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Implementation of Open and Distance Learning Programmes in Primary Teacher Education in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The Department of Teacher Education (DTE), through its affiliate teacher training colleges has mandated the roll out of open and distance learning mode in its programmes. This preferred critical path is intended to assist trainees with the needed mental, emotional and material support during their period of Teaching Practice. This case study examined the implementation of Open Distance Learning (ODL) in a primary teacher education college in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe. Mixed methods research approach was used in this study in which case study and survey techniques were employed to understand the way in which quality is assured in the provision of student support. The study used a random sample of 80 student teachers and 30 lecturers to obtain information for analysis and interpretation. 5 heads of departments were selected purposively to contribute to the study. The findings of the study were that most student teachers are deployed to rural-based schools with low access to the internet, making fruitful study a challenge. It was also established that the modules supplied to student teachers when going out to schools are of academic importance although their quality and selective coverage of the curriculum hamper intended academic growth. The study recommended that sensitisation programmes be instituted to change the mind-sets of people towards positive use of technology for quality Open and Distance education delivery.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on the provision of distance learning in education. It deliberately ignites conversation pertaining to the requisite support materials and services for student teachers on teaching practice, particularly those in resource constrained environments. This study also inspires new thinking regarding the use of blended instructional methods to improve the quality of teachers.

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1. Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has since its genesis in the 1960s evolved to become the option of choice the world over. Its escalating appeal has grown to threaten the dominance of the traditional approach in serving educational provision, especially in higher education. Student teachers are persistently pressured to participate in distance learning or educational technology (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2013). Traditional systems have infused distance learning practices and programmes in ways that have resulted in new organisational structures and learning arrangements in educational institutions. Primary teacher education in Zimbabwe has adopted a 2-5-2 mode of training, that is, student teachers spend the first two terms of training on-campus, then proceed on teaching practice in the schools for five terms, then return to colleges for the final phase of revision and examination. It is during the off-campus training phase that ODL, with its growing new trends of practice, is implemented. The study, therefore, examines the nature of delivery of these practices and programmes in order to establish the success of this mode of educational provision.

ODL refers to an educational strategy involving quasi-separation of the learner and teacher in time and space (Belawati & Baggaley, 2010). Open learning is viewed as a philosophical construct that intends to remove barriers and constraints that hinder access and success in quality lifelong education (Otukile, 2011). Therefore, ODL implies practices that enable access to learning with no or minimum barriers with respect to age, gender and time limitations (Joy Job & Nundoo-Ghoorah, 2011). Student teachers are presented with an enabling environment that seeks to serve educational attainment in a sustainable, flexible and cost effective model.

The composition and qualifications of lecturers have a strong bearing on delivering quality distance learning. This educational approach calls for a shift in perspective from a traditional teacher-centred to a learner-centred environment (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [AACSB], 2007). The emphasis is on designing and facilitating learning, rather than organising and delivering of instruction to student teachers. Student teachers are actively involved rather than being passive recipients (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2013; Ferreira & Venter, 2010).

Implementation of ODL programmes requires new technical and pedagogical skills (AACSB, 2007). Student teachers in their dialogue with themselves and interaction with peers endear academic engagement with especially skilled lecturers. Institutions are, from time to time, called upon to relook at the requisite skills and experiences of their lecturing staff to ensure quality outputs and processes. Lecturers need to be specialists in such areas as creation of course goals and structure, creation of learning materials and experiences, delivery of instruction and assessment of learning. They are expected to have the capacity to discern strong and weak areas in student learning, and to address these in ways that allow them success at the “centre stage” of learning. It is also important that ODL be driven by a human resource with high levels of respect and credibility (Rabah, 2015).

Innovations in the wider spectrum of distance learning delivery, is part of the centre piece for targeted performance standards. A teaching strategy that uses complementary application of lecture presentations and technology-based media is preferred. However, this operational stance needs to take cognisant of targeted learning objectives and learning styles (AACSB, 2007). A creative teacher can systematically combine the two

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paradigms in ways that enhance achievement and effective service offerings. High levels of performance in ODL tend to be premised on the nature of learning interactions that occur during the instructional process. According to AACSB (2007), interaction opportunities need to be availed to student teachers with instructional personnel, and with other student teachers. While face-to-face interaction is beneficial for individual student teachers, it can be hampered by problems that manifest as a result of a mismatch between theory and practice (Newman, Olle & Bradley, 2011).

