INTRODUCTION

As a drive towards an improvement of the quality of graduates, academic institutions are increasingly resorting to curriculum re-engineering or curriculum rebranding designed to add value to the students and the institutions. The value is derived from enhanced academic performance that produces results appropriate to the established educational needs (Sprawls, n.d). Curriculum rebranding is a systematic process of analysis, design, and implementation of a new or modified learning programme. A re-engineered educational activity is a modification or a replacement of a traditional model such as the lecture and note-taking classroom setting. It is done in the context of Arubayi’s (2009) assertion, that the power of any educational institution is anchored by the quality of its staff, availability of supporting resources and a sound curriculum. The nature of a curriculum that any institution uses, therefore, to a large extent determines and shapes the quality of graduates that are produced (Akinmusuru nd). It is with this realisation that Mutare Teachers’ College began to question whether the existing curriculum was effective enough and not hindering its ability to achieve a greater pass rate among its student teachers. The answer lay in transforming the curriculum to integrate strategies that would enhance both the effectiveness and the efficiency of various educational activities it offered among the two year and three year diploma students.

The two year and three year diploma programmes are post ‘A’ and post ‘O’ Level programmes respectively. Both groups spend the first full year at college. However, they differ on the period they spend on TP. Students on the two year programme spend only one term on TP in their second and final year before they complete their course whilst the three year student teachers go on TP for the whole year. After this period, the students return to college to complete their course in the third year (Mutare Teachers’ College Prospectus, 2011).

The rebranding exercise was based on the 2010 Nyanga Declaration in which Heads of departments, Lecturers-in-Charge and Heads of Subjects convened a meeting in Nyanga and resolved to rebrand the curriculum (Mutare, 2010). Terms of reference for the lecturers charged with the task of spearheading the implementation process included repackaging the 2010 first year programme, overseeing the modalities of implementing programmes like computer literacy to all students as well as strengthening the already existing learning activities like referencing skills, study skills and communication skills. Implementation was to commence with the 2010 first year groups, which is both the two and three year students. There was a strong need in the transformational phase to provide a coherent and more enriched curriculum where more emphasis on teaching methodology would be prioritised over content acquisition. This shift was premised on the realisation that the students, especially the post A’ level group possessed acceptable levels of content to teach in secondary schools. What was required of
them was to acquire pedagogical skills hence the timetable had to be redrafted to allocate more time to peer and micro teaching as the ultimate objective was “to teach the student how to teach”. This entailed creating a platform to assist every student teacher develop knowledge, teaching skills and professional attributes required of a classroom practitioner. It was envisaged that the skills gained would enhance the student teachers’ potential to demonstrate key competences and capacities not only on teaching practice (TP) but also as graduate teachers. Child-centred teaching methods that formed the basis of the existing curriculum, had to be strengthened. There were initial fears that concentration on methodology in the rebranded curriculum could significantly reduce contact time allocated to subject areas where subject based content was delivered. Whilst all students are required to take Educational Foundation courses that include Theory of Education (TOE), Teaching and Learning Skills (TLS), Education and Media Technology (EMT) and Professional and Development Studies (PDS), they take different subjects where subject content and subject based methodology is taught.

Cognisant of the potential limits of a largely content based curriculum, the institution managed to strike a reasonable content-methodology balance thereby offering a learning opportunity that was more compatible with contemporary trends on the job market. The need therefore, to offer alternative learning opportunities that are more compatible with contemporary lifestyles is the primary focus of each teacher training institution (Goldhaber and Hannaway 2011). Curriculum rebranding thus signposted progression in teaching and learning at Mutare Teachers’ College, and set standards that equipped student teachers with requisite skills to meet challenges in the classroom. Increased effectiveness would be achieved by providing enriched learning experiences.

Research Questions/ sub problems

The following questions will guide the present study.

- Has the emphasis on methodology improved performance of student teachers on TP?
- How do the student teachers feel about their TP experiences?

