

TRAINING TEACHERS AT A DISTANCE: PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) IN TEACHER EDUCATION The Zimbabwean Experience

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe like most developing countries continues to experience shortages in skills. One such area that has experienced skills shortages is education. This has resulted in governments and education institutions coming up with innovative ways to improve the training of teachers. Such innovative models include the Open & Distance Learning (ODL) model in the development of skills. In some instances, there has been a combination of the conventional model and the ODL model. The purpose of the study was to examine the different methods used in the training of teachers and the role of ODL in addressing skills shortages.

The study used the qualitative methodology and the case study design. The respondents were purposively selected. Data was collected through lesson observations, document analysis and open-ended questionnaires that were administered to senior teachers, deputy school heads and school heads. These gave a total of twenty respondents from different schools. At the same time twenty trainee teachers in different programmes with the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) were observed teaching and were assessed.

The study also examined views, attitudes and perceptions about the training of teachers. From the data it could be concluded that the model being used by teachers' colleges (2-5-2) was more inclined to ODL than the 'conventional' model, thus demonstrating that indeed teachers can be trained through ODL. Whilst there were mixed feelings about the role of universities in the training of pre-service teachers, it could be concluded that universities had a role in the training of teachers regardless of the mode of delivery they used. The study noted that the lack of resources and lack of understanding between different stakeholders was negatively affecting the success of the ODL model of training teachers at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).

Keywords: Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), teacher training, distance education, Africa

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Soon after independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe government adopted two modes of training teachers for primary schools. These were the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) and the conventional teacher education programme.

The former was a four year teacher training programme which was launched in 1981 with the support of UNICEF and the latter was a three year teacher training programme. The two programmes differed most in the mode of lesson delivery and areas of emphasis.

For the ZINTEC programme the emphasis was learning on the job and as such it served the purpose of alleviating the teacher shortage problem that was being experienced in Zimbabwe due to the expansion in education that resulted in phenomenal increases in the number of schools and pupils' enrolment. The conventional mode emphasized on trainee teachers acquiring the requisite theory and skills before they were deployed to teach. As such the ZINTEC trainee teachers spent most of the terms out in the field teaching as full time teachers and trainee teachers from conventional colleges went out to teach for three terms before they qualified and the rest of the terms were spent at teachers' colleges training to be teachers. In contrast, ZINTEC student teachers spent only sixteen weeks at college in the four years they were students

The ZINTEC initiative in Zimbabwe was not a new development in the training of teachers in Africa. There have been such initiatives in other parts of Africa. This was so soon after attaining independence in most countries in Africa. Cases in point are Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda among others (Peroaton, 2010). The ZINTEC programme ran from 1981 to 1988 and evidence suggests that there was a 80 percent pass rate and that there was positive evidence of classroom performance (Chivore, 1995) though comparative conclusions could not be drawn (Peroaton, 2010). Such developments epitomized the role of ODL in teacher training. These are innovative ways of addressing the shortage of skilled personnel in the field of education. However, the major concern is that if the innovative ways of training teachers such as these have been effective, why are they used as a 'short gun' approach to addressing the shortage of skilled personnel in developing countries. In Zimbabwe for example, the ZINTEC programme has been abandoned despite the shortage of trained teachers in the country.

We can only speculate as to why some countries have abandoned the training of teachers through ODL. One of the problems is that there appears to be concern about the quality of teachers produced through ODL. Shah (2005) noted that in the case of South Africa most teachers there were involved in distance education that enabled them to gain formal qualifications, but still lacked the requisite skills and competencies. There have been other concerns about the training of teachers in general and training through ODL in particular. ODL has been viewed as serving a number of purposes which include the following:

- That ODL can reach a greater number of students who widely geographically spaced.
- That is found convenient to adult learners who can learn and work at the same time.
- That it is found to be cost effective.
- That students can identify and develop job related skills and competencies.