ODL as a growing phenomenon also advocates for the production and use of resource materials consistent with both individual and group learning methodologies. A balance has to be struck between individual student teachers and activities done in interaction with other people (Belawati & Baggaley, 2010). Interaction of learners and subject matter occurs as they read and write assignments (Khoro, 2011). It is the nature of presentation of content of study in the documents which causes student teachers to discuss content with themselves (Holmberg, 1986). These learning packages may comprise written modules, tapes, CDs, DVDs and other referral materials. Khoro (2011) further advises that modules should be written as though the writer were actually talking with the student in a face-to-face interaction.

ODL places additional motivation and discipline on student teachers (AACSB, 2007). Student teachers are expected to take full responsibility for their own learning (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2013). In fact, they are placed at the centre of the learning discourse. They again, need to learn to exercise greater autonomy and own independence in terms of time, planning and carrying out individual study (Bhalalusesa, 2001; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). This perception emanates from the view that the bulk of study performances are done off-campus. This mode of educational provision also avails a certain degree of flexibility in carrying out some tasks, further making greater demands for student motivation and personal planning.

A positive orientation to study requires the support of institutions. Various kinds of learning support may be provided by institutions such as tutorial services, organised study groups, library access, academic advisement, financial services and access to learning resources (Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). The modules, which are pivotal to distance education, need to be comprehensive and possess a long term relevancy in order to inspire better student performance. Three crucial aspects through which the effectiveness of modules is assessed for student use include the level of language used, practice activities developed and content organisation (Khoro, 2011). A well-produced study material, if used by a motivated and disciplined student, fosters the attainment of quality outcomes.

Providers of ODL should be able to identify student teachers' needs and problems, and adopt a pro-active stance in monitoring and addressing challenges that student teachers encounter (AACSB, 2007). However, it is prevalent that some student teachers fail to access learner support facilities as a result of separation by distance (Fozdar, Kumar & Kanan, 2006). This implies that institutions have a dual role of ensuring learner support that is accessible and relevant, as well as to encourage student teachers to participate in and use support systems that ensure quality learning.

Organisations and departments that offer support services should be involved in early planning as their cooperation can be critical to programme success (AACSB, 2007). Arrangements for services such as inter-institutional library loans, admissions,

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registrations, student consultations, dispatch of materials and other related services require appropriate timing and proper conduction in accordance with predetermined plans. Study materials and accompanying guiding documents require distribution to learners before they leave institutions to their stations of deployment. Delayed or non-provision of study packages to student teachers on teaching practice hampers efforts to realize their potentials.

Technological use is also considered one single vital instrument for distributing ODL in non-traditional ways. In developed economies, ODL institutions mainly utilise "technologically delivered education" or Information and Communication Technology (ICT) approaches, while institutions in developing countries rely on printed materials as their primary medium of instructional delivery (Seeletso, 2015). An implementation of a varied mix of these techniques in distance learning practices and services appears critical in enhancing continued learning improvement.

Institutions in developing countries have, differently, moved to embrace ICT in ODL even though this process is largely at the formative stage (Ferreira & Venter, 2010). Access and participation by student teachers in those courses is still relatively low. This suggests that institutions still have a challenge to socialise and educate student teachers, lecturers and the society on the use of computer based technology for ODL business (Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). ICT permits the use of synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction, which affords students to learn as individuals as well as teams. The use of these modes in combination with face-to-face instruction has created what has been termed blended teaching and learning (Seeletso, 2015). The use of the blended mode of instruction therefore, has created a new dimension in the teaching of student teachers while on teaching practice. The concern borders around the way in which student teachers access education for the ultimate purpose of attaining quality outcomes. In this view, both internal and external stakeholders have raised reservations pertaining to the quality of teacher educational provision through ODL. This study, in the main, examines the implementation of ODL in colleges of primary teacher education.