Statement of the Hypothesis

The hypotheses which were tested were:

(a) The null hypothesis (H0) which states that there is no relationship between emphasis on methodology and performance of students on teaching practice.
(b) The alternate hypothesis (H1) stating that there is a relationship between emphasis on methodology and the quality of delivery of students on teaching practice.

Literature Review

The stimulus for re-engineering the curriculum is a result of ongoing transitions in society and the curriculum must address the factors that are driving the change. Virtually all educational institutions, programmes, and courses will benefit from some degree of rebranding in preparation for the future. This applies to both degree and diploma oriented programmes. Graduates, who complete their programmes successfully from Teachers’ Colleges, are churned out into a very competitive labour market often competing for the same teaching posts with graduates from universities dotted around the country. Whilst curriculum rebranding is meant to ensure adequate preparation of students for teaching practice, it ultimately gives graduates a competitive edge on the job market. A rebranded curriculum or educational activity as observed by (Perry nd ; Biros, Morris & Scheurmann, 2004) uses contemporary technology, appropriately developed learning materials, media, references and resources that can be used for individual study or as a tool for teachers. It is within this context that the Mutare Teachers’ College purchased many state of the art computers and associated material to complement this effort. It should be noted that compared to the existing curriculum, the rebranded curriculum, incorporating intensive use of ICT, was set to introduce and to acquaint student teachers with contemporary teaching technology before they leave college. It would also provide a major boost to the performance of student teachers on TP and the marketability of the graduates from Mutare Teachers’ College.

Justification of the study

The existing teacher training model had inherent weaknesses which included programme congestion among others. The nature of the time table did not create sufficient room for students to reflect on what they would have learnt or to visit the library. The other serious limitation was lack of synergy among departments. There was need to create harmony among departments to avoid parallel teaching of the same topics in different departments. For instance a topic like Motivation was taught in both Theory of Education (TOE) and Methodology. This apparent lack of synergy resulted in students having a lot of work on their hands. This entailed having more assignments than would have been the case if there was greater synergy among departments. Though focusing on producing quality teachers, the existing curriculum lacked the critical emphasis on methodology. This is grounded on the understanding that the prime objective of any teacher training programme is to ‘teach the student how to teach’. Students might have a sound subject content mastery but the skill of imparting that content to the learner in a classroom situation is what is essential for the student to acquire. The process of rebranding the curriculum therefore sought to formulate a new and adaptive teacher training model to replace the existing one. The new model would also ensure adequate synchronisation of courses across the curriculum.

Limitations of the study

One of the major limitations of this study is that the review period, that is when rebranding was introduced in 2010 up to now, is too short to draw comprehensive and conclusive results. Conducting similar follow-up studies to the present one at an opportune time in future might yield different results. The other limitation is that current TP results achieved in a ‘normal’ situation are being compared with those of the 2007-2010era. In this period Zimbabwe was still beginning to recover from a ten year economic recession which reached its peak in 2008. During this period it is assumed that no proper
teaching was taking place in the country’s secondary schools thereby depriving student teachers of time to implement the knowledge acquired at college (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011; Chirume, Dirwai, & Masiri, 2009). Notwithstanding the above limitations, it is hoped that valid insights for future interventions can be drawn from this study.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The entire student enrolment from both the two and three year finalist groups constituted the population for anecdotal records analysed and Table 1 shows the totals. These students were the first group to go on teaching practice after the curriculum rebranding exercise and therefore were good sources of the required information. The 2010 two year intake (n=168) and the 2010 three year intake (n=309) who were in their final year at college in 2012 made the population. Table 1 below shows the subject affiliations for the three year group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts/Commerce</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and Textiles/Food and Nutrition</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/Art</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/Music</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Registrar’s office (MTC), (2012)

Thirty one student questionnaires were sent out and twenty-six were returned. The participants were drawn from the two and three year finalists on campus on the basis of purposive sampling. The purposive sampling was based on the anecdotal data that was obtained from the TP records. The TP records show information on the sex, subject combinations as well as marks obtained by the student during TP. From such records, it was easy to select students who had scored very high, average or low marks so as to create a balance in the sample. An effort was also made to select students from different subject combinations in order to obtain a balanced assessment of the impact of the emphasis on methodology on different subject areas.