There are a number of countries that have attempted to address the problem of shortage of teachers through training of teachers through ODL.

These include Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, India, Nigeria, South Africa, United Kingdom among others. Such ODL programmes have been funded by different sources, that included the government and students in some cases and donors in others.

Whilst there have been recommendations on the role of ODL in the training of teachers and its role on alleviating shortages, there are a number of questions that remain unanswered about the role of ODL in the training of teachers. These have much to do with the effectiveness and impact of the training, the delivery point, costs of teacher education through ODL and efficiency rate, its management, media and technology used (UNESCO, 2001). Unfortunately, there has not been much of an attempt to address these concerns in all the cases studied.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many questions have been asked about the the courses offered through ODL in many countries including Zimbabwe. A case in point was the suspension of degree programmes offered by the only ODL university in Zimbabwe. Such courses included the Master of Science in Counselling, Bachelor in Science in Counselling, Diploma in Education (Primary) and Diploma in Education (Secondary). These programmes were suspended by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) for their failure to meet the expected training standards among other issues. A public notice to this effect stated that: "In terms of Section 17 of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education Act, (Chapter 25: 27) read in conjunction with Sections 8 and 9 of the Manpower Planning and Development Act, (Chapter 28:02) ZIMCHE wishes to inform all stakeholders in higher education that the following degrees/diplomas offered by the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) have been suspended with immediate effect; Master of Science (MSc) in Counselling; Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Counselling; Graduate Certificate/Diploma in education (Grad. CE); Diploma in Education (Primary); and Diploma in early Childhood Development (ECD)". It must be noted that the diploma programmes cited above were pre-service training programmes for teachers. The inherent and implicit argument seemed to go beyond the issues of standards alone, but the argument that ZOU had no business in the training of pre-service teachers but should focus on developing teachers who have already been trained. Such arguments and problems as noted raise a number of questions about the training of teachers through ODL. The Zimbabwe Herald, 17 September 2012 had its headline story as "PSC rejects ZOU graduates".

The same article further noted that teachers who had attained a Diploma in Education from the ZOU were not being recognized by the Public Service Commission (PSC) which is the employer of public servants in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the article indicated that education officials preferred to engage O' and A' level school leavers as temporary teachers to ZOU Diploma of Education holders.

This raises a number of questions about people's perceptions of the training of teachers through ODL. Chief among these is the question: Can primary school pre-service teachers be trained through ODL?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which pre-service primary school teachers can be trained through ODL. It further examines the role of universities in the training of pre-service primary school teachers.

Research questions

In order to find answers to the main research question as cited above, the study raised three research questions which are as follows:

- What training methods are being used to train pre-service teachers?
- What are the views and perceptions of school heads, deputy heads and senior teachers on the training of primary teachers through ODL?
- Are there any differences in training between conventional training methods and ODL training methods of primary school teachers?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The training of teachers has become one of the topical educational issues in modern day discourse. Such questions have ranged from questioning the quality of the traditional and conventional means of training teachers to whether it is necessary to come up with alternative ways of training teachers. Noll (2005) notes that teacher education has consistently been under careful scrutiny. Such scrutiny has resulted in a number of recommendations. Kramer (1991) notes that recommendations on teacher education have included restructuring of the present system of training teachers and adopting an interdisciplinary approach to training of teachers. Despite the different training approaches advocated, teachers remain in short supply in most developed and developing countries. There is agreement in some quarters that the present system of training teachers needs reform as dissatisfaction with the education quality has touched on the training of teachers.

Major areas of concern in teacher education have been its knowledge base, the link between theory and practice, lack of class management skills and failure to develop support for powerful teaching skills. In addition to that studies of teacher performance in Zimbabwe have shown that the performance of newly qualified teachers was found lacking in Lesson Planning & Preparation, Class Management, teaching of Reading and Social Sciences (Samkange, 2012). Such findings concur with the study by Chivore (1990) who studied the effectiveness of the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) teachers in Zimbabwe. He found that they were ineffective in such areas as planning, class lesson evaluation, scheming, education with production, education and community engagement.

