An Assessment of The Bachelor of Early Childhood Development Degree Programme in its Initial Stages at Zimbabwe Open University

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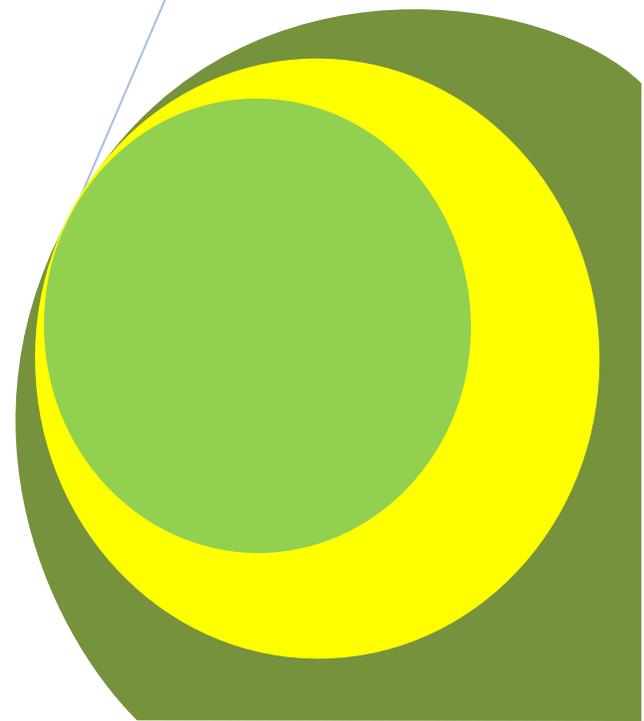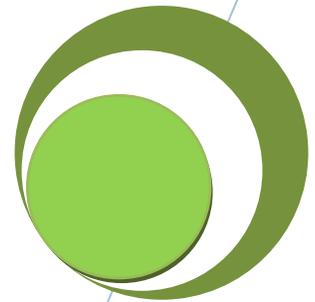
Research Article

An Assessment of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Development Degree Programme in its Initial Stages at Zimbabwe Open University

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ABSTRACT

The Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree (BEDECD) is a teacher development programme which was introduced for study at Zimbabwe Open University in September 2010 in response to the need for more ECD-trained teachers. BEDECD is four year programme. It had run for three semesters at the time the study was conducted. The study was conducted at Zimbabwe Open University, in Masvingo region to assess opinions of students and lecturers on the implementation of the BEDECD curriculum, in the stated period. Generally, students and lecturers were of the opinion that modules designed for the programme had been useful and had recent data and the design of the modules was of high quality. Pre-Teaching Practice Microteaching was viewed by most participants as helpful but micro-teaching was not accorded adequate time. However, participants were generally, unhappy about the delayed provision of some modules in each of the semesters. Students felt that tutorials were in most cases fruitful as tutors were thoroughly prepared but students reported that tutors did not employ any media that could have driven home ideas and concepts at stake. The study recommended timeous provision of curriculum materials and feedback on assignments, among other things.

Keywords: Sub-theme: Teacher Education and Professional Development or Curriculum Reforms and Implementations.

Early childhood development –is a broad term consisting of activities and experiences which are intended to bring about developmental changes in children

Curriculum materials –supportive learning materials such as modules, assignments, tutorial letters and courses

INTRODUCTION

Several modes of training are used to train teachers. Teachers can be trained full time at institutions where they are expected to be physically present most of the time. Teachers can also be trained through distance learning whereby they are physically separated from the training institution most of the time and are trained through use of a variety of delivery strategies such as modules, e- and contact tutorials. Zimbabwe Open University trains teachers through distance learning and one such programme is the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Degree (BEDECD).A study was conducted to determine the views of students and lecturers on the implementation of the BEDECD in its initial stages.

