a learning route provides better benefits to learners than conventional systems. Amongst such benefits is increased quantity, improved quality, immediate knowledge application and enhanced teacher skills and competence.

4. The fourth question was: “What are the advantages and challenges faced in training teachers through distance education?”

Advantages of distance teacher education

There are some noticeable advantages for distance teacher education programmes which should be highlighted or registered in a country experiencing a perennial teacher shortage such as Zimbabwe. Teachers pursue their studies without withdrawing their services, as it tends to be the case when serving teachers are admitted in a conventional face-to-face program. Teachers on training have an immediate opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills that they learn because they are in contact with students on a daily basis. This has an immediate impact on the quality of teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom. The increase in enrolment does not need a corresponding increase in teaching personnel. Distance education has made a big stride in ensuring women’s participation in teacher training at a higher level. The home study provision has enabled pre-natal and ante-natal mothers to pursue their studies without disruptions while students in similar conditions in conventional colleges tend to be withdrawn on health grounds. There is no doubt that distance education offers an opportunity to remove the gender disparities that have characterized a number of education systems. For most women, ODL helps overcome social constraints that limit their ability to travel to pursue higher education (Allsop, 2008). Distance teacher education provides for flexibility in the progress of student teachers because it is not tied to the fixed calendar of an academic year. For example, if the student teacher, for some reason, has not been able to complete courses, they may be allowed to take extra courses in addition to those uncompleted as they move to the next segment of the program. ODL provides for some flexibility in course entry and exit points, for self-study modules with negotiated deadlines, flexible start dates, the possibility of extended time, recognition of prior learning and exploration of the implications for tutors’ teaching beliefs and workload factors. If for some reasons, the student teachers withdraw from active studies, they can pick it up from where they stopped whenever they want to resume the studies. In the conventional program, the current practice is that such students would normally be made to repeat the whole year because there are no provisions for students to join the program at any other time rather than the beginning of an academic year.
Learning materials

One of the fundamental principles of distance education is the provision of opportunity for students to study according to their own learning pace or speed (Keegan, 1990). For this reason, ZOU ensures that every student receives all the course materials at the beginning of the program so that she/he can design his/her own study timetable in the light of the overall schedule of the program. Students receive the learning materials long before the dates fixed for tutorial programs. The intention here is to give students a reasonably sufficient amount of time to study the materials independently, work on the assignment questions and areas of difficulty before the actual date of the tutorial session.

Challenges of teacher development through ODL

Library services

It has been the primary challenge of distance education programs to provide current, relevant information for the distant students (Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992).

Perceptions of stakeholders

Out of the various problems facing distance education today is how it is perceived by the individuals involved in it. Despite the splendid role and increased popularity of open and distance learning, the quality of teacher education via distance education has been called to question (Dede, 1996) as cited in Peat and Helland, 2002). Different people perceive the advantages of ODL differently and their perceptions have influenced attitudes towards the acceptance and use of ODL in the system in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. The tutors, students’ and other stakeholders’ perceptions have an enormous effect on the successful implementation of distance teacher education programmes. People are having wrong perceptions about ODL because its benefits have not been adequately researched and documented. It is hoped the present will help counter these wrong perceptions.

Conclusion

Local and international experience has demonstrated that open and distance learning can be effectively used for teacher education. The evidence on effectiveness of teacher development through ODL is in fact robust enough for it to be adopted as a regular part of teacher education. Successful programmes have reported that students were motivated, that they benefited from good tutorial support, and that the logistics worked well (Perraton, Creed and Robinson, 2002). The record shows that distance-learning methods can be used for all four components of teacher education: (1) for general education, (2) to strengthen teachers’ knowledge of the subjects they will teach, (3) in teaching pedagogy and child development, and (4) as a guide towards good classroom practice. While the evidence from country experiences is limited it is generally positive: teachers can learn through these methods, and high success rates have been widely reported. Zimbabwe has long and rich experience with correspondence and distance education. Previous teacher development programmes that include Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course, Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Education in Educational Management and Master of Education in Educational Management have been very successful. The country can therefore, rely on this vast experience and the availability of distance
educators to implement a successful initial teacher development programme for the training of both primary and secondary teachers. The evidence on costs shows that open and distance learning can be at an economic advantage as compared with conventional education. The advent of modern technology is also of great advantage in distance teacher education.

**Recommendations**

The fifth question was: “What is needed for effective teacher education through distance education looking to the future?”