1.1. Theoretical framework of study

This study is underpinned by Holmberg's theory of Interaction and Communication. It is commonly referred to as the "guided didactic conversation" (Schlosser & Simonson, 2009). The theory highlights the importance of independent study which leans on the elements of separation and time. It assumes that Open and Distance Learning serves well individual student teachers that do not prefer face-to-face instruction. The student teachers have a greater choice on the content of study for the greater good of society. This mode of study increases student access to learning opportunities, equity and lifelong learning (Aydemir, Ozkeskin & Akkurt, 2014). Intense enquiry is viewed as an individual activity that is facilitated through interaction with various forms of media, inclusive of print and technology. This is meant to enhance student understanding and the subsequent quality of education (Khanna, 2017). The use of technology further assists in the effective management, development and dissemination of information to student teachers in ODL systems. This theory maintains that ODL works to address several constraints which relate to time, financial, administrative and family problems (Parvin, 2017). This theory resonates succinctly with the implementation of ODL programmes in the education of student teachers on teaching practice. This requires students to continue to be provided with teaching materials as well as being supervised to enhance the quality standards in regard to post-training teaching readiness,

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2. Methods

Research methodology is an operational framework within which facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen more clearly (Maloba, 2012). A mixed research approach of the case study design was used in this study. Mixed methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques to collect and analyse data that provides answers to research questions. This strategy allows for the collection of data that can be presented through themes and statistical analysis (McKim, 2017). The case study design is intended to afford the researcher to study contemporary phenomena within its real-life context and to use multiple sources of evidence (De Vilbiss, 2014). Case studies also offer richness and depth of information not usually offered by other methods (Goodrick, 2014).

Multiple methods of data collection for analysis and interpretation were employed to strengthen the validity of research findings (Zohrabi, 2013). The use of many methods or triangulation is a strategy for confirming findings through use of multiple perspectives. This involves collecting data at different times using varied sources, methods and agents (Wilson, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2009; Hendricks, 2006). A *random-purposive* sampling technique was employed in this study. Systematic sampling was used to select 30 lecturers in teacher education from a population of 104 and 80 third year student teachers from a class of 175. A total of 24 questionnaires were returned by lecturers, giving a response rate of 80 %; 14 males and 10 females. Student teachers who returned questionnaires were 60, constituting a 75 % response rate. These comprised of 33 females and 27 males. Focus group discussion was conducted with 5 purposively selected Heads of Departments members (HODs) to obtain qualitative data on services and practices that are meant to ensure quality delivery of ODL. These were selected on the trust of the researcher that they possessed rich information on the implementation of ODL in primary teacher education. Maree (2007) concurs that the personal judgement of the researcher is critical in establishing the worthiness of participants for the study (Maree, 2007). HODs were contacted by phone to arrange for the discussion. Their email addresses were used to send them consent forms which they signed and returned. The FGD was conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams. The discussion began by highlighting that they had the freedom to participate in the study and that the provided information would be treated as confidential. The meeting lasted for an hour and was conducted during lunch break to avoid disrupting business programmes. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 24 and qualitative information was interpreted using the thematic method.

3. Results

3.1. Assessment of knowledge levels of lecturers

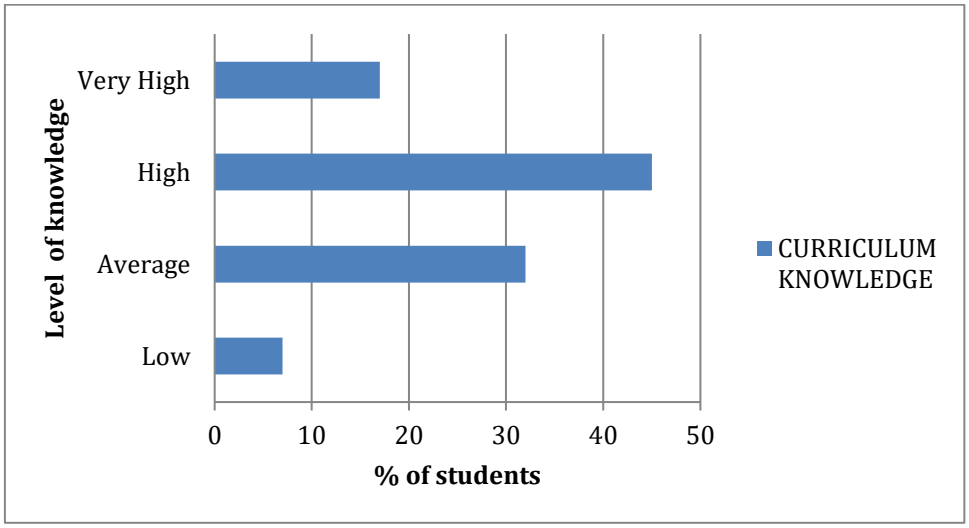
Participants generally confirmed that lecturers hold requisite knowledge to develop pre-service teachers for teaching practice. Seventeen lecturers were positive on this aspect while 7 objected. This represented 79% and 21% respectively. The expertise of lecturers was seen to be evident in the classroom management skills that some student teachers displayed during their teaching practice. The instructional strategies taught to student teachers covered peer teaching and micro-teaching practices conducted before actual deployment to their schools of practice. A two week home-based teaching programme was provided to student teachers at the end of the first term of the first residential phase to enable them to try marrying of theory with practice prior to actual deployment. The