Background to the study

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is the only State Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Zimbabwe. There are four faculties offering services in ODL to students in Zimbabwe and those beyond the Zimbabwe borders. The faculties are faculty of Arts, Education and Humanities, Faculty of Commerce and Law, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Faculty of Science and Technology. The faculty of Arts Education and Humanities is one of the largest. The Department of Education offers more than ten courses , among which are ; The Master of Education in

Educational Management degree, Bachelor of Education in Educational Management, Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Education in Youth Studies Degree and Bachelor of Education Childhood. The Bachelor of Education Early Childhood degree was introduced for study at ZOU in September 2010 as there was a perceived need of more Early Childhood caregivers or teachers because like most countries in the world, Zimbabwe considers Early Childhood education as a right of every child. The programme is offered to diploma and non diploma holders. The minimum duration of the degree programme is six semesters and a maximum of sixteen semesters. BEDECD like all other ZOU programmes is implemented through open and distance learning (ODL) to youth and adult learners. The delivery strategies are mainly: *Printed modules*, *Face to face tutorials* and *Internet*

This development was also influenced by the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission (1999).The broad goal of the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood Development degree (BEDECD) is to produce a practitioner who is competent in managing Early Childhood programmes for the 0 – 8 years olds. It is designed to capacity-develop students to become effective teachers of young children through distance teaching and open learning. The vision of the department of education as regards the BEDECD programme, is of a student who is a creative and reflective thinker, (BEDECD Tutorial letter No.1p.2). BEDECD is a four year programme. In the first three semesters, the following courses are offered for study:

ECD 101   Historical and Philosophical Foundations of ECD
ECD 102   Sociological Foundations of ECD
ECD 103   Theories of Child Development
ECD 105   Learning and Development through Play
ECD 106   Health, Nutrition and Safety in ECD
ECD 104   Curriculum Issues in ECD programmes
ECD 107   Mentoring
ECD 109   Communication Skills
ECD 202   Professional Studies
ECD 207   Research methods
ECD 204   Language Arts in ECD
ECD 212   Media Science
ECD 206   Expressive Arts in ECD
ECD 210   Planning and Development of ECD Curriculum 'A" and'B" and Micro-teaching

There seemed to be some problems in the running of the programme in its initial stages such as delayed provision of modules. At the time the study was conducted the programme had run for three semesters only. It was against this background that the study was conducted.

Statement of the Problem

It seemed as if there were some problems in implementing the Bachelor of education early childhood degree in the early stages of its implementation at Zimbabwe Open University. The study sought to assess the implementation strategies of the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood degree courses in its initial stages.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- Was there adequate provision of critical curriculum materials to the BEDECD students?
- What are the students' and lecturers' opinions on the quality of curriculum materials used to support student learning?
- Were BEDECD tutorials conducted effectively?
- Was tutors` marking of BEDECD assignments effective?
- Was micro-teaching helpful to students as a preparatory tool for Teaching Practice?
- Were BEDECD courses relevant to the training and development of ECD teachers?
- What areas need improvement about the BEDECD programme?

Significance of the study

It was hoped that Early Childhood Development teacher trainers and programme leaders could use the study as a platform to reflect on their practices in training ECD teachers through distance education . It was also hoped that

some unveiling of ECD teacher training-linked challenges could be a basis for addressing them through efforts of training institutions. Researchers also hoped that insights gained through the study could stimulate further study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

The Zimbabwe Open University`s Bachelor of Education Early Childhood Development programme, in operation at Masvingo Regional Campus was identified for a situational case study. A case study enables probing deeply and analysing intensively (Best and Kahn, 1993). According to Tuckman (1994), a case study is where one singles out a unit for study. In this case the unit was the BEDECD programme being implemented at Masvingo Campus.

Sample

The target population were all part - time tutors teaching BEDECD courses as well as all the students in intakes 1 and 2.Only two part – time lecturers out of the four were sampled for participation, using the convenience sampling technique. The programme coordinator also took part and was interviewed. Out of the population of the 14 BEDECD students only twelve participated in the study. Students were asked to respond to the questionnaire after one afternoon exam. The two who did not participate indicated problems of transport, so they were hurrying to leave the exam venue.

Instruments

The researchers self – administered the questionnaire. The questionnaire had both closed and open – ended questions. A structured interview schedule was also used to obtain lecturers` views on the implementation of BEDECD programme in its early stages. The use of questionnaires and interviews enhanced methodology triangulation. So, some of the disadvantages of the questionnaire such as being not able to probe responses, were minimised through the use of the interview. Participant triangulation was made possible through the involvement of ECD students, their tutors and the regional coordinator of the programme.

Limitations

Since the study was just a case study of the BEDECD, findings of the research cannot be generalised to other new programmes at ZOU such as the Bachelor of Education in Youth Studies. The findings of the study cannot be generalised to other ZOU campuses, since the study was just a case study of the Masvingo Region although the picture may be a replica of what also transpires in other ZOU regions.

