

**TITLE:**

**The contributing factor of distance education in the upgrading of qualifications for in-service teachers.**

**CONTENT**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 What is meant by in-service teacher education
- 3 Contribution of former Colleges of Education
  - 3.1 Contribution of the former Roggebaai College of Education
  - 3.2 Contribution of the former South African College of Teacher Education (SACTE)
- 4 Contribution of the universities
  - 4.1 Contribution of the University of Stellenbosch
- 5 Developments in technology in distance education
- 6 New programs for in-service teacher education according to the NQF
- 7 Evaluation of the different programs
- 8 Conclusion

## **1 Introduction**

Even where an efficient system of initial training and support services exist, experience suggests there will be a need for highly developed in-service (INSET) teacher education programs to enable serving teachers to adapt to changing circumstances. Distance education is a set of teaching and learning strategies that can be used to overcome spatial and temporal separation between educators and learners. These strategies or methods can be integrated into any educational program and used in combination with any teaching and learning strategies in the provision of education (SAIDE, 2000:52).

This paper will deal mainly with the up grading of the qualifications of INSET teacher education and in particular by means of distance education. Although there are a number of institutions who offer INSET programs for the upgrading of teacher education qualifications only a few of these programs will be highlighted. The technology involved in these programs which helps to support the students in their studies will be indicated. Developments in technology in particularly distance education improves the accessibility (Melck, 1999:6). There will be an evaluation of these programs to illustrate their success rate.

Sustainable INSET teacher education programs are vital for the effective functioning of any education system. These programs should be able to support the teachers in their daily instruction in the classroom and they should be of a continuous nature. Lifelong learning enhances professional practice and the personal development of teachers. Ongoing teacher education develops healthy schools and a culture of effective teaching and learning. It is widely accepted that distance education has an important social and political role to play in terms of redress and equity and in providing education to groups that would not otherwise have access to education.

## **2 What is meant by INSET teacher education**

INSET is those education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary teachers and principals, following their initial professional certification and intended mainly or exclusively to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively (Bolam, 1982:3). INSET education and training is concerned with the development of teachers professional and academic skills (Blake and Hanley, 1995:79). It can involve relatively short-term activities drawing together the whole staff of the school or it can involve individual attendance at various kinds of externally arranged courses and conferences. There are four categories for INSET:

- INSET for unqualified teachers (mainly certification courses)
- INSET to up grade teachers qualifications
- INSET to prepare for new roles, such as principal, head of department
- Curriculum related INSET (mainly course linked to planned curriculum changes or ad hoc refresher courses)

When a program for INSET is introduced it must be able to attract the teachers concerned, it must be able to support the teachers, fulfil the needs of the teachers and there must be continuous evaluation to see if the program is sustainable. There should also be follow up programs to the initial one to ensure that there is growth (Husen and

Postlewaite, 1994:5930). There are three groups of factors that influence teacher development:

- Personal
- Professional
- Contextual factors and specific interventions that involve the broader community

The intention of INSET is to change or improve instructional practices or conditions. It is sometimes difficult for teachers to attend a full-time residential institution to complete or up grade their studies. Distance education as a mode of instruction can be utilised to overcome this problem (Perraton, 1993:2). Distance education programs have used a variety of methods to overcome the separation between learner and teacher.

### **3 Contribution of the former Colleges of Education**

On 31 January 2001, all teacher education institutions were incorporated into higher education and former colleges of education became part of universities and technikons. This declaration of colleges of education as subdivisions of universities and technikons was gazetted in the Government Gazette Volume 426 number 21913, 15 December 2000. Before this colleges of education was under the jurisdiction of the Education Departments of the various provinces. They had prescribed curricula, some of them were autonomous while others still fell under the Department of Education. Colleges of Education had working relationships with universities. There were certain agreements of cooperation. The university was responsible for the moderation of examination question papers and the curricula of that particular college. The examination question papers and curricula of those colleges who were under the jurisdiction of the Education Departments were moderated by subject advisors of the Department of Education.

Most of the colleges of education offered full-time and part-time courses. There were however a few of them who only concentrated on distance education. They were Roggebaai College , South African College for Teacher Education (SACTE), Umlazi College, Springfield College and Natal College (SAIDE, 1995:3-27). This paper will concentrate on the contribution of two of these colleges who offered teacher education programs by means of distance education exclusively. The methods used in teacher education at a distance have varied according to the purpose of the program concerned and to the practical circumstances (Perraton, 1993:7).

A teacher's education college with national responsibilities for distance education may need to develop its own system of course materials. All of the former colleges of education who offered distance education in South Africa developed their own course materials and most of them had their own printing facilities. At the former South African College for Teacher Education (SACTE) the study package consisted of a study guide plus a video and audio cassette. They offered a variety of courses, that included practical courses. Contact sessions were held on a regular basis.

The courses that were offered by the colleges of education were mainly diploma courses. The students who attended these colleges were mainly students who did not obtain a matriculation exemption. These students were provided a chance to enter the

teaching profession. Colleges concentrated mainly on the training of teachers for primary schools and for the practical subjects. They played a major role in the supply of teachers.