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use of micro teaching, peer teaching, readiness tests were part of the ways to check the levels of curriculum teaching by lecturers in various subject areas. The responses from the focus group discussion with the HODs also corroborated this positive assessment of lecturer skills. They said "We *give them a test which covers a lot of areas in which they have been involved".* Participants added that "*We give them the right or adequate knowledge for them to go to schools. We make them prepare teaching kits which they are going to use during teaching practice*

The rating of lecturer knowledge from the questionnaire responses of student teachers showed that 4 awarded low, 19 average, 27 high and 10 very high. Those who rated the skills as high and very high constituted 52%. This evaluation is in perfect alignment with that of both lecturers and the HODs, thus further confirming the availability of requisite skills of lecturers in the matrix of attempting to enhance quality in the provision of distance learning to practicing student teachers. The Graph 1 shows the ratings by student teachers on curriculum knowledge of lecturers.

Graph 1: Level of curriculum knowledge of lecturers



While the knowledge of lecturers is confirmed in Graph 1, 32% of the participants gave an average rating and 7% a low rating, representing 39% student sample that was not content with the expertise of lecturers in curriculum delivery. It was also suggested that improvements be made on student-lecturer rapport, agreements on documentation, increased face-to-face interaction between student teachers and tutors during both on and off campus learning as these aspects are also key in ensuring success in teaching and learning. However, lecturers revealed that they would perform much better if they were placed in departments of their own specialisation, instead of situations where they were used as relief or assists in under staffed subject areas. This practice was seen as contributing in compromising lecturer performance in imparting knowledge and skills to student teachers.

3.2. Student-lecturer contact time on teaching practice

Five percent of the participants considered the amount of contact time to be poor, while 52% indicated it as average. 38% said contact time was good, leaving 5% who viewed it as excellent. A total of 57% of participants were not satisfied with the amount of contact time student teachers had with their supervisors while on teaching practice, showing a

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dent in the quest to improve the delivery of ODL at the college. Student teachers need quality time with lecturers especially during post observation conference for a critique of the classroom instructional discourse. In addition, off-campus student teachers require coaching, advice and encouragement on matters pertaining to their education and training. Lecturers should afford student teachers an opportunity to consult them on issues relating to their schools of practice and even on research works supervised by other lecturers. The student respondents bemoaned the 'fly past' strategy of supervision that colleges sometimes adopt as it shoots down efforts to enhance distance learning outcomes and services.

Responses from the lecturers sampled on the benefits student teachers get from visits by lecturers while on teaching practice revealed some agreements with the views of student teachers on the amount of face-to-face contact they received from lecturers. No lecturer pointed out a low rating on benefits that student teachers receive from lecturers. 8 student teachers gave an average rating while 15 marked it as good, thus representing 33% and 62% respectively. Only 1% indicated that the benefit was excellent. On areas for improvement, lecturers noted the need to iron out contradictory demands that are usually made to student teachers by lecturers and school-based supervisors. There was need also to capacitate all lecturers on effective supervision of curriculum areas such as Early Childhood Development, the Languages and practical subjects. Improved benefits to student teachers could be realised with regular distribution of teaching practice supervision visits, as this reduces instances of student laxity, while sustaining qualitative practice. Institution of workshops in clusters for student teachers was further viewed as a strategy to increase student- lecturer contact time, which is a valuable way to extend knowledge acquired through ODL. Off-campus, student teachers require more tutorial contact time with lecturers who are supposed to mark, assess and give feedback on their assignments on time as a means to consolidate quality performance.