To ameliorate the problem of teacher shortage there have been innovative ways adopted to improve the quality of teachers and alleviate the teacher shortage. Such programmes as Teach South Africa and Teach for America have been initiated in South Africa and the United States of America respectively. These are programmes that are designed to prepare university graduates for teaching. Four separate evaluations have found that the Teach for America's 3-to-8 week summer training programme did not prepare graduates adequately for teaching as noted in Doll (2005). It was inadequate in many areas, which could be attributed to the short training period. Major weaknesses of the programme related to lack of subject specific pedagogy and limited exposure to a wide range of teaching methods and different test scores were found to be a teachers training issue rather lack of experience in the classroom (Fetler, 1999 in Doll, 2005). The inadequacies noted in some of the training programmes raise questions about the ability of the innovative ways of training teachers to address some of these concerns. There are at least two issues teacher education has to address.

These are the knowledge and pedagogical skills of the teacher produced. The subject-matter knowledge whilst it is a requisite for teaching is not adequate to produce the quality teacher that society requires.

Whilst subject knowledge has been found to be relevant in teaching and “an important factor in teaching effectiveness, it appears that its relationship to teaching performance is curvilinear; that is, it exerts a positive effect up to a threshold and then tapers off in influence” (Darling-Hammond, 2005: 388). Another of the two factors is the pedagogies of teaching and learning. How have trainee teachers been prepared in this area? Studies have shown that in terms of teacher education an interaction of the subject-matter with the pedagogical skill has an influence on teacher performance.

Approaches to training of teachers through ODL

A case study of nine countries by UNESCO (2001) came up with different observations and conclusions about the role of ODL in the training of teachers. Major observations were that ODL could be used to train both new entrants to teaching and experienced unqualified teachers as was the case in China and Nigeria (ibid). It was also noted that ODL can be used to develop skills of those who were already in the profession as was the case in Brazil and India. Further to that, ODL can also be used in curriculum reform and career development. The success of the programmes may be a problem to qualify, as success tended to be determined much more by retention rate than indicators of quality. On the same note, it can be noted that the University of South Africa has been offering teacher education programmes through ODL and such programmes have diversified to include pre-service teachers. A study in Brazil by Bof (2004) observed that training of teachers through ODL had increased the quality of classroom teaching. The positive aspects of the programme were that it was not overly theoretical as the approach struck a balance between theory and practice.

The garbage in and garbage out adage equally applies to training of teachers through ODL and any other model. This might be so as no distance learning system can exceed the quality of the people within the system (Burns, 2011). The experience from different studies indicates that the major differences in ODL models lies within the technology used, nature of learning, institutional settings and the degree of interactivity support (Fillip, 2001 in Burns, 2011). As noted by Burns (2011) ODL in teacher education has been used as pre-service teacher preparation method with well supported extensive face-to-face preparation.

Furthermore, Burns (2011) identifies different types of distance education by models of delivery. These include the correspondence model, audio-based models, televisual models, computer-based multimedia models, web-based models and mobile models. Examples of these models make use of the print, radio, broadcast television, video conferencing, interactive multimedia, computer mediated communication, online courses, virtual classes and hand-held devices among other examples. Teacher education models have undergone reform since independence in 1980 in Zimbabwe. The training of teachers in Zimbabwe has witnessed different programmes being run concurrently.

A case in point was the introduction of the ZINTEC programme already alluded to and the continued training of teachers through the conventional model. The model of training primary school teachers has since moved from the more theory focused model to the 2-5-2 model of training teachers. This model is currently used in Zimbabwe. It attempts to strike a balance between theory and practice.

The model represents the number of terms student teachers have to spend at college and on teaching practice. The first two terms are spent at college, the next five terms are spent on teaching practice and the last two terms are spent at college.

