

QUALITY ASSURANCE EFFECTIVENESS: PERCEPTIONS OF  
STUDENTS AND LECTURERS ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE  
MECHANISMS EMPLOYED IN THE PGDE PROGRAMME AT  
ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

ROSEMARY NGARA\*

VERONICA MAKUVARO\*\*

SIMUFOROSA MAGWA\*\*\*

ABSTRACT

At the time there was no meaningful economic growth in Zimbabwe most of the graduate youth found themselves joining the teaching profession .Consequently, at Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU),there was a sharp rise in the student enrolment in the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE).The notable rise in student teacher enrolment in the PGDE programme was also attributable to the demand made by employer of teachers that all teaching staff should have a teaching qualification.At ZOU the sharp rise in the numbers of students studying the PGDE programme presented some problems in the effort to quality assure the programme. The study was conducted to determine lecturers' and student views on the ways in which the quality assurance mechanisms were viewed as effective and not effective. Lecturers and PGDE students were purposively and conveniently sampled to take part in a case study which was conducted in the Midlands Region of ZOU.Questionnaires and a focus group discussion were used to generate data. The study established that several mechanisms were in place to quality assure the PGDE programme. Nonetheless while some of the mechanisms were opined as being effective in providing ways for further improvement, contact tutorial time was viewed as inadequate and Teaching Practice examining as lacking the external aspect by sister universities. The study recommended extension of tutorial time and external examining of the Teaching Practice component of the PGDE programme ,*inter alia*.

**Key words: quality assurance, mechanism,**

\* ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

\*\* MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

\*\*\* GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

## 1.1 Introduction

Zimbabwe Open University(ZOU) educates teachers through open and distance learning and one programme at ZOU, which educates and develops teachers, is Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). A study was carried out to determine views of lecturers and students on the quality assurance mechanisms which are used to quality assure the PGDE programme.

## 1.2 Background

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is state-sponsored and has the mandate to advance, transform and transmit knowledge through a distance and open education system. There are several objectives of the ZOU quality management system among which are to “provide quality” teaching, learning and novel learner centered ODL teaching approaches and to “design market driven programmes” [4:16]. The Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme has been on offer at ZOU for quite sometime. During the rather harsh economic conditions experienced in Zimbabwe, and due to some competition from other State universities offering the same programme, enrolment for study in the PGDE programme was quite low. However since 2013, the enrolments of students pursuing PGDE have risen significantly. In 2013 the Midlands region enrolled nine students and in 2014, 64 and in 2015 in the first semester enrolled 252 PGDE students. Some factors attributable to the rise in enrolment figures in this programme include the requirement by the employer of secondary school teachers that all teachers should have a teaching qualification. At ZOU the PGDE programme is offered to degree holders whose fields of specialisation give the provision to teach two secondary school subjects. The PGDE programme runs for one and half years (3 university semesters). Printed modules and face to face tutorials are the main delivery strategies employed in helping PGDE students to learn through Open and Distance Learning. The subjects include foundational courses in education, Teaching Practice, among others. As PGDE enrolments, since January, 2013 increased by each semester there seemed to be some problems presenting themselves in the implementation of the PGDE programme, among which, is the delay in the provision of some modules for some of the courses and failure to effectively conduct T.P preparations for the large intakes. It was against this background that this research was carried out.

### 1.3 Review of related literature

In a study titled “Quality tutorials in ODL: Exploring experiences of ZOU students” it was established that the organisation of tutorials was considered of high quality by students but the absence of some tutors compromised on the quality of tutorials and that the economic hardships affected the quality of tutorials negatively [2]. The study also found out that lecturers used the tutorial method when their students preferred the exposition method [2].

A study titled “An assessment of the BECD programme in its initial stages at ZOU” established that in the first three semesters that the BECD programme had been running, some modules and tutorial letters had been adequately provided to the students but probably due to economic hardships some modules were not available to students at the time of registration [3]. Modules that were available and tutorials were regarded of high quality. However, lack of use of teaching media in tutorials was the key criticism raised [3]. Tutors’ marking was regarded by students as communicative but feedback as not timeous.

While these studies by [2], and [3] cover issues of quality, they do not cover mechanisms of quality assurance wholesome, in relation to the PGDE programme, which the current study endeavored to do. The study by [2] focused on the quality of tutorials per se. In this study focus is on quality assurance mechanisms and their effectiveness in the PGDE programme.

### 1.4 Statement of the problem

In trying to offer market driven programmes such as the PGDE programme, there seem to be some challenges that can affect negatively the quality of the whole curriculum implementation and consequently quality of the programme. The study sought to determine PGDE student and lecturers’ opinions on the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms which are employed to quality assure the PGDE programme at Zimbabwe Open University.