3.3. Distance learning assistance from mentors

While colleges have a mandate to ensure student teachers are adequately assisted in their learning opportunities while off-campus, school-based supervisors can play a huge role in their education. Responses of student teachers showed that mentors assist them in conducting and writing research reports. Mentors play the role of inducting student teachers in the teaching business, covering areas on instructional delivery, social life of the school, documentation, media production and distance learning assignments. Their role is informed by the essence of partnerships that are ever needed to exist between colleges and schools to afford complete support to student teachers while on teaching practice in schools. Mentors complement the role of college lecturers and, as such, have formed a crucial cog in the delivery of quality ODL in primary teacher education. However, there is need to continuously update mentors on developments in the educational arena to ensure they keep abreast with changes, and so assist in ushering quality distance learning.

3.4. Perceptions of lecturers on staff development programmes

Lecturers perceived staff development programmes as necessary and useful tools in the roll out of distance teaching and learning. Staff development practices ensure the provision of new knowledge and experiences for effective instructional delivery. Participants noted that these could be implemented on teaching methodologies,

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professionalism, classroom management and conflict resolution. The Early Childhood Development programme (ECD) was cited as the target area requiring attention. This arises from the fact that most lecturers in the teacher education department have no formal training in the course but are expected to proceed on teaching practice to assess and supervise student teachers. Participants concurred that staff development programmes on ODL issues are long overdue to a majority of new lecturers. Few individuals confirmed their attendance to such programmes, with ECD being the area which organised many skills development programmes for the subject lecturers. The responses from the focus group discussion revealed that while some lecturers could have been trained in processes and activities that are part of distance offing at college, more activity is still required in that direction. One participant said that: *"Some of us we didn't have a formal way of learning that, we usually do that through experience" FGHOD1.* This was however contradicted by FGHOD5, who said that "*There was something that was formally done, but I think there is need for training".* These views indicate a need to workshop lecturers on the preparation and supervision of student teachers on teaching practice to ensure the quality of the programme is improved. The college can invite facilitators from the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) in Harare to schedule staff development workshops through the Flemish Office for Development and Technical Assistance (VVOB), which conducts a majority of programmes for both lecturers and student teachers at the college.

3.5. Adequacy of resources for distance learning

The importance of resources for use by student teachers during teaching practice cannot be denied. Student teachers need to be provided with a complete set of policies and guidelines on essential materials to have and on how to conduct themselves during the process. A teaching kit containing the various needed documents is also required of them before proceeding to their schools of teaching practice. The module is also one document that the Department of Teacher Education mandated colleges to provide to student teachers before they are deployed to schools of practice. The responses from student teachers indicate that 48 (80%) agreed that they were given subject modules while 12 (20%) denied receipt of these modules. Student teachers revealed that the modules were helpful in assisting them to write assignments as they contained relevant content, and in appropriate language. However, some observed the lack of detail in some of the modules which were also selective in covering topics in the syllabus. The Health and Life Skills and Information and Technology (IT) subject areas were cited as areas whose modules needed a quick relook in terms of currency and relevance of information.

Lecturer responses from the focus group discussion supported the revelations by student teachers. These showed that modules are given to student teachers when going out on teaching practice which they are to use as they respond to assignments. Two respondents said: "*When student teachers go out to schools each subject area produces a module and gives them for use*" *(FGHOD5).* This was confirmed by FGHOD3 who said "*as they go out to schools, we give them modules to assist them as they write assignments.* While responses from the questionnaires given to lecturers corroborated the above views on the provision of modules to student teachers, these revealed mixed reactions on their involvement in module production. Lecturers from English, Theory of Education and Ndebele departments denied involvement in the production of modules for student teachers. Some expressed limited participation in module work. Others revealed inconsistencies in lecturer participation in module work, particularly with regard to the

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stages of module production. While some lecturers contributed items for inclusion, others brought in chapters, while still some claimed to have compiled the modules. These aspects of involvement tend to inform the nature of assessments that are made by participants on the suitability of modules for implementation of ODL in primary teacher education.