This model is biased towards distance education as student teachers spend most of their training time on teaching practice. It also makes use of the experienced mentors who have to provide mentoring to the student teachers attached to them throughout the five terms they are in schools. The supervision and assessment of the student teachers is done by school heads, mentors and college lecturers who make school visits. In addition to the assessment during teaching practice, students have to write assignments and end of course examinations for them to be awarded a Diploma in Education which entitles them to teach at primary school in Zimbabwe. For many years in Zimbabwe the training of primary school teachers has been the prerogative of the teachers' colleges which are associate colleges of the University of Zimbabwe. At one time the University of Zimbabwe was the only university in the country, but now the terrain has changed. There are now nine state universities and five private and church-related universities. The question is: Can all other universities be involved in the training of primary school teachers? To what extent can the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) as an ODL institution be involved in the training of teachers? It may not be easy to provide answers to these questions, but it is suffice to note that the shortage of trained teachers remains critical in Zimbabwe. The most affected areas are the least developed districts in terms of infrastructure, social development and communication.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative research methodology. This enabled the researcher to study meanings and contexts that were created in social interactions such as the training model and views and opinions about teaching practice. The methodology was found suitable as the study was dealing with data on attitudes, perceptions, meanings and the description of social reality (Berg, 1998). The study was concerned with trying to understand different stakeholders' perceptions about teacher education. The advantage of using qualitative research in such a study being that it enabled the researcher to study small units which generated rich data that provided a deeper understanding of the problem of teacher education. Data was collected from university documents on assessment procedures on teacher education, and through observation of trainee teachers on teaching practice, and the use of open-ended questionnaires.

The total number of student teachers interviewed was twenty. These were purposively selected on the basis of being in the second and third years of their studies. The study focused on the student teachers who were on the programme at the Harare region of the Zimbabwe Open University. Data was also collected from school heads who were conveniently sampled.

They were selected on the basis of having had student teachers on the ZOU teacher education programme. Data was also collected from senior teachers and teachers who had acted as mentors for student teachers. These were asked to evaluate the performance of students on teaching practice. Data was also collected through the use of class visits and observation of students who were still on the Diploma of Education programme with the university. The lesson observations focused on scheming, lesson planning, lesson presentation, class management & the learning environment, class records and personal aspects.

The first performance indicator was scheme of work. On scheme of work the assessor had to check on the following items; availability and whether they were up to date, subject schemes lay out, clarity of aims and objectives, matching of content to learners' levels, adequacy and sequencing of content, the relevance of evaluation comments.

Another performance indicator was Lesson Planning. Under this indicator, the assessors had to check on the clarity of objectives, adequacy and suitability of content, variation of lesson activities, resourcefulness, and quality of instructional media and depth of lesson evaluations. The the third performance indicator was lesson presentation. Within this indicator the following areas were considered; introduction, sequencing of learning activities, organization of content, questioning skills, motivation techniques, response to learners, vocal and body language, teacher-child interaction, child-to-child interaction and the effectiveness of educational media, use of time, pacing of activities, reinforcement and evaluation of learning, lesson closure and achievement of learning objectives.

As for the fourth performance indicator, student teachers had to be assessed on class management and the learning environment. Skills accessed under this indicator included the following: interaction with pupils, communication skills, management of routines, eliciting pupil cooperation and involvement, displays and learning centres and handling of problems.

The fifth performance indicator that the students had to be assessed on was class records. Under class records the focus was on the following skills: appearance and layout of the teaching practice file, skills & development checklist, class register, social record, inventory record, anecdotal record, needs analysis and health record.

The final performance indicator students had to be assessed on was personal aspects. The skills considered under this indicator were conduct and sense of responsibility, attitude and maturity, attire and appearance, level of self confidence, language use and voice projection. The student teachers were assessed in the different areas and awarded marks out of one hundred.

