Dispelling the Myths about the Effectiveness of the Zimbabwe Open University Primary School Trained Teacher in the Instructional Process: Echoes from the Frontline

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Abstract

The acute shortage of teachers in Zimbabwe and indeed elsewhere has been responded to through innovative approaches that have seen Open and Distance Learning (ODL) being adopted to quell the under supply of the teachers. While some of the innovations have been positively received with by the communities served by teachers churned from different initiatives, training teachers through ODL has received mixed feelings (Dede, 1996; Harrison, 2001). It is from this viewpoint that this study sought to establish the effectiveness of the teachers trained through the Zimbabwe Open University Primary School Teachers Training programme from the point of view of the Education Inspectors, school heads, Civil Service Commission inspectors and the students trained through ODL at ZOU. The present study was a case study of Mashonaland West province in which two districts were randomly selected. The study adopted in-depth interviews as data collection instruments. The study sample was 40 and consisted of 20 ZOU Diploma in Education (Primary), 10 school heads, 8 Education of ficers and 2 Civil Service Commission inspectors. Results from the study show that there was acceptance among respondents that the theory taught to the ODL student teacher was being put into practice. ODL Diploma students were thorough in the general classroom management of their work which was enhanced by frequent visits by senior teachers at their individual schools of work and Teaching Practice visits by ZOU lecturers. Most teachers were up to scratch in their documentation especially in scheming which was compulsory in most schools and this had been necessitated by the visits by senior school authorities and lecturers from ZOU which helped in many ways in improving scheming, planning lessons and evaluation. Most teachers were able to handle their lessons effectively as seen in narrative reports that spoke so well on lesson introductions, teaching strategies, instructional media use and concept and skills development. More teachers should be trained through the ODL mode in light of the positive findings.

Key words: Effectiveness, Primary school teacher training programme, Staff shortages