

## **Collaboration Challenges amongst lecturers in Teacher Development through Open and Distance Learning**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In open and distance learning collaboration in teacher development programmes is called for. Collaboration if effectively implemented contributes to positive changes in teacher development standards and expanded views of didactic activities. Several stakeholders can contribute to effective teacher development through collaboration. However collaboration levels seem to be very low and ineffective in some ways. A study was conducted to determine conceptions of lecturers at Zimbabwe Open University on the types of collaborative activities existing in teacher development in ODL and their adequacy and to get their views on challenges presenting themselves in the university's attempt to uphold the collaborative nature of Teacher education related activities. An open questionnaire was used to generate data from lecturers. The study established that collaboration in teacher education was called for on the part of lecturers in many activities among which were programmes' design, teaching practice preparation and supervision and ICT literacy. Lack of interpersonal processes related to collaborative practice, resources and team spirit were challenges in trying to promote effective lecturer collaboration in teacher education. The study recommended professional development necessary in promoting collaboration for lecturers, provision of resources and close link with Teacher Development Conventional colleges, inter alia*

**Key words:** *collaboration, teacher development*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Collaboration has become a buzzword since it is often invoked to solve community issues, (Winn and Blanton, 2005 citing Himmelman, 1992). Collaboration brings together a range of stakeholders, including professional organisations and members of the community. As collaboration can bring about positive changes in standards and expanded views of teaching and learning, collaboration is called for in teacher education through Open and Distance education. Mediocrity in teacher education in Open Distance Learning cannot be tolerated (Winn and Blanton, 2005). The current study was conducted to generate data from Zimbabwe Open University lecturers on collaboration in teacher development through Open and Distance Education.

### **II. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

At Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) practising and prospective teachers are developed in four programmes. The four programmes are the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Development (BECD), the Bachelor of Education in Secondary Education (BEDS), Diploma in Education (Primary) and Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). There are many processes that take place in developing student teachers pursuing the stated teacher development programmes. Among these processes are tutoring, assessment and preparing students for practicum. At the time the study was conducted, there was a marked rise in the enrolment figures of student teachers at ZOU. Since 2013, enrolment in the teacher development has risen significantly. For instance in the Midlands Region of ZOU only, in the second semester of 2015, 560 students registered to pursue studies in the teacher development department. Among other factors, the requirement by the employer of secondary school teachers, that all secondary school teachers should have a teaching qualification, contributed to the rise in enrolment figures of students studying teacher development programmes. The rise in the enrolment of students pursuing teacher development programmes at ZOU, naturally calls for heightened levels of collaboration and widening of collaborative activities by lecturers. However, in spite of the growth of student numbers in teacher development programmes, collaboration by lecturers seemed to be restricted to a few activities. It was against this backdrop that this study was conducted.

### **III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **The concept collaboration**

Collaboration is a working practice whereby individuals work together to a common purpose to achieve business benefit. ([www.aiim.org/what-is-collaboration](http://www.aiim.org/what-is-collaboration) Aims Certified Information Professional). Collaboration is a shared engagement in a co-ordinated attempt to complete a given task or activity (Dillenbourg et al 1995).

Functionally collaboration brings a broad range of stakeholders together to take responsibility over a long term to address issues that matter to them (Ongiando & Jwan, 2009, citing McKieven, Kim & Lasker, 2000). Collaboration is a continuum of approaches taking a variety of forms (Dillenbourg, et al 1995). According to Allms Certified Information Professional (undated) the collaboration life cycle has the following stages: awareness, motivation, self synchronization, participation, mediation, reciprocity, reflection and engagement. In support of this view, Dillenbourg et al (1995) say that some components of successful collaborative teaching practices are team processes, resources and support from administrators, interdependence and opportunity. Collaboration relies on openness and knowledge sharing (Allms Certified Information Professional, undated.). According to Himmelman, (1992 as cited by Winn 2005) the following steps are critical in collaboration: clarifying the purpose for collaboration and developing a vision, co-coordinating ideas to identify goals and objectives, finding common ground and . prioritising goals and objectives.