About the assessors

There were twenty student teachers who were involved in the assessment. These were found in the provinces of Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, Midlands and Harare. Although some students were outside ZOU Harare region, they had to be assessed by lecturers from the Harare region since they registered with the region. Two lecturers were involved in the school visits and assessments.

They are both in the Faculty of Arts and Education as lecturer and senior lecturer. One had a Masters in Education degree and the other had a Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree. One had thirty four years of experience as a teacher, school head, education officer and District Education Officer before joining ZOU.

The other had twenty seven years as a teacher, deputy school head and school head before joining ZOU. Their previous experience and qualifications show that they had been involved in the supervision, administration and management of educational personnel for a long time. Their experience came in handy in the assessment of students on teaching practice.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The university programme and time-tables indicated that the pre-service teacher trainees attended tutorials like all other students in the Faculty of Arts and Education. These were limited to three tutorials per semester. Each tutorial was divided into three sessions of two ours each. This would translate to eighteen ours per semester, thirty six hours per year and one hundred and eight hours for them to complete the pre-service training in three years.

The courses covered included theory of education, teaching practice and research. When asked to respond to the period of face- to- face interaction all the the twenty pre-service teacher trainees indicated that this was not enough for them as they were in most cases concerned with assignment dates much more than the knowledge gained through the tutorials.

On areas that they felt there should be some improvements, sixty percent of the students noted that the university had to improve on the lesson delivery mode and forty percent noted that there was need for residence courses before students can be deployed to teach.

On a similar note, all students expressed concerns about the deployment system for teaching practice. There appeared to be no clear arrangement with the parent ministry, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture on the deployment and engagement of the trainee teachers. As noted in one case the student had no school to do teaching practice as he had not been appointed as a temporary teacher. Similarly, all the the respondents noted that the time allocated for tutorials was not adequate. As noted in the time-tables, students attended tutorials for eighteen hours per semester.

When compared with the 'conventional' teacher education colleges the training model of the university was affected by a number of problems. It would appear that the university did not have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture as was the case with teachers' colleges. Teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe as noted earlier followed the the 2-5-2 model of training teachers. The five in the model demonstrates the terms students spend on teaching practice.

The ODL model of the university appeared to lack in clarity on the number of terms the trainee teacher would be on teaching practice, as they would only practice teaching when they had been offered temporary teaching posts. There was no guarantee that they would be offered temporary teaching posts throughout the year. It would appear that students were observed in the third year and/or final year when Teaching Practice appeared as a course in their studies.

They were expected to be under the supervision and mentorship of school heads and senior teachers for most of their training period. According to the Zimbabwe Open University Regulations (2007) the Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed) Primary was in three parts and "students will be on teaching practice throughout their study and will be assessed continuously. However, external assessment of teaching practice will be carried out in Semester 5" (p.62).

The regulations further suggest that the external assessment teams would be made up of university lecturers, college lecturers and education officers from the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. There was no evidence to suggest that the regulations were being implemented. This may be due to the problem of lack of MOU as noted earlier.

The assessment of students on teaching practice covered twenty students. The assessment reports were two from the university lecturers and one from either the head of department or school head. Of the twenty students observed on Teaching Practice twelve were on the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme.

These were students training to be secondary school teachers after acquiring university degrees. The second group of students assessed on teaching practice were doing the Diploma in Education Secondary (DES) and the third group comprised of five students doing the Diploma in Education Primary (DEP). The last two groups comprised of pre-service trainee teachers who had O'level and /or A' level academic qualifications. These are the entry academic qualifications for one to train as a teacher at teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe.

The lesson observations by university lecturers and school heads and/or heads of departments indicated that PGDE students were performing well in all areas observed. The areas were based on the performance indicators on the Practicum Supervision/Assessment Form. The form focused on six performance indicators. These were Schemes of Work; Lesson Plans; Lesson Presentation; Class Management and the Learning Environment; Class Records and Personal Aspects. The distribution of marks in relation to the performance indicators was fifteen, fifteen, forty, fifteen, ten and five respectively. All these aspects added up to a total of one hundred.

