



African Virtual University
Université Virtuelle Africaine
Universidade Virtual Africana

AVU POLICY BRIEF

AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AFRICAN VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

Research & Practice in Open, Distance & eLearning

Policy Brief Number 2014-08

Toward a more student-centered mode of teacher training in ODL

Issue at-hand

Teacher training in Africa is regarded as inefficient partly because of widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The focus for some time now has therefore been on how to improve the quality of teacher training and increase the number of teachers in Africa. However, this has proved difficult, possibly due to economic reasons and the high cost of teacher training. One of the suggested solutions to this problem is to use open and distance (ODL) mode of learning as it would scale up teacher training and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

ODL operates without the establishment of traditional teaching and learning institutions and is increasingly viewed as one of the most viable, innovative and competitive ways of providing education services to large groups of learners. Consequently, many countries, especially in the developing world, have adopted ODL as a cost effective way of training large numbers of teachers. Teacher training programs delivered through ODL use a combination of short residential instruction and distance learning mode. Learning materials used in ODL include modules in the subjects (learning content), activities, self-study materials and self-assignments. Despite the positive contributions of ODL in expanding access to higher education in Africa, and especially in teacher training, there are still issues concerning its implementation and students' perception of the type and quality of support they receive in ODL programs. This was the focus a study by Grace Banda and Elias Kaphesi presented at the 2013 1st International Conference of the African Virtual University. Using the case of a teacher training college in Malawi, the study sought to identify issues concerning the implementation of ODL teacher training programs based on student teachers' perceptions of the on-campus and off-campus components of the programs, as well as the type and quality of support given to the students.

Recommendations

Based on the perceptions of student teachers' in Malawi, the study notes that ODL mode of teacher training can be strengthened in the following ways:

- Combine college training with field study and practice so as to give students a chance to practice what they learn during face to face sessions;
- Provide students with adequate teaching and learning resources in a timely manner and ensure that they also have access to a wider range of media used in ODL;
- Enhance students' support system to enable them focus more on their studies e.g. provide post-program support, ensure timely payment of student allowances, and improving the quality of food and accommodation during residential sessions;
- Increase the time allocated for face to face learning component of ODL programs in order to make them more effective and allow learners to have more in-depth coverage of content;
- Equip teacher development center libraries with books and study materials to complement the ODL modules.
- However, in adopting these recommendations, it would be important to pay attention to the following general potential pitfalls of using ODL programs as highlighted by Banda and Kaphesi in their study:
 - Students may have problems comprehending course information that is technical, quantitative or scientifically oriented;
 - Problems may be difficult to resolve because course expectations are often not clear, and because of the physical separation between the instructor and student;
 - Instructors are not able to modify lecture plans on the basis of moment to moment feedback from learners, which may affect how a student experiences the ODL environment;
 - The overall student learning experience may be negatively affected due to limited interaction with instructors.

Implications

The study of students' perceptions in ODL has implications for learner support and for the overall satisfaction of students in these programs. Better outcomes can be realized for ODL if institutions are more responsive to students' concerns and perceptions:

- More effort should be made to improve the field based component since the residential component was rated better and more useful than the field based component.
- Student teachers in ODL should receive adequate professional support through effective mentorship and supervision by committed field supervisors who have appropriate ODL skills.

- Teaching workload should be reduced to give student teachers in ODL more time to study and do their assignments. This includes addressing the shortage of staffing in schools that leads to student teachers having high teaching loads.
- Other challenges to be addressed include delays in payments of students' allowances; delays in distribution of study materials; and inadequate time for face to face training.

Conclusion

Whereas some educational stakeholders might raise concerns about why and how ODL teacher training programs are currently being implemented, these programs are still considered an effective, innovative and cost-effective means of scaling up and improving the quality of teacher education and training in Africa. The results of this study suggest that despite the challenges, students perceived ODL as a useful mode for training primary school teachers. Successful implementation of ODL for teacher training can be achieved through political support from the government e.g. through adequate allocation of financial resources.

Reference

Paper presented at the 2013 1st International Conference of the AVU, Nairobi, Kenya, under the session on *Distance Learning & ICTs*.

Title: Student Perceptions of Open and Distance learning mode for Initial Primary Teacher Training in Malawi: a case of Lilongwe Teachers College

Presenters: Grace. M. Banda (Lilongwe Teachers College, Lilongwe) & Elias Kaphesi (University of Malawi, Blantyre) Malawi.

Policy Brief prepared by Tom. O. Ojwang'

For more information, please visit AVU's Website: <http://www.avu.org/avuwweb/en/>

African Virtual University| Université Virtuelle Africaine
Cape Office Park, Ring Road, Kilimani
P. O Box 25405 – 00603, Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: +254 20 2528333; +254 20 3861458/59

Working Across Africa

Beyond Technological, Language and Cultural Barriers

www.avu.org; <http://oer.avu.org>

Policy Brief Copyright © 2014 by African Virtual University

Published in the framework of the AVU Multinational Project Part II,
funded by the African Development Bank

Kindly refer queries to
Research & Development Unit at submissions@avu.org