Delimitations

The study sought to assess ECD teacher trainees' and lecturer perceptions of the implementation of the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood degree only and at Masvingo Zimbabwe Open University regional campus only. Thus, the study focused on micro level implementation   in the initial stages of the BEDECD programme.

Conceptual Framework

An overview of early childhood development (ECD)

Wood (1990) defines early childhood as a stage from infancy through 3rd grade, that is, from birth to 8 years of age where children attain the physical and mental skills they will use for the rest of their lives. ECD is a holistic programme of education and care (learning new activities, knowledge and skills) focussing on the development of children between 0-8 years (Heckman, 2004 and Keenan and Evans, 2009). ECD is the formal teaching and care of young children .It provides the first transition from home when parents and children learn to separate for the first time.
        As a result of this age range, Cox , Granby, Horri and Morgan (2006) assert that typical early childhood settings have a set of 3 major programmes of specialised categories found in education settings. This categorisation is also obtaining in Zimbabwe in the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture. The categories are:

- 0-3 –infants and toddlers
- 3-4 ECD/A, 4-5 ECD/B
- 6-8 infant school (Grade1-3)

The period of early childhood development is a period of most rapid development and is a cornerstone for all future development (Heckman, 2004). Early childhood sees the greatest growth and development. It concerns all aspects of growth and development which include emotional, physical, social, cognitive/intellectual, and creative and health development. All these aspects above are part of a child's life which develop simultaneously and influence one another.

Importance of ECD

According to Heckman (2004), Cox,et. al. (2006) and Keenan and Evans (2009) some of the importance of ECD include the following:

- The period of early childhood (0-8 years) is developmental when children need the most care and support.
- Learning starts in infancy long before formal education and continues throughout life. Early learning begets later learning and early success begets later success. In the same vein, early failure is a comfortable bed for later failure.
- Early childhood interventions of high quality learning have *lasting* effects on future learning and motivation. Early quality interventions in children are critical until they reach school age – a time when it may be too late to intervene.
- Child development is a foundation for community development as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and a sustainable society. Thus, it is during the 0-8 years that experiences and interactions with parents, family, caregivers, and peers influence the way a child's brain develops and the kind of adult one becomes. This literature on the importance   ECD justifies effective tutoring of BEDECD students.

CURRICULUM OR PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

Essence of Programme / Curriculum Implementation

The term curriculum can be defined as a course or programme of study. It can be regarded as the planned course which is envisaged by the planners (Gatawa, 1999). Programme implementation entails putting into practice officially prescribed courses of study. According to Carl (1995 p.49) programme implementation is, "that phase during which relevant design is applied in practice." The process involves helping the learner acquire knowledge, skills, and ideas as stipulated in the course of study. It is the stage when a programme is put into effect. Tutors or teachers are the major programme implementers. According to Stenhouse (1979) the teacher is the key agent in curriculum implementation. Implementation takes place when the teacher / tutor, curriculum materials interact with the student (University Of Zimbabwe, 1995). Programme implementation is one of the stages that take place in the process of change. It is the stage at which anticipated changes are brought into reality.

Programme implementation usually takes place at two levels namely macro and micro – levels of implementation Mostert (as cited in ZOU Module BEDS 308,1995).Macro implementation takes place usually at the national level and it involves the application of policy and curriculum initiatives by those in authority such as policy makers and subject specialists. Micro level implementation is more localised than macro implementation. It is the level at which tutors, regional campuses and departments apply the educational programme.

Agents of Curriculum Implementation

Teachers and tutors determine and influence what and how students learn. Heads of institutions and departments usually are the key players in facilitating programme implementation for instance by performing their role as guides and supervisors in the implementation process.Learners occupy an important place in curriculum implementation. Their characteristics and needs influence tutors on how best to go about the implementing of the curriculum. For instance, in Open and Distance Learning, learners are adults. There are several characteristics of adult learners which tutors need to bear in mind when making decisions about programme implementation. Some of the characteristics of adult learners are that, they can and do learn, they are usually volunteer learners, they have extensive life experience, they have a problem of forgetting and have many roles to play (Knowles , 1990) .

Knowledge on such characteristics is influential in determining the manner in which programme implementation will be affected. Tutoring strategies to be used may be determined bearing such characteristics in mind.