Collaboration has a number of advantages. It makes work less stressful, gives a better understanding of the curriculum standards, contributes to changes in standards and accountability and provides expanded views of teaching and learning (Dillenbourg et al, 1995 & Winn & Blanton, 2005)

Some challenges to effective collaboration include; the issues of finding mutually workable planning times, scheduling and that student may make a shift during collaboration. (Dillenbourg et al, 1995)

#### **IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Practicum instructors participated in a study by Shita et al (2010) which was carried out to determine participants' criteria for collaboration between nursing school teachers and practicum instructors. Information sharing and co-operativeness were variables which participants viewed as critical in contributing to successful collaboration. In the same study it was established that frequency of meetings, training that respects the students' understanding, participation and guidance in conferences, all influenced the level of collaboration between clinical instruction and teachers in Nursing practicum. The current study was related to the research by Shita et al (2010) since the present study also sought to determine participants' opinions on factors they viewed as contributing to effective collaboration in teacher development in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Nonetheless, the current study was focused on lecturer collaboration in teacher development through ODL while the study by Shita et al (2010) was concerned with collaboration between clinical instruction and teachers in Nursing practicum.

Studies by Atay (2007) and Darling- Hammond (2006) both cited by Onglondo and Jwan (2009) found out that in student teacher practicum programmes where collaboration between student teachers and mentors was well structured and emphasised very powerful impact on students' teacher development was witnessed as students were assisted to develop in efficacy. In these two studies it was also established that failure to properly structure collaboration in the supervision of student teachers was a challenge that could cause harm. Poor coordination between University and schools led to conflicting views on guidance for student teachers.

Ngara (2014) established that lack of resources, lack of co-operation from colleagues and long distances between attachment schools were impediments to effective collaboration in Teaching Practice (TP). The study by Ngara focused on collaboration in practicum in teacher education while the present study focused on collaboration on various lecturer activities in teacher development through ODL.

#### **V. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Teacher development in ODL demands collaboration by many stakeholders. Despite the marked increase in the enrolment of students in teacher development programmes lecturer-collaboration remained limited to a few activities mainly tutoring and mentoring of student teachers.

#### **VI. PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to determine lecturers' opinions on the range of activities in which collaboration could be done, in addition to the usual ones and to determine challenges to effective lecturer-collaboration in teacher development in ODL.

#### **VII. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions guided the study:

1. Which forms of collaborative activities by lecturers are operational at ZOU in teacher development?
2. In which other activities is collaboration by lecturers necessary in teacher development at ZOU?
3. What are the critical components of successful collaboration by lecturers in teacher development through ODL?
4. What challenges are there in trying to promote effective collaboration by lecturers in teacher development at ZOU?
5. How could collaboration by lecturers in teacher development through ODL be made more productive?

### VIII. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It was envisioned that a good understanding of factors contributing to effective collaboration by lecturers would make significant contribution to knowledge within teacher education in ODL. It was hoped that stakeholders in teacher development in ODL would use findings of the study to reflect on their practices and strategies in increasing lecturer collaboration in teacher development. The researcher further hoped that this study could stimulate further study in teacher development.

### IX. RESEARCH METHODS

#### Research Method

The study employed the qualitative method of research. According to Magwa & Magwa (2016) qualitative research deals with peoples' perceptions. In this study the qualitative method was used to explore the views of lecturers on forms and quality of collaborative activities existing in teacher development through ODL. The opinions of participants were also sought on challenges presenting themselves in ODL in the efforts made to uphold the collaborative nature of teacher development related activities by lecturers. The study involved participants at two ZOU regional campuses, namely Midlands and Masvingo regional campuses.

#### Population of the study

The population of interest for this research was all full time lecturers and part-time lecturers at ZOU, in the aforesaid regional campus.

#### Sample

Twenty lecturers were purposively sampled for participation. Lecturers in the Faculty of Education and Arts and lecturers in other departments with teacher education qualification were involved in the study. Two participants in Masvingo Region and eighteen in the Midlands Region made up the sample.

#### Data generation instruments

An open-ended questionnaire was e-mailed to all the sampled participants working in Masvingo region. Only two lecturers out of the five to whom the questionnaire was e-mailed returned the completed open ended questionnaire. The same questionnaire was self-administered to eighteen the full-time and part time lecturers in the Midlands province. According to Greener (2008) an open ended questionnaire is an appropriate device for generating research data in a qualitative study. Participant triangulation assisted in increasing the trustworthiness and dependability of the generated data.

#### Data Analysis and Presentation

Data were analysed across participants and presented via thick description, including citing direct quotes from participants.

### X. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Which forms of collaborative activities by lecturers are operational at ZOU in teacher development?