Out of the twenty students observed on Teaching Practice nine scored between 84 percent and 90 percent, thus passing with distinction, seven passed with a merit, thus obtained marks between 75 percent and 80 percent and four obtained marks between 54 percent and 58 percent. The highest scores were by students studying for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education. As noted earlier, the assessment was by at least two university lecturers and school head or head of department at the school. The marks of the university lecturers and school heads concurred in terms of the performances of the different students on teaching practice. The differences in the allocation of marks between the different assessors were negligible.

Perceptions on the training of teachers

School heads, deputy heads, senior teachers and mentors were asked about their perceptions about the training methods currently used by teachers' colleges and universities to train teachers. They all answered open-ended questionnaires. They were selected on the basis of having student teachers at their schools who were on teaching practice at the time of the study. They were all asked if they had had student teachers at their schools for the past five years. The essence of the question was to establish the supervision roles of the respondents irrespective of the student teachers' college of origin. All the twenty respondents from the different schools indicated that they had had student teachers on teaching practice from different teachers colleges in the past five years. On whether they had supervised students on teaching practice, seventeen noted that they had supervised students on teaching practice and only three indicated that they had not supervised student teachers on teaching practice.

The respondents who indicated that they had supervised student teachers were mostly school heads, deputy heads, Teachers in Charge (T.I.Cs) and mentor teachers.

The responses tended to suggest a collective effort in the training of teachers, where experienced teachers, deputy school heads and school heads shared their skills and knowledge with student teachers. This is important in the training and development of teachers as this provides on-the-job training through sharing with experienced teachers who were either mentors or supervisors (school heads).

Since the majority (85 percent) of the teachers, deputy school heads and school heads had supervised student teachers on teaching practice it was necessary to rate the performance of student teachers based on their supervision and mentoring of the students. One respondent noted that " they do very well and make preparations of their work in advance". This was supported by others who gave such comments as "quite good", "average good", "exceptionally good", "normal" and the "they are hard working and enthusiastic" to qualitatively describe trainee teachers' performance.

However, some respondents noted that some performed well whilst others were performing below the expected standard. Considering that the entry qualifications of students to teachers colleges is a minimum of five O' level subjects including English and Mathematics, the same minimum entry qualifications for those who are training as teachers at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), the question to be asked is: What would make a student teacher trained through ZOU different from those from teachers colleges? In essence, it is the same experienced teachers and school heads who have to spend most of the time with student teachers during training.

The third question sought to establish if mentors, senior teachers, deputy school heads and school heads were aware of the role that mentors had to play in the training of teachers in Zimbabwe. From the responses it emerged that all were aware of the role of the mentor. The roles included guiding, supervising, assessing, advising, and helping the student teacher develop relevant teaching skills.

This is important for skills training and development. The practice of making use of experienced staff is not a phenomenon peculiar to training of teachers.

The utilization of experience and skills at our disposal has become essential in manpower training and development. This has resulted in open education taking a predominant role as a result of its superior efficiency ('The state of Digital Educatl' Knewton.com Retrieved 24/10/2012).

Having examined the role of the mentor in the training of teachers, the study further sought to find out if mentors had been staff developed in their roles. Nineteen of the respondents indicated that the student mentors had received some training on mentoring from teachers' colleges. This constituted 95 percent of the respondents in the sample. Only one respondent noted that she was not sure. Such responses tended to suggest the collective effort between schools and colleges on trying to improve quality in teacher education. Respondents noted that student teachers spent more time on teaching practice than at college. They further suggested that the teacher training model in Zimbabwe was predominantly open education. In this regard, they were referring to the 2-5-2 model of training that is currently used by teachers' colleges.