Variables for Successful Implementation

For educational programmes to be successfully implemented on going interaction between programme designers and implementers is necessary. For instance tutors, programme coordinators need assistance and guidance as a new programme is being implemented. Interaction can be made meaningful if researches or assessments are carried out formatively as programmes are being implemented. Provision of support services enhances implementation of a programme. Support can also be given through programme monitoring. This can pave way for adjustments as implementation goes on. Relevant resources necessary for successful implementation need to be provided. Curriculum materials and adequate time need to be provided. Provision of human resources (e.g. tutors) is also another critical factor (Mapolisa et al, 2006). The current study sought to access the implementation of the BEDECD in relation to the provision of support services that are being provided to support its implementation.

Some Challenges in Programme Implementation

Economic challenges negatively affect the implementation of educational programmes.The economic situation in any given educational environment can easily affect the quality of programme implementation negatively. Hard economic times affect implementers and provision of resources and student learning as well. The inadequacy or non-availability of programme materials can affect its implementation. Curriculum materials need to be availed. These include books, modules teaching and learning media and effective tutors. The availability and quality of resource materials have great influence on curriculum implementation. Gatawa (as cited in Mapolisa et al, 2006) is of the opinion that the nature of the content to be learnt may act as a barrier to curriculum implementation especially if content is irrelevant and unrelated to the needs of students. Students need to perceive planned content of learning as worth to be studied. Related to these challenges in programme implementation the study sought to determine if there were any related challenges faced in the implementation of the BEDECD programme.

Tutoring and Peer Tutoring

Tutoring is one of the support services most ODL students need. According to Tait (2003) the challenge of high drop out rates are typically answered through the provision of tutorials. ODL institutions provide students' access to tutors to allow support. Tutorials take different forms. Some are media based and these are based on the understanding that well designed and well written learning materials can serve as good deputy teachers. According to Holmberg (1999) tutorial in print can stimulate conversation. The writer of material converses with the student-reader. The most common types of tutorials are contact-based and e- tutorials. According to Holmberg (2000) these correspond to guided didactic　conversation and are based on the awareness that human beings, although learning　individually, develop talking their ideas or concepts over with others. Tutoring in ODL is designed to bring an interpersonal element to the learning process, foster collaborative learning and support as well as to enrich print- based learning through a variety of practical and interactive activities. Through such purposes when students participate in learner dialogue they learn to argue purposefully and present their ideas rationally, learners enquire and critically evaluate knowledge presented by others and experience collective advances in knowledge Otto (1998). For contact-based tutorials to be successful tutors need some specialised competencies or qualities which include, sound academic qualification, interpersonal skills such as motivating, responding, empathy and attention to detail, commitment to students and their learning, creativity, computer and tutoring skills (Ngengelube et al, 2008 and Holmberg, 1995).It goes without saying that ODL tutors need to strive to use strategies that promote deeper learning and learning at tutorial session is best facilitated by non-lecture oriented techniques. Tutors in ODL should also explain the curriculum design of their courses and the expected contribution by students and importance of collaborative learning (www.asianjde.org/2009 v.7.2 Dimri.html). Tutors are also expected to assist ODL students acquire suitable study skills, develop assignment writing skills and examination taking skills (www.eaitlib). While tutoring is a noble student support service, it may be negatively affected by some factors, for instance, many students may fail to attend contact-tutorials. Due to this reality, evaluation of one's tutoring ought to be an in-built mechanism in ODL simulation. Peer tutoring is a　strategy which ODL should organise for students. Learners need support from other learners. Students can be a very useful source of knowledge and usually they are willing to share knowledge with other students.

Feedback

Knowledge on how ODL students are progressing in their studies for instance, on tasks and assignments development is quite critical. Assessment can be done using the traditional methods and e-assessments. Marked assessments are concrete ways of constructive dialogue that help student learn. Written and detailed feedback should be provided, specific errors of fact or misunderstanding ought to be corrected, the awarded mark ought to be

explained, strategies for improvement should be suggested and learner effort should be praised (Kyriacou, 1996 and, Petty,2000). For students to realistically be able to use marked assignment feedback, the turnaround time for marking should be short. Receiving prompt feedback in ODL is especially important for those students who do not live in big cities where connectivity, network system and accountability could be an additional determining factor for a satisfactory ODL, learning experience (Kerby, 2003). There are some challenges in some set ups in providing students feedback through e-assessment. There is a general lack of accessible modern mechanisms to assist tutors in many ODL institutions and many tutors fear that e-assessment will de-skill their profession (Kerby, 2003 and www.pandora-asia.org). In addition, e-assessment may prejudice students with little computer literate skills. There can be loss of data due to network failure and expert computer users could users could access, copy or manipulate answer scripts (www.pandora.asia.org).