Research Methodology and Data collection

In an endeavour to establish the impact of emphasizing on methodology rather than content in teacher training programmes, Mutare Teachers’ College was treated as a Case Study. This allowed an intensive analysis of its programme whilst stressing on developmental factors in relation to context. This Case study, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies is explanatory in nature. The rationale is to establish causation in relation to underlying principles and to capitalize on the strengths of the two approaches as well as to compensate for the weaknesses of each approach. Furthermore, this allows for methodical triangulation where the findings from one type of study can be checked against the findings derived from the other type so as to improve the validity of the results (Punch, 1998; Morse, 1991 and Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The case study which gathered qualitative data was complemented with the descriptive survey approach. The descriptive survey sought to ascertain student teachers’ perceptions and experiences during their teaching practice. Descriptive surveys, whilst being factual, accurate and systematic, have low internal validity because they fail to establish causal relationships hence the need for “hybrid” approaches (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Through document analysis, students’ pass rates and TP records for the past three years were analysed. This information was obtained from the College Registrar’s Office. Statistical analyses to test the null hypothesis, that is, the assumption that emphasis on methodology has no impact on performance of student teachers, the establishment of trends (TP results for untreated groups up to 2 – 3 years back) and comparative analysis of the two year group results against the three year TP results for the treated group and the treated vs. the untreated group) was done through T-tests. The students’ views on the TP outcomes were obtained through questionnaires which had both closed and open-ended items. The data from the open ended questions were analysed qualitatively by categorizing them into emerging themes for analysis. The data collected from the closed item questions were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS) Version 17.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of emphasis on methodology

Results indicate that at 0.05% significance there was no difference in performance for the two year group between the treated group (2010 intake) and the untreated group (2009 intake) satisfying the null hypothesis. This suggests that for the two year group there was no difference in performance as a result of the rebranding exercise. On the contrary, the three year intake results reveal that the treated group (2010 intake) produced better TP results compared to the untreated group (2009 intake). This implies that the rebranding exercise had a positive impact on the students’ TP performance. The T-test assumed that the results were normally distributed.

Mean scores for the three year group

Results indicate that at 0.05% significance there is a difference between the means of treated and untreated three year TP marks rejecting the stated null hypothesis. The mean scores for this group of students were higher after the rebranding exercise. The assumption in subjecting the data to a T-test is that the data is normally distributed. Results from analysed data reveal that there was no significant difference in the mean values for the two year groups while a noticeable difference was evidenced in the three year group despite the same treatment. Emphasis on methodology might not have had a telling effect on the treated two year group (2010 intake) due to the short period of time they spend on TP. The single term the two year group spend on TP may be inadequate for students to fully implement skills they are exposed to at college. The three year treated group (2010 intake) who were on teaching practice for an entire year might have had adequate time to implement the methodologies emphasized. Duration of teaching practice and its impact on effectiveness may warrant further research.
Student challenges while on Teaching Practice

Students were asked to rank order identified possible challenging areas while on teaching practice.

Students' views on;

(a) Scheming

Scheming, a basic teaching skill taught in PDS and subject areas proved to be a challenge to student teachers. A majority of the students (34.6%) indicated that scheming was very difficult. One student opined that s/he “…almost failed teaching practice due to his/her inability to scheme properly”. Thirty one percent felt that scheming was a difficult activity for them whilst 15% found it very easy.

(b) Planning

Planning was relatively easy for 50% of respondents, while 34% found it to be difficult. This is in accordance to results obtained through T-tests for the two year group where there was no improvement on results due to rebranding.