### 1.5 Research questions

The following questions guided the study:

- Which quality assurance mechanisms are employed in trying to quality assure the PGDE programme?
- How effective are the quality assurance mechanisms?
- In what ways are the quality assurance mechanisms ineffective?
- What impediments are there in trying to enhance quality assurance in the PGDE programme?
- How could the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms which are employed in the PGDE programme be improved?

### 1.6 Research methods and methodology

#### Research method

The qualitative method was used to carry out the study. Most qualitative research deals with people's individual and collective thoughts and perceptions [4]. In this study focus was on how PGDE students and lecturers viewed the effectiveness of quality mechanisms employed to quality assure the PGDE programme. One of the characteristics of qualitative study method is to investigate the current status of phenomena. It was the primary goal of this study to investigate the quality assurance mechanisms employed in quality assuring the PGDE programme at ZOU. In addition, the study was a case study since it involved students and lecturers at the ZOU Midlands regional campus only.

#### Population of the study

The target population for this study was PGDE students in their second and third semesters in 2015, all the full time lecturers in the department of Education at the Midlands Regional Campus and all part-time tutors in the PGDE programme.

#### The Sample

Three full time lecturers in the department of education were purposively sampled to take part in the study via a focus group discussion, since the researchers believed that the full time lecturers in the education department had knowledge of understanding about the PGDE programme and particularly knowledge about quality assurance mechanisms that

were being used to quality assure this programme. The part-time lecturers in the PGDE course were also involved in the study since they had knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon being studied. Four part-time lecturers were sampled through convenience sampling. As part-time tutors returned student marked assignments at the end of the first semester in 2015, they were requested to complete an open questionnaire. Forty students filled in a questionnaire at the time they finished writing their exams in the first semester of 2015.

### Data generation instruments

The instruments for data generation were an open-ended questionnaire and focus group interview. The full time lecturers took part in a focus discussion while part-time tutors and students filled in an open-ended questionnaire. The use of the focus group enhanced some triangulation which contributed to the trustworthiness of the study and enabled the researchers to probe participants' responses to obtain greater clarity [1].

### 1.7 Presentation of findings and discussion

**Q1: Which quality assurance mechanisms are employed in trying to quality assure the PGDE programme?**

Participants' opinions regarding the essence of quality assurance mechanisms which were used to quality assure the PGDE programme were several and these were presented in Table 1 for those who filled in the open ended questionnaire and via thick descriptions for those participants who took part in the focus group discussion.

**Table 1: Student and tutors views on quality assurance mechanisms are employed in trying to quality assure the PGDE programme**

Stated mechanism	Number of responses out of 40 students	Number of responses out of 4 part time tutors	Total number of responses out of 44 participants

Exams and assignments	37	4	41
Engagement of specialist lecturers/tutors	27	4	33
Contact tutorials	25	4	29
Provision of relevant modules/Coverage of appropriate courses	22	4	26
Collaboration in student teacher preparation for T.P.	18	4	22
Making teaching practice a compulsory course	19	4	23
Collaboration in student teacher T.P. supervision and assessment	19	2	21
Provision of library service	9	2	11
Provision of internet facility	9	2	11

Forty-one out of 44 participants among those who filled in the questionnaire stated the use of exams as one of the mechanisms by which the PGDE programme was quality assured. This view was also opined in the focus group discussion. Two of the participants had the following to say:

*Exams and assignments play a critical role in quality assuring the PGDE programme. They assist in checking learner understanding and lecturer effectiveness.*

*The university can't just churn out students without testing them for capability and understanding.*

Employment of tutors and lecturers with relevant specialisms was stated by 33/44 amidst those who filled in the questionnaire as a way by which the PGDE programme was quality assured. The use of contact tutorials was stated by 29/44 who filled in the questionnaire as a mechanism by which the PGDE programme was quality assured. Provision of apt modules was stated by 26/44 participants while collaboration in tutorials and Teaching Practice preparation and supervision was stated by 22/44 participants. According to one participant among those who completed the questionnaire:



*Full time and part-time tutors cooperate in preparing students for exams and practicum.*

11/44 participants opined that provision of the library services and internet facility were other quality mechanisms which in place for the PGDE programme. That a few participants indicated availability of library and internet facilities was another way by which the PGDE programme was quality assured could be an indication that some of the participants did not use these facilities which were available at ZOU. Internet access had improved very much in most parts of Zimbabwe at the time the study was carried out. One could access internet at most places in the country.