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaire Data

Table 1: Information about respondents

Item	Numbers
Students	12
Intake	1 & 2
Sex	11 Females, 1 Male

Students' ages ranged from 33 to 43 years while their teaching experience was between 4 and 20 years. Most of the Yes/No questions were answered by all participants except questions 5, 6,8 and 9.

Table 2: Students' responses to Yes/No questions

Question	YES	NO
1. Did you get the tutorial letters for each of the courses you have studied so far?	10	2
2. Were you given assignment topics in good time?	10	2
3. Were assignment questions clear?	10	2
4. Were assignments challenging?	10	2
5.Were week - end tutorials timeous?	5	6
6a) Were tutorials well prepared by your tutors?	8	3
7. Did tutors explain goals or aims of each of your courses?	4	8
8. Were tutors` explanations clear?	8	3
9. Did tutorials develop logically?	6	5
10a). Did tutors involve you meaningfully?	7	5
12. Was there any use of media by tutors ?	2	10
	8	4
14a) Were you given adequate guidance in assignment writing?	3	9
15. Did you get quick feedback on your performance in assignments?	4	8
16a.)Was tutor marking of assignments helpful to you	10	2
17) Were ECD modules of any use to you ?	12	0
18. Were modules readable?	12	0
19. Were modules given to you in good time?	4	8

Students' opinions on the provision and quality of curriculum materials used to support learning

All the 12 students felt that generally modules were of high quality and useful with up to date information. Students further went on to identify some of the modules such as: ECD 103   Theories of Child Development, ECD 105 Learning and Development through Play and ECD 106   Health, Nutrition and Safety in ECD, ECD 104 Curriculum Issues in ECD programmes and ECD 202 Professional Studies. All the 12 students were happy that modules were readable and easy to follow especially with the activities that guided them in their preparation for examination .

Participants were happy that their examinations were course linked and their modules guided them in their preparation. Again they were happy that results were released early and this gave them ample time to prepare for their subsequent semester. However eight of the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the delays of some modules in each of the three semesters.This dissatisfaction relates clearly to need for programmes to adequately furnish learners with adequate learning materials (Mapolisa 2006). The students expressed the view that this was an area that needed improvement since some of them were based in rural areas where there were no libraries and internet facilities.

Were BEDECD tutorials effectively conducted?

Most students felt that tutorials were fruitful as tutors came thoroughly prepared for their sessions and their sessions developed logically. Those who came for the weekend school indicated that it was fruitful since they had the opportunity to get adequate guidance from their tutors. The majority of students (10 out 12) were of the opinion that no teaching and learning media were used during tutorials by tutors. A few students lamented the timing of these tutorials and felt that these should be moved to month end so as to reduce their movements since most of them came from afar. Eight out of the twelve students felt that two week-end tutorials were adequate while the other four did not. Maybe differences in opinion could be due to differences in ways students access other sources of data to compliment module data. Those who have access to ample data may find two week-end tutorials adequate.

Was marking of BEDECD assignments effective?

Ten out of twelve respondents agreed that assignment topics were given on time during registration. They further indicated that the assignments were very clear and they understood them, they had enough time to start writing their assignments before the due dates. Respondents agreed that the assignments were quite challenging and required them to read beyond the module. Marking was viewed as helpful by 10 out of the 12 students and some students indicated that they were corrected where they had gone wrong. Some even felt that suggestions and comments given by tutors assisted them in improving their next assignments. Such positive comments on tutor marking could be attributed to the fact all BEDECD tutors have a sound teaching qualification and they are able to apply principles of marking as they mark assignments done by ECD students.

Student views on Microteaching

Only six students who attended microteaching sessions were requested to answer questions on microteaching. When students were asked whether or not some stated skills were effectively covered in their microteaching their responses were as shown in table 3 and figure 1.