3.6. Provision of learner-support services to student teachers

Current teaching and learning strategies demand student teachers to be provided with adequate materials and services to ensure the creation of student friendly environments. Institutions should enact student-support services to ensure learning opportunities are increased to achieve quality outcomes. Questionnaire responses from lecturers indicated that regular consultations were conducted to assist student teachers to deal with learning problems that arise as they work in schools. Student teachers make regular personal visits to college to submit assignments, make research consultations and to attend to emergent issues that impact their practice. Vacation courses are also conducted midway the duration of the training programme to allow student teachers to come to college for tuition and to address challenges they experienced while out in practicing schools. Access to the internet and library services was widened to cater for the needs of off-campus student teachers as well. This saw the opening hours of the college library being extended, while computers and internet services increased.

The Guidance and Counselling service which research has supported to increase academic achievement and opportunity should be provided enough space in learning institutions. Lecturers, as they visit student teachers on teaching practice, are expected to offer counselling services. They are supposed to assist student teachers in a number of educational matters. However, participants in the focus group discussion indicated lack of proper training on counselling to give them relevance in that area of student learning. FGHOD2 said: "*I don't think we have had really training, it's more of, as a group, using our discretion on how best we can help the students".* This shows the lack of a coordinated code of giving assistance to student teachers while on teaching practice. Lecturers rely on discretion and intuition to deal with student issues and this may work against the desired framework for delivering quality ODL.

3.7. Communication technologies used

Communication plays an essential role in the transmission and sharing of information. This is especially true for student teachers doing their courses through ODL. 60% of the student teachers reported using print media in their interaction with college. 31% relied on print and telephone services, while 7% employed telephone, print and e-mail. E-mails and voicemails and fax options were each reportedly used by 1% of the total participants. Participants never used web and video conferencing, internet radio and message board forums as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Communication technologies used

TYPE OF TECHNOLOGY	PERCENTAGE
Print	60%
Print and Telephone	31%
Telephone, Print & Email	7%
Email	1%

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Voicemail & Fax	1%
Web & Video Conferencing	0%
Internet Radio	0%
Message board forums	0%

It is interesting to recall that media usage can be interpreted with regard to the geographical location of schools. An increased reliance on print media is indicative of the nature of the school to which student teachers are deployed for teaching practice. Most student teachers were in rural and satellite schools (78%) with limited or no internet services, making it impossible to use services that demand internet access. The college still had to move forward to enhance the quality of ODL through taking on board web and video conferencing, internet radio and message board forums, among other e-leaning services. With internet being perceived as the driver of distance learning programs, the issue of quality provision of learning at the college becomes of interest.

4. Discussion

Lecturers play a prominent role in student learning. This is evidenced in the evaluation of their skills and knowledge. It is expected that lecturers who are highly skilled and knowledgeable in a given subject will do better than those with skills deficits. The attitudes, values and dispositions of lecturers also contribute to the overall teaching abilities and achievement of student teachers. The set of pedagogical skills and approaches used in the delivery of instruction helps to shape student performance. Current teaching strategies favour the use of student centred teaching styles which enforce active participation. This can be made possible if teaching takes cognisance of student characteristics and learning styles. Micro teaching and peer teaching strategies tend to be handy when preparing student teachers for teaching practice as they receive opportunities to try out theories they learnt about while being assessed by colleagues.

One of the ingredients for successful ODL is the provision of interactional opportunities to student teachers. There should be a sound interaction among an individual student, student teachers, instruction and lecturer. Attri (2012) observes that while ODL provides opportunities to previously unreached sections of the population and it may contribute to loss of student motivation as a result of reduced face-to-face contact with lecturers and peers which is a hurdle to distance learning. Student teachers have to enjoy open access to instructional sources, which may be in the form of printed materials, CDs, radio programmes and other technological services. Saglam (2011) posits that technology can activate the learners' sensory channels which are used to receive information and in the process rekindle interest for academic achievement. In fact, the first impulse in implementing ODL should be to find those courses that can easily be translated into online, video or digital formats (Minnaar, 2013). Student teachers do not learn in isolation and it is critical that they should be group interactions to enhance sharing and validation of information. Opportunities have to be availed where student teachers can meet to share and exchange experiences. Cluster workshops are an ideal platform where student teachers in a given cluster can be grouped to discuss nagging issues, especially of academic, social and economic nature. The use of vacation programmes is also a good platform to bring the entire group of student teachers together. This allows issues which are common to the whole group to be tabled and addressed for the common benefit of student learning.