All the mechanisms which were stated by participants who completed the questionnaire were opined by participants in the focus group. Nonetheless in the focus group discussion collaboration in T.P. examining was opined as not being done. The following statement which was made by one of the participants supports this view:

*In the Midlands region, we have not had external examining of Teaching Practice by any sister university, but in some other regions like Harare this is being done. All we have had is internal moderation by moderators from national centre.*

**Q2: How effective are the quality assurance mechanisms?**

Participants viewed all the mechanisms which were in place in trying to quality assure the PGDE programme as guardians of quality in one way or another. For instance, 22/44 participants considered exams and assignments as being critical in maintaining or guarding required standards. 27/44 considered use of specialist lecturers as instrumental in the provision of quality assistance to students. One participant in the focus group had the following to say :

*Exams, assignments, supervisions and collaboration, just to mention some of these quality assurance mechanisms which are used in the PGDE programme are all effective in guaranteeing continuous improvement and guarding quality.*

**Q3: In what ways are the quality assurance mechanisms ineffective?**

23/44 participants among those who completed the questionnaire were of the mind that tutorial time of six hours for each module was not adequate. According to a participant in the focus group:

*Six hour tutorials seem not to be enough to some students and 6hours are definitely not adequate for preparation of students for Teaching Practice, let alone courses that require acquisition of practical skills.*

In support of this view another participant said:

*A module like the PGDE 106 Computer applications in education needs much more time to give students ample time to practise some of the practical skills involved.*

Twelve out of 44 who completed the questionnaire expressed the view that tutorials were made ineffective since some tutors resorted to lecturing. One of the participants wrote:

*Some tutors just lecture to us and fail to cover all the module topics or to attend to our unique needs.*

This finding is not in tandem with the finding made by [2] who in their study established that the students preferred to being lectured to the use of participative methodology which is akin to tutorials.

Assessment of Teaching Practice was viewed by some participants as not effective since it lacked the external component. This view was only given by participants in the focus group and one the participant buttressed this view by saying:

*We don't get any input from external assessors whose suggestions could be instrumental in quality assuring the PGDE course. External validation is just important for continual improvement.*

**Q4: What impediments are there in trying to enhance quality assurance in the PGDE programme?**

Thirteen out of 44 participants who filled in the questionnaire gave the view that limited contact time for tutorials was an impediment in an effort to quality assure the PGDE. This



opinion was also given in the focus group discussion but in the focus group discussion the inadequacy of preparatory time was given with regards to Teaching Practice prep for students and acquisition of some practical skills in some practical skills'-oriented modules.

Four part time tutors and three full time lecturers opined that limited student tutorial attendance was an impediment in an effort to quality assure the PGDE programme. Twelve students expressed the view that being subjected to mass lectures was a challenge they perceived in the effort to quality assure the PGDE programme. However this opinion was not expressed by tutors and lecturers alike. Probably the teaching staff found it compelling to use the exposition method since they were handling large groups of students in a given tutorial period.

**Q5: What can be done to further enhance the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms in the PGDE programme?**

Eleven students made a suggestion that teaching staff should resort to using tutorial-relevant techniques. All tutors and lecturers and 22 students suggested an increase of the tutorial time in different courses and in practically-oriented modules.

### 1.8 Conclusions and recommendations

Participants viewed mechanisms that are in place in trying to quality assure the PGDE programme as several. Some of the quality assurance mechanisms used at ZOU to quality assure the PGDE programme included assessment of students through assignments and exams, providing modules, making teaching practice a compulsory course and conducting tutorials. Some of the mechanisms were regarded as effective as each mechanism in one way or another contributed to the attaining of objectives of quality assurance of the PGDE programme, mainly those of quality improvement and being quality guardians. In some ways the effectiveness of the quality mechanisms was affected negatively by some variables such as limited time, use of mass lectures instead tutorials and lack of external assessment in the T.P. component of the PGDE programme. Non-attendance by some students in tutorials was viewed as a challenge faced in trying to quality assure the PGDE programme.

The researchers recommend the following:

- ✚ extension of contact time in the practical-oriented courses in the PGDE programme
- ✚ external assessment of T.P.by some other higher institutions of learning in all regions of ZOU, each semester
- ✚ provision of actual tutorials instead of mass lectures since students have only six hours as conduct time with tutors per module

## REFERENCES

- [1] Borg, W.R. and Gall, M. D. (1989).*Educational Research : An Introduction*. 5<sup>th</sup>Edition , New York Longman.
- [2] Chikoko ,V. and Chiome,V. (2013). Quality tutorials in open and distance learning: Exploring experiences of Zimbabwe Open University students in *African Educational Research Journal*Vol 1(2) pp152-160 October 2013.
- [3] Ngara,R. and Ngwarai,R. (2013). An assessment of the Bachelor of Early Childhood of Development Degree Programme In its Initial Stages at Zimbabwe Open University in *Greener Journal of Educational Research* Vol.3 (8) pp381-391 October 2013
- [4] *Zimbabwe Open University Quality Policy Manual* (2013).