Table 3: ECD student views on whether critical teaching skills were effectively covered in your microteaching at ZOU

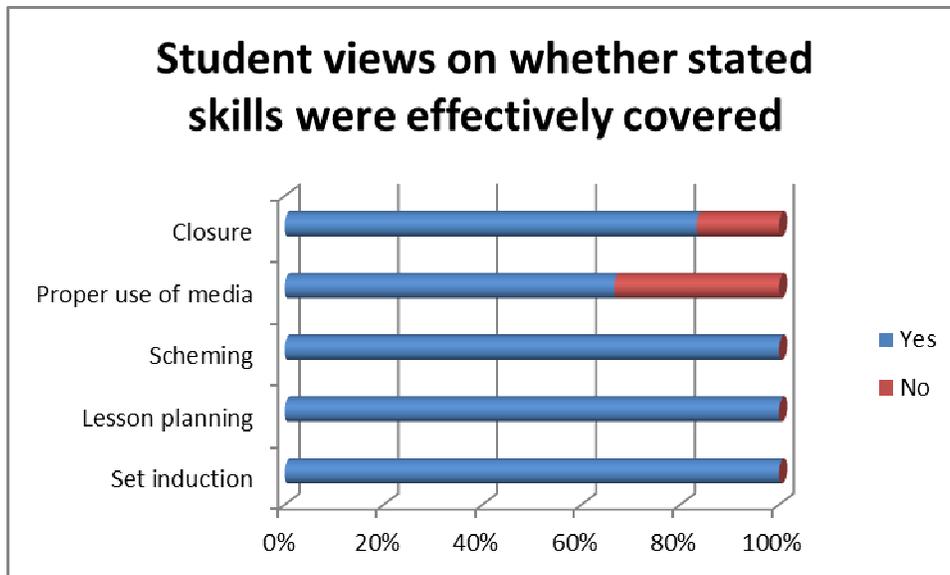| Skill	Yes	No
Set induction	6	0
Lesson planning	6	0
Scheming	6	0
Proper use of media	4	2
Closure	5	1

Fig.1

Data in Table3 and Fig.1show that students were of the mind that several critical skills were covered in their micro-teaching. All the six students were of the mind that set induction, lesson planning and scheming were effectively covered in microteaching. Four out of six felt that proper use of media was effectively covered while two other students thought otherwise. Five of the six students felt that skills of concluding lessons were covered effectively while one was of a different opinion. Student responses to a question which required them to state the benefits they derived from microteaching were as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: ECD student views on benefits derived from microteaching

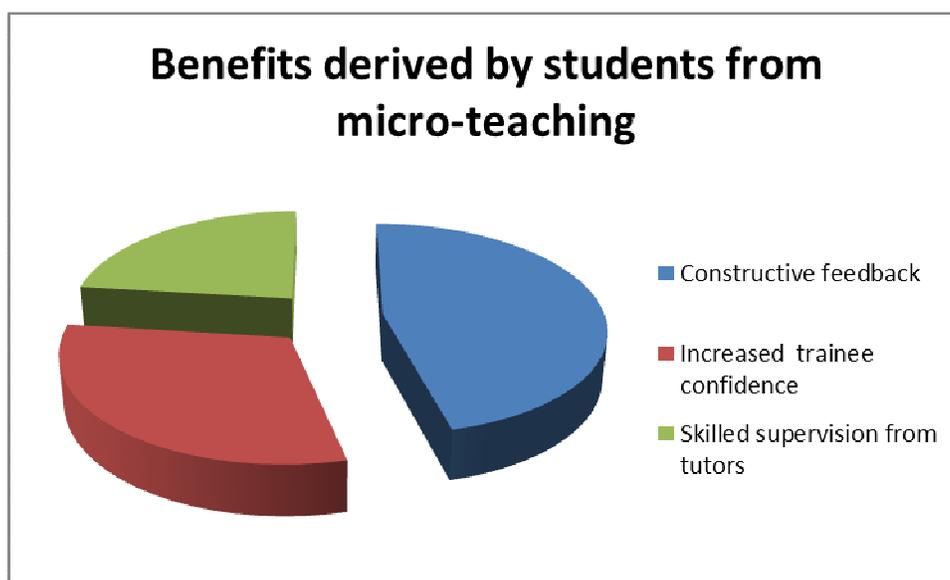| Stated benefit	No. of responses
Constructive feedback	6
Increased trainee confidence	4
Skilled supervision from tutors	3