(c) Mastery of subject content

Thirty nine percent (39%) of respondents were comfortable with content, however, further results reveal that 11, 5% of respondents identified mastery of content as a challenge. One student teaching at an A’ level school complained that content at this level is very difficult especially in science subjects.

(d) Content Delivery

Content delivery was a challenge to 26.9% of respondents indicating that mastery of teaching skills as was envisaged by emphasis on methodology had limited success. The results also reveal that no respondents were completely comfortable with content delivery as none of them considered it as the least challenging option.

(e) Classroom Management

Most students were comfortable with classroom management. The cumulative percentage from rating 1-3 was 42.3% showing that issues of classroom control were contained. This may not be attributable to students being good disciplinarians but may pronounce the presence of mentors during lessons whose presence could have acted as an authority (Hudson, 2005; Sasson, 2008).

Relevancy and application of Peer and Micro-teaching

Peer and micro-teaching are fundamental components of developing teaching skills in student teachers before teaching practice (Furlong & Maynard 1995, Ananthakrisham 1993). Student teachers develop and perfect the skills while internalizing the art of teaching.

Peer and micro-teaching

Respondents apparently show that micro-teaching has more relevancy and that the teaching skills gained during the process are more applicable during teaching practice. Students feel that “…peer teaching lacks ‘real’ classroom atmosphere which micro-teaching provides hence it is more relevant to our teaching practice”. This is evident in 42% of the students.

Contribution of mentors to teaching practice

The success of emphasizing on methodology will be incomplete without input from mentors who work closely with student teachers during teaching practice. Mentors attended a workshop to appraise them of the new focus and its intentions. Mentors who are an important cog positively influenced the training process. The results below indicate the perceptions of student teachers regarding the contribution of mentors in the re-engineering process. Seventy seven percent of the student teachers opined that mentors were supportive during teaching practice. The 19.2% of student teachers who indicated that mentors were not supportive felt that ‘…mentors over- loaded them with work and rarely visited them for supervision and assessment.’ A similar conclusion was reached in an article by Mudavanhu and Zezekwa (2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research made summary and conclusions in the context of the research problem, the research objectives and the research questions. The correlations as a linear relationship helped to test for relationship between emphasis on methodology and the performance of the students while on TP. In the research, it was statistically revealed through the T-tests and correlations that there was a strong relationship between emphasis on methodology and TP performance among the students following the three year programme whilst the results for the two year programme students showed that there is a very weak relationship between emphasis on methodology and TP performance. TP results for the two year programme for 2010 did not show any difference with 2009 results before the curriculum was rebranded. The reason could be that two year programme students go for TP for only one term and therefore this does not give them sufficient time to implement the skills they would have learnt. On the other hand, the three year programme students have the whole year on TP therefore have enough time to implement what they would have learnt. This suggests that if given more time for TP, students following the two year programme may perform at par with the three year programme students. Basing on this revelation, emphasis on methodology has a significant impact on the performance of student teachers. The research also shows that micro and peer teaching are important learning activities from which teaching skills are acquired before students go for (TP). The students felt that during micro and peer teaching, they are exposed to a
real classroom situation in which they interact with real pupils and colleagues hence sharpening their skills. This concurs with research findings from work carried out by Jackson and Bruegmann, (2009) and Ananthakrisham, (1993) that students have larger achievement gains when they have more effective colleagues.

A re-designing of the two year programme is necessary to ensure that more time is given to teaching practice. Students must be accorded the opportunity to acquire necessary skills and attitudes for the profession (Chikunda, 2005). This could be achieved by setting up a practising school near the college where the skills of the students are continually sharpened even after the duration of their TP or an extension of the TP period. During TP and after graduation, some teachers are posted to schools that still use traditional teaching methods; in-service workshops should be held frequently to appraise practising teachers on developments in their field and to hone their skills. It is further recommended that schools should be equipped with computers and other modern teaching technologies since the rebranding thrust takes technology as a major component of teaching and learning.

REFERENCES


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