The case studies examined in the present research provide us with a significant body of knowledge to further our understanding about the use of distance teacher education for both initial and continuing training. Although the case studies are limited in their scope, they make it possible to draw some recommendations about the appropriate uses of open and distance learning in the training of teachers. On the basis of the present findings, effective distance education programmes would require the adoption of the following key strategies:

- Winning government support for distance teacher education,
- Setting up a directorate for the coordination of distance teacher education,
- Adoption of the partnership model in the training of teachers

**a) Role of the State in distance teacher education**

Just like any other teacher education programme, distance teacher education must be supported by government. Education in Zimbabwe enjoys a worldwide reputation for its high quality. This is achieved through a national system of regulation and quality assurance. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture is responsible for legislation pertaining to education. In Zimbabwe, the government plays a very significant role in teacher development. The government trains, hires and pays teachers. The key power held by the state over education is that of allocating the rights to supply credentials. To give degrees, an educational institution must be licensed by a body authorised by the state. This power of the state also applies to private educational bodies, and thus provides a strong unifying force on educational institutions. In Zimbabwe the ZINTEC programme was funded by the government of Zimbabwe with the material support from UNESCO (Chivore, 1989). At the ZOU, pre-service and in-service teacher development programmes eg. the Diploma in education (Primary), PGDE, BECD, BEDM and MEDM are fully supported by government.

**b) Organisation and management of distance teacher education programmes**

Distance teacher education programmes need to be well organized and managed. ZOU set up a department of teacher development responsible for coordinating distance teacher education. The department is responsible amongst other things for:

- Integrating and rationalizing teacher education systems with the aim of providing standardised, accredited training for pre-service and in-service training
- Implementing flexible open and distance learning methods, designing new roles and responsibilities for existing providers and transferring training and support tasks to the level of district, zone and school
- Conducting feasibility studies, audits and baseline studies to determine what institutions and expertise already exist and could be pulled into a delivery and support system
• Developing the delivery and support network that links all those involved with one another.
• Provision of student support as the key element for success.
• Enlisting commitment from all stakeholders.
• Quality assurance and quality control of all national teacher programmes.
• Student teacher administration eg. deploying students into schools, paying their allowances and looking after their welfare.

c) A clear understanding of the contexts in which teachers work and commitment to developing appropriate teaching and learning environments and providing ongoing support.

The environments in which many teachers have to work and learners have to learn are often not optimal for distance teacher education. Learning. This means a certain minimum level of school infrastructure needs also to be in place to make it possible for teacher development through ODL to be effective. Often classroom resources for teachers and learners are very limited.

d) Purpose-driven programme design informed by postmodern perspectives and the reality of a globalised society.

A teacher development programme offered through distance education should ‘practise what it preaches’. If the programme argues for a blend of independent as well as cooperative and collaborative learning approaches in the classroom then this is what should be valued in the programme in the way that in-text activities and assessment tasks are set and in the ways in which face-to-face or technology mediated contact is conducted.

e) Ongoing evaluation and impact analysis to inform programme review that is budgeted for.

Robinson notes that 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: “Most reports are largely descriptive, only sometimes including detailed statistics and often lacking well-evidenced findings on outcomes ... However, some problems arise specifically from the nature of distance education: its scale, distribution of learners, tutors and schools, range of stakeholders and partners responsible for different tasks” (Robinson 2003). This article argues for site-based assessment and support (which may require decisions about sampling strategies in large-scale programmes), a focus on quality of teaching against agreed criteria, the dovetailing of programme assessment and Ministry developmental appraisal processes and the use of data from such processes that leads to revision of programme design and delivery that is catered for in the programme budget.

f) Greater collaboration between the ODL institution, schools in which teachers gain teaching practice and the government.

Lack of collaboration and mistrust can lead to resistance that impact negatively on distance teacher education. Some resistance is reported e.g. in Zambia, Malawi and Gambia, especially where “allowances” are involved (Mattson, 2004). Distance teacher education is best implemented using school based training in the context of partnership. The ZOU partnership model involves the training institution (ZOU), the school and the government. Because of this partnership model, distance teacher education in Zimbabwe benefits from the cooperation and
support that exists between ZOU, other teacher education institutions such as colleges, schools and from government. There is a gradual integration and rationalisation of teacher education systems linking the Ministry of Education, universities, colleges, districts, resource centres, and local support. With so many role players increasingly involved in teacher development, there is need to guard against possible loss of coherence and cohesion.

For Zimbabwe, teacher development through ODL is relevant to solving four problems confronting schools, the teaching profession, and the Ministries of Education. First, Zimbabwe will continue to experience shortages of teachers because teacher numbers barely keep pace with rising pupil numbers. Second, female teachers are in a minority which, in a way, holds back the enrolment of girls. While gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary education, gender inequality continues in the tertiary education. Distance education can bridge this gap. Third, even where there are enough teachers, too many of them are undertrained. Many teachers have little more than secondary education themselves. Teaching methods are often old fashioned. Distance education can help upgrade teachers qualifications. Fourth, Zimbabwe needs to improve teachers’ jobs in order to cater for a changing society: inclusive education, education for democracy, education for the information age, Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics education (STEM), all these make new demands on the teaching force. It is therefore argued here that conventional teacher education cannot meet the ever increasing demand for new and better qualified teachers. Teacher development through ODL is the way to go.

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