Fig.2

The data in the Fig.2 and Table 3 depict that students felt that they benefited from microteaching by receiving constructive feedback, gaining confidence and getting skilled supervision from tutors.May be the obtaining of such benefits could be attributed to tutor teaching background and useful guidance. In actual fact the EDC tutors who participated in microteaching were actively involved in microteaching at some teacher training colleges where they worked full time. When ECD students were asked to suggest ways by which micro-teaching could be made more helpful to students, all the six students who responded to questions on microteaching made the suggestion that more time should be given to microteaching. This suggestions links clearly with Singh (2004) and Ananthakrishnan, (1993) who say the quality of microteaching can be enhanced through student re-teaching after initial presentation and video recordings and replays, which all require substantial amounts of time. Two students were of the feeling that presenters should be accorded time to evaluate their delivery before comments and suggestions are made by tutor and other students. Such a strategy could make presenters critical and this could help students to be objective of their performance even when it comes to lesson evaluation during their practicum. One student suggested use of both child-based and peer-based microteaching. Three students suggested use of videos .Again this suggestion supports Ananthakrishnan, (1993) whose view that use of videos in microteaching promotes reflection and evidence –based evaluations and suggestions. One student suggested attendance in microteaching periods by all ECD students. Attendance by all would benefit all students and some standardisation of expectations for Teaching Practice could be reached in the presence of all students.

What areas need improvement about the BEDECD programme?

Ten students felt that media should be used in their face to face tutorials .This suggestion can be linked to Knowles (1999) whose view is that one of the characteristics of adult learners is that they tend to forget quickly so maybe the ten students thought that use media and illustrations would also make them improve their understanding of concepts and consequently improve their remembrance of learnt content. Eight respondents felt that modules should be given on time. Three respondents felt that one exam paper should be written per day. Four students were of the thinking that the weekend school tutorials could also be increased so as to assist them go through the entire module with their tutors. Three of the students suggested use of a variety of delivery strategies including radio broadcasts and e-mail. The suggestion is quite in line with information in the BEDECD tutorial letter number one, intake 2, part 1: semester one which states the different forms of delivery modes by which ECD students at the Zimbabwe Open University are helped to study .

Interview Data

Provision of curriculum materials

When the two part-tutors and the BED ECD programme co-coordinator were asked whether there was adequate provision of curriculum materials for the two intakes of the BED&ECD students, the opinion of the three was that curriculum materials were being provided fairly adequately. All the three cited the provision of modules, assignments and tutorial letters. According to the regional co-coordinator, tutorials had handy information. "The tutorials welcome students to each semester, given guidelines on registration procedures, courses on offer per intake, coursework assignments, scheme of assessment, guidelines on academic writing, Preparation for examinations among other things". Due to economic hardships the campus does not reproduce each of the tutorials for each student and students are encouraged to meet costs of photocopying and according to the tutors when tutorial letters are availed at weekend tutorials, most students do not photocopy them. Delayed provision of some modules was a problem at times for instance in the first semester of 2011, the provision of the ECD 106- Health Nutrition and Safety was delayed. When the programme coordinator and the two part-time tutors were asked to give their mind on the quality of BED ECD curriculum materials, their point of view was the modules were of a very high quality and so were the tutorial letters. According to the programme coordinator principles of module writing were taken on board in the writing of modules. Unit objectives were action based, content was relevant and detailed and activities were well thought out with high order questions. Some of the modules that were cited as regards high quality were the ECD 104 Curriculum Issues in ECD programmes and ECD 103 Theories of Child Development and ECD 202 Professional Studies in ECD.May be the high quality of modules could be attributed to the fact that sometimes modules are written by a team of authors and that some searches were made on the web as evidenced by reference lists which include URL`S, accessed on the web. Tutorials letters were said to be of high quality also, as they were informative and give much of the information and advice that distance learner needs. According to the programme leader, "Tutorial letters are an effective tool by which BED ECD student get much of the support they need." In the opinions of the two tutors and coordinator assignment topics were of high order and students had room to choose from two opinions. Two assignments per course per semester were considered adequate by tutors. The two tutors and the coordinator were

of the opinion course content covered, so far, was relevant to the training and the development of the ECD teacher. Thus the general views on the provision of curriculum materials held by the tutors and the programme coordinator are generally the same as those expressed by most students. No programme can survive without the support of materials for implementation. Chimedza (2005), posits that there is need to address the timeous delivery of all learning materials-modules, tutorial letters, exam time tables, readers, handbooks, assignments, among other things.