The participants' responses to this question were as is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants views on activities done collaboratively by lecturers in teacher development**

Stated Activity	Number of Participants
Tutoring students	20
Module Writing	8
Research Supervision of Students	15
Micro teaching	9
Peer teaching	9
Conducting research	3
Supervision of TP	12
ICT Literacy	2

Data in Table 1 show that participants were of the thinking that there were a number of activities in which work related to teacher development was done collaboratively by lecturers. All participants expressed the opinion that tutoring of students was done collaboratively. Probably this was so, because the number of full time lecturers operating in the teacher development is quite small and so input from tutors from other teacher educational institutions is necessary. 15/20 participants opined that the supervision of students' research was done collaboratively. In recent years there has been a sharp rise in the enrolment of student teachers, and so supervision of research is one activity which full time lecturers could not handle on their own. According to 12/20 participants, Teaching Practice supervision was done collaboratively. This opinion was only given by participants who were full time employees at ZOU. At the time this study was carried out full time lecturers at ZOU in different departments, with teacher education qualifications, were taking part in TP supervision, to alleviate supervision pressures on the part of lecturers in the department of teacher development, which had

come about as a result of increased student enrolment in the department. Nine out of twenty participants gave the views that peer and micro-teaching were activities in which there was collaboration. In support of these views two participants made the following contributions:

P<sub>3</sub> *Full and part time tutors supervise student teacher peer teaching tutorials*

P<sub>12</sub> *Part-time tutors participate together with Regional Programme coordinators in the preparation of students for micro-teaching in schools.*

Eight out of twenty informants gave the mind that there was lecturer collaboration in the writing of modules. Maybe fewer participants expressed the mind that module writing was done collaboratively because this activity is confined mainly to full time lecturers. Only 3/20 participants were of the mind that conducting educational research was done collaboratively by lecturers in teacher education programmes. Two out of twenty informants also gave the view that there was collaboration in teaching ICT literacy. That such a small number of participants gave this opinion, could be attributed to the limited levels of literacy which most lecturers have.

These views given on the ways in which there was collaboration by lecturers in teacher education are in support with Dillenbourge *et al.*, (1995) who say that collaboration is dependent upon interdependence and opportunity.

**In which other activities is collaboration by lecturers necessary in teacher development at ZOU?**

**Table 2: Participants' views on additional activities in which collaboration was necessary**

Stated Activity	Number of Informants out of 20
Orientation for new students	10
Doing action research	9
Setting TP policies and procedures	5
Tutorials (module tutoring by two people)	4
Designing teacher development programmes	2
TP supervision	3

Ten out of 20 informants gave the opinion that there was need for collaboration by lecturers in orienting new students. Five of those ten participants were part-time tutors. In support of this opinion some participants gave the following responses;

P<sub>7</sub>: *Part-time tutors should not be left out on orientation.*

P<sub>11</sub>: *Only full time lecturers make presentations on orientation days, this curtails collaboration*

Nine out of 20 participants gave the mind that action research should be done collaboratively by lecturers. One participant made the following contribution:

P<sub>11</sub>: *Collaboration by lecturers (full and part-time) in action research in teacher development should be done.*

Five participants gave the view that there should be collaboration in setting TP policies and procedures, while four participants gave the opinion that tutoring of modules should be done collaboratively. One participant had the following to point out:

P<sub>9</sub>: *Sharing of module units could enhance quality of tutoring.*

Three (all of whom were part-time tutors) out of the 20 participants opined that TP supervision should be done collaboratively. Probably only three participants aired this view because at the time the study was conducted, TP supervision was being done by full-time staff, in the teacher development department and other departments at ZOU. Part-time tutors were not taking part in this activity. Two participants (both part-tutors) gave the mind that there should be collaboration in the designing of teacher development courses. That some participants gave the view that part-time tutors should take part in teacher development linked activities such as TP supervising and designing of teacher development curricula corroborates views by McKieren *et al.*, (2000) who say collaboration brings a broad range of stakeholders together to address issues that matter to them.

**What are the critical components of successful collaboration by lecturers in teacher development through ODL?**

Informants' opinions on critical components of successful collaboration in teacher development in ODL were represented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Factors contributing to successful collaboration by lecturers**

Stated Components	Number of informants out of 20
Availability of resources (time, transport)	12
Good team spirit/Cooperation	16
Ability to properly structure collaboration (tutoring, TP supervision)	6
Knowledge on collaboration (its requirements, essence)	3
Knowledge sharing	3

Cooperation was opined by 16/20 informants as an ingredient for successful lecturer collaboration in teacher development programmes. One of the participant made the following opinion:

P<sub>4</sub>: *Symbiotic working relationships are necessary.*

Out of the 20 participants, 12 gave the opinion that provision of supporting resources such as time and transport (in the case of TP supervision) was a factor that contributes to effective collaboration. According to six participants, the skill to properly structure collaboration in teacher development programmes was critical to collaboration effectiveness. One participant had the following to say:

P<sub>7</sub>: *The know-how of structuring collaboration is a dire need.*

Three participants gave the view that knowledge on the concept collaboration and knowledge sharing was an important variable in effective collaboration. One participant gave the following opinion:

P<sub>11</sub>: *Adequate knowledge on what collaboration entails is critical to all involved in it (collaboration).*

The opinions given on factors necessary for effective collaboration in this study are in support with Dillenbourgeet *al.*, (1995) who say some of the components of successful collaboration are team processes and resources.

**What challenges are there in trying to promote effective collaboration by lecturers in teacher development at ZOU?**

In table 4, participants' views on challenges presenting themselves in trying to promote effective collaboration are presented.

**Table 4: Challenges faced in trying to promote effective collaboration in teacher development programmes**

<b>Stated Challenge</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Lack of good team spirit/ cooperation	11
Lack of time	9
Programmes like TP (PGDE) done over a short time	5
Lack of funds	4
Lack of interpersonal processes related to collaboration	3
Personalisation of programmes	3

Lack of good team spirit was viewed by 11/20 participants as one of the challenges in promoting effective collaboration. According to one participant:

P<sub>11</sub>: *Lecturers belong to different departments and faculties and so some feel that teacher development activities aren't their responsibility, and so are not committed fully to activities such as TP supervision.*

Nine participants gave the view that lack of time was a challenge in trying to promote effective collaboration. In support of this view some participants had the following to point out:

P<sub>19</sub>: *Lecturers from other programmes are busy with own programmes there is no time to fully commit themselves to teacher education*

P<sub>13</sub>: *Time isn't just available to do action research with colleagues.*

Five participants gave the view that, teacher education activities like TP supervision of Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students were done over a very short time, thereby bringing in the problem of time management and overall effectiveness of collaboration. Four participants gave the opinion that lack of funds was a challenge in trying to make collaboration in teacher development effective. One participant simply wrote:

P<sub>11</sub>: *Action research could be done collaboratively, but there is no funding*

Three participants gave the view that personalisation of teacher education programmes and activities was a challenge which presented itself in trying to promote collaboration by lecturers in teacher development programmes. One participant pointed out:

P<sub>12</sub>: *Some lecturers are not positive, they think a programme activity like TP belongs to an individual and do not cooperate fully.*

The findings made in this study which show that lack of co-operation and lack of resources were hindrances to effective collaboration are in corroboration with findings by Dillenbourgeet *al.*, (1995) and Ngara *et al.*, (2014). However the challenge of lack of funding on research work which could be done in teacher development programmes was not a finding made among the reviewed studies in this current research.

**What could be done to promote effective collaboration by lecturers in teacher development programme?**

**Table 5: Suggestions on how lecturer collaboration could be promoted**

Stated suggestion	Number of participants
Heightened levels of collaboration	18
Widening scope of collaboration	13
Workshopping would-be collaborators	11
Giving incentives to collaborators	2

Eighteen participants made a suggestion that there should be a heightened level of cooperativeness for collaboration to be fruitful. Thirteen participants viewed the widening of the scope of collaboration as a way by which collaboration could be made efficient. One participant made the following contribution:

P 16 *Collaboration should relate to all activities in teacher development.*

Eleven participants gave the mind that there was need to workshop would be collaborators to enhance their understanding of “collaboration”. Two participants made a suggestion to the effect that some incentives should be given to collaborators from faculties and departments outside the teacher development department at ZOU.

## XI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The generated data indicated that there were a number of activities being done in the teacher development programmes, in which collaborations was prominent. Participants gave the mind that more collaboration could be done in other aspects such as action research writing and designing of teacher education programmes. There were some perceived challenges presenting themselves in trying to make collaboration by lecturers effective and some were individuals linked while others were institutional linked.

The following recommendations are being made:

- Workshopping would be collaborators on the concept collaboration (Knowledge sharing) by Zimbabwe Open University
- Provision or sourcing of funds for collaboration activities that need financing by Zimbabwe Open University
- Providing workable planning times by programme coordinators at the ZOU regional centres
- Widening the activities and forms of lecturer collaboration by Zimbabwe Open University
- Continued and meaningful links with conventional teacher development colleges by regional programmes and national programme leaders at Zimbabwe Open University

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