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ODL thrives on increased access to quality material resources. In developed countries this mode of learning is mostly hinged on technological media while in the growing economies, the use of printed media is the norm. Student teachers learning away from their lecturers and institutions need to be provided with learning packages that provide access to knowledge in a manner that approximates lecturer instruction. The learning process has to be simplified, well-structured and adapted to the learning abilities of student teachers (Stefanc & Mazgon, 2012). Colleges of teacher education are mandated to supply student teachers with a teaching practice kit containing rules and policies as well as modules. The modules are expected to adequately cover all the curriculum areas in good language, organised structure and with appropriate practice activities. It is also important that the modules should be availed to student teachers early in their period of deployment so that they can be used for research and the writing of assignments. Content should be the same for all student teachers but examples, activities and experiences should match their individual needs, experiences and expectations (Attri, 2012).

Institutional leaders have to be pro-active in ensuring student teachers access and succeed in their learning. In addition to teaching, lecturers need to assist student teachers with services that embrace counselling and extended support to those who may lag behind in mastering some skills. These counselling services are believed to compensate for the separation of lecturer and student in the system and to help solve the queries that develop over time (Attri, 2012). It has to be instilled in student teachers, that among other things, distance education seeks their motivation and autonomy. ODL requires student teachers to be responsible for their own learning. This means that the planning, organisation and initiation of learning rest with the student. De La Harpe and Radloff (2015) state that student teachers have to be motivated to learn and be positive about themselves and their learning. They must also manage their learning through planning, monitoring, evaluating and adapting to various learning situations. This role, which in essence, is played by lecturers and school supervisors, is key in the advancement of the ODL agenda in teacher education. This is because student teachers have to find motivation for their learning despite being deployed to schools that hamper learning such as those located in deep rural communities.

5. Implications

The article has foremost, implications for practice. The results of the study would inform teacher education administrators of the great need to plan and thoroughly prepare for the implementation of ODL programme for student teachers on teaching practice. This involves expanding the training of both student teachers and lecturers on internet access and use to enable a seamless implementation of e-learning. Similarly, the marking of student teachers' assignments and research works should be done on soft copies to cut on costs of physical travel that student teachers incur to submit and collect academic work. Staff development programmes and workshops should be conducted regularly to appraise lecturers on needed skills and competencies to deliver quality ODL to student teachers. This would ensure that sound mechanisms are instituted to develop modules which contain current and relevant information. There must also be a commitment to harmonise policies and guidelines that lecturers and school-based supervisors use to assess the work of student teachers as this bolsters the desired partnership which is critical for achieving quality ODL. Vibrant guidance and counselling services need to be put in place to deal with problems that might emerge to impede effective teaching and learning. It is also imperative that all lecturers be deployed to their subject of specialty

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and make sure the distribution of learning materials is done before student to proceed to their schools of deployment.

6. Conclusion

From an analysis of the collected data, the study concluded that the use of internet service for student teachers on teaching practice is very low. This is apparent for students deployed to schools that are geographically remote, such as those in rural and peri-urban settings. The said environment denies both lecturers and student teachers access to effective communication. This impedes the processing of the work of students inclusive of sending documents, assessment and receipt of feedback. Some lecturers also experience challenges in executing professional duties due to lack of vibrant staff development practices. This emerged despite a show of commitment by the college to improve the performance of student teachers on teaching practice by striving to provide them with requisite manual learning materials. The study concluded that there is lack of alignment of college and school expectations which causes student teachers to experience difficulties in knowing which of the institution's rules and policies should take precedence. Furthermore, Guidance and Counselling services were found to be subdued to help to improve the performance of student teachers in the teaching-learning process. Finally, the status of some of the modules used by student teachers required a review as they partially covered the syllabus with out-dated content.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics clearance provided by the Research Ethics Committee of BAISAGO University. All protocols for conducting research that involves human participants were observed. This also entailed participants consenting to participate in the study.

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Conflict of Interests

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