Tutorials

On whether tutorials were effectively conducted, the regional coordinator said that most BEDECD tutors delivered well prepared tutorials. Tutors did not just rely on data in modules but used other sources, including the internet. In the supervision of tutorials, the methods used were participative as evidenced mainly by group discussions and in some isolated cases peer tutoring was witnessed. This point was also raised by some students who pointed out that they were involved through group discussions. During most tutorial sessions, learner attendance was quite satisfactory with eight students attending in March and nine students out fourteen attending tutorials at the beginning of May in 2011.However in the first semester of 2012, microteaching was only attended by six students. Students got further support service when some tutors assisted them with issues related to academic writing and the overview of courses and reading lists other than those in the modules. It may be that some lecturers assisted students with academic writing skills because a few students were of the mind that they got help of this nature. Nonetheless, the programme regional coordinator and the two tutors expressed the view that no media were being used in tutorial sessions. This opinion was also expressed by the majority of students. Maybe the lack of media use could be attributed to the general view that concrete media is not necessary for adult learners but on the contrary media drive home key learning points and they are still useful to adult learners especially when they are covering new learning content. Maybe the other factor contributing to lack of use of media is that although some resources such as OHP`s and power-point are available at the regional campus no tutor has been keen to use them. In addition, one of the part-time tutors expressed the opinion that students' learning could be further enhanced by incorporating the use of internet and e-learning. A similar view was given by some three students.The two tutors made the observation that some students did not attend tutorials and these were likely to miss out on some critical issues.

Marking

On this aspect, only the regional coordinator of the programme was interviewed as the coordinator has access to students` marked assignment before they are dispatched to the learners. According to the regional BEDECD coordinator, tutors` marking was one area in which she delighted. She said that marking was very well done by all BEDECD tutors as it was communicative and thorough. This efficiency in marking by the part-tutors could be attributed to the teacher- training qualifications which all the BEDECD tutors hold and their commitment to students` welfare. Be that as it may, in the three semesters covered by the study, feedback for the first assignment could not be provided before students wrote the second assignment in each of the courses. So according to the BEDECD coordinator, feedback on students` performance in the first assignment of each course was not timeous enough to provide help to students before they attempted the second assignments. When asked what factors might have contributed to the delay in feedback, the coordinator was of the mind that some of the causes could be institutional and student- linked. In the case of the institution, there is usually too small a time space in between the writing of the first and second assignments. This observation may have influenced the opinion by some students that feedback on marking was timeous. In some instances, students register or enrol quite late and at times they fail to beat the deadline to submit first assignments and special provision is made that both the first and second assignments are handed in at almost the same time.

Areas needing improvement

Tutors and the coordinator proposed the following:

- Timeous feedback on performance in assignments
- Use of media in tutorials
- Use of e-mail and e-learning as other delivery strategies
- Using peer teaching as a strategy
- Quick provision of modules

Some of these suggestions were made by students also.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the questionnaire and interview data, it was established that in the three semesters that the BEDECD programme had been running, some modules, tutorial letters and assignments had been adequately provided to the students. However due to some problems, probably economic, some modules were not availed to students at the time of registration. Tutorial letters, though with very critical information, were not availed to each student and students faced financial problems to photocopy them. Modules and tutorials were viewed by students, tutors and programme coordinator as of high quality and quite readable. Tutorials were by and largely viewed as effective but lack of use of teaching media was the key criticism raised. There was also the view that the nature of delivery strategies could be more varied than it was, to include elements of modern technology. Tutors` marking was viewed by the research participants as effective as it was communicative and therefore helpful to students. However feedback to students on performance in first sets of assignments was often not timeous as in most cases students wrote the second sets of assignments prior to receiving feedback on the first assignments. Opinions expressed by ECD trainees and tutors on the implementation of the ECD degree programme have some bearing on views expressed by Knowles (1990), Mapolisa et al (2000) and Ngengelube etal (2008) who express the view that several factors, such as tutor quality and provision of resources have a bearing on the quality of curriculum implementation.

The researchers` recommend the following:

- provision of modules to students at the time that they register or enrol
- tutor use of teaching media to enhance learner understanding and remembrance of rather difficult concepts
- use of video recorders to give more meaning and life to micro-teaching
- more sessions of microteaching as Teaching Practice preparatory activities for ECD students.
- clarifying to students of the goals and objectives of each of the courses on offer per semester by each tutor
- more deliberate use of e-learning as one of the modern delivery strategies

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