As noted earlier, the figures represent the number of terms student teachers spend at teachers' colleges and at teaching practice. They spend the first two terms at college, followed by five terms on teaching practice at schools and the last two terms at college before graduating, as alluded to earlier. In relation to the training model discussed above respondents were asked to comment on the current model of training teachers.

As noted earlier, the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the training models currently in use. When asked to elaborate on that, they noted that they observed that such training was practical and relevant. However, there were suggestions that student teachers be in charge of full classes during their training. Secondly, there were also suggestions that student teachers be deployed to some areas that have a critical shortage of teachers during their training, especially in their second year of training. The third suggestion was that teachers' colleges should revert to the conventional mode of training teachers, arguing that students should have more time at college acquiring the requisite theory of education and teaching skills. On the same note, one respondent indicated that students should spend three terms at college, three terms out on teaching practice and the last three terms at college, thus suggesting a new model of training, 3-3-3 model.

On the role of universities in the training of teachers, the perception is that universities should leave the training of teachers to teachers' colleges. Most respondents saw the role of universities as that of supervising teachers' colleges, improving trained teachers professionally, assessment, supervision, monitoring courses and ensuring quality in the training of teachers.

Further to that responses also indicated universities should focus on offering degree programmes in specialized subjects. Responses appear to suggest that universities should have little to do with the direct training of pre-service teachers, but should play a monitoring and supervisory role. If universities can set bench-marks for teachers' colleges to follow, they should be able to implement the same bench-marks themselves. In that regard, there is no valid reason to stop universities from training teachers at any level, provided they have the resources and clearly defined departments to deal with issues of teacher education and training.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the data and perceptions noted above, a number of conclusions could be drawn about the training of teachers in Zimbabwe. It can be concluded that the training methods adopted by teachers' colleges are more inclined to ODL than the conventional methods of training. This can be supported by the data that the student teachers spent most of the time out of college without direct face-to-face contact with their lecturers.

It can also be concluded that school heads, deputy school heads and senior teachers at times perceived the training of teachers differently. Whilst most acknowledged that the current model of training teachers had more elements of distance education than conventional training, they differed on the role of universities in the training of pre-serviced teachers. Whilst some noted that universities can be involved in the direct training of pre-service teachers, others indicated that universities had to play a monitoring and quality assurance role. It also emerged that there were no major differences between conventional methods of training teachers and the ODL mode of training teachers. In fact, even the 'conventional' model of training teachers had predominantly distance education components.

On the basis of the above, the study recommends the following:

- That the training of teachers should not be confined to teachers' colleges, universities should be directly involved in the direct training much more than was the case at the time of the study, to ameliorate the problem of teacher problem of teacher shortage.
- Whilst the training of teachers through ODL is an innovation that has assisted with the training of teachers in a number of developing countries, it has to be handled with care so as not to compromise quality and standards. The training of teachers through ODL should be well supported by resources and modern technology. These should include e-learning, video-conferencing, radio and television broadcasting and the setting up of departments responsible for teacher education and training.
- Teachers can be trained through ODL, as even the conventional model of training teachers has elements of distance education, but there is need to increase the regularity of face-to-face interaction between students and lecturers.
- It is necessary to consider some of the suggested models of training teachers. A case in point is the introduction of the 3-3-3 model of training teachers. The model represents three terms at college, three terms at teaching practice and the last three terms at college.
- Universities in Zimbabwe have to be directly involved in the training of teachers much more than was the case at the time of the study.
- Those involved in teacher education and training have to take the role of mentors seriously and provide them with the necessary training if training of teachers through ODL is to be effective.
- The role of the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture and the Public Service Commission is important in the training of teachers through ODL. They are the employers and therefore have to be working together with universities during the training of teachers.
- Trainee teachers should be given full responsibility of classes during teaching practice, though they should be regularly monitored by mentors and school heads. Their deployment should cater for disadvantaged areas.

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