### **3.1 Contribution of the former Roggebaai College of Education**

This college concentrated mainly on the upgrading of teacher qualifications by means of distance education. No practical courses were offered. The courses that they offered were the following:

- Junior Primary Teachers Diploma Third Year
- Senior Primary Teachers Diploma Third Year
- Junior Primary Teachers Diploma Fourth Year
- Senior Primary Teachers Diploma Fourth Year
- Higher Diploma in Education

Teachers who had not completed their second year of teacher education could complete this diploma before they started with the third year diploma course. The teachers could complete these courses over two years. They received mainly printed study material. The language of instruction of the study material was in English and in Afrikaans and the students could choose the preferred language of instruction. It was quite interesting to note that 75% of the students were Afrikaans speaking. Subjects like Biology included videotapes in their study package. There were contact courses for the different subjects and this was offered during the vacations. Venues for the centres were selected according to the following criteria:

- Accessibility to the majority of students
- Availability of accommodation
- Availability of equipped laboratories and lecture rooms

The feedback from students who attended the various contact courses during their studies, have proved that they have only benefited from it. This is illustrated by some the letters that students wrote, for example. One student wrote, “the fact that I had to forfeit my holidays is a small sacrifice compared to the wealth of instruction that I have gathered at the course”.

Students sent in assignments that were assessed and then sent back to them accompanied by a tutorial letter, discussing the problems that the students occurred during the answering of the assignment and a memorandum of the assignment. The assignments contributed towards their year mark. After the completion of a module they wrote an examination. Students wrote examinations at the different centres where they resided.

The students found this mode of instruction accommodating for their needs. The greater part of the student population were married women for whom it was impossible to attend a full-time residential college. They said that they could study, continue teaching and tending to their families. It was quite interesting to note that many of these students were young mothers with small infants who they had to tend to. Distance education made it possible for these young mothers to complete and further their studies. It can thus be stated that distance education is cost effective in the sense that teachers are already teaching and earning a salary and thus do not have high expenses while they are studying (Perraton, 1993:3). Distance education

programs have been used to train teachers with differing backgrounds and at a variety of different levels.

The college catered for students from different places in the country and as far a field as Namibia. The success rate of the college will be discussed when the evaluation is done.

### **3.2 Contribution of the former South African Teacher College of Education (SACTE)**

The courses that were offered by SACTE were more or less the same as that of Roggebaai. Their study package included a video and an audio cassette. They had more students. They also offered practical courses. More contact courses were held. The contact courses was an opportunity to meet the students, find out about their problems and to do the practical implementation of the different subjects.

## **4 Contribution of the universities**

The universities which offer INSET by means of distance education are the following, UNISA, University of Stellenbosch, University of Port Elizabeth, University of Pretoria, Randse Afrikaanse University, University of Potchefstroom. They offer a variety of diplomas as well degree courses. The degree courses have been of great value to teachers for the up grading of their qualifications. UNISA in particular have played a major role in this regard.

### **4.1 Contribution of the University of Stellenbosch**

Stellenbosch concentrates on degree as well as diploma courses. The courses that they offer are the following (University of Stellenbosch Faculty of Education Information Brochure 2000):

- Certificate programs. For example. Further Diploma in Education: Curriculum Studies
- Further Diploma in Education: Learners with Special Educational Needs
- Further Diploma in Education: Natural Sciences (Mathematics)
- Bachelor programs: Bachelor of Education (B Ed)
- Bachelor of Education (Honours)
- Masters programs: M Ed and M Phil. There are two options, the thesis option and the structured programs.
- Doctoral programs: D Ed advanced research in Education and PhD advanced research in Education

These programs are more or less what most of the universities offer in South Africa. There are contact courses for students during their vacations. The study material are offered in Afrikaans and in English. Assignments are sent to students who complete them and then send them back to the university for assessment.

In May 1998, the University of Stellenbosch formally launched its technology enhanced distance education facility, as a strategy for extending access to its educational programs to people geographically distant from the university's main

campus. There are more than one form of technology employed to meet the needs of a specific target audience. From print to interactive telematic broadcasts (ITV) to the internet. This is dependant on the profile and technological access of the specific target audience (De Coning , 2002:3). There is an interactive classroom on the main campus with different electronic centre's situated countrywide.

Concerning the teacher education program there is a partnership between the university and National Private College, which is a private distance education provider. The lecturers of the universityn writes and compiles the study material, sets the examination and does the accreditation of the diplomas and degrees. National Private College does the administrative part of the distribution of the study material and information to the students and the organisation of the examination centres where the students write their exams.

## **5 Developments in technology in distance education**

The appropriate choice and use of technology will depend on the particular context in which it is being used (Bates, 1995:4). According to Lockwood (1995:7) there is a distinction between the conventional technology for example print, television, video cassettes, radio and audiocassettes and the new technologies for example computers, teleconferencing, interactive classrooms and interactive television. The greatest difference is in their capacity to sustain two-way communication that aids learning. Two-way communication between teacher and student (s) is replacing the old one-way system of print, radio and television.

It is useful to make a distinction between media and technology (Bates, 1994:29). The term medium is used to describe a generic form of communication associated with particular ways of representing knowledge. Each medium not only has its own unique way of representing knowledge, but also of organising it, often reflected in particular formats or styles of presentation. A single medium such as television may be carried by different technologies (satellite, cable, video cassette). While certain technologies are closely associated with each medium, a variety of different technologies may be used to deliver these programs.

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2001) identify the following four main stages of 'technical' evolution which are currently recognisable:

- First generation; correspondence courses with the text being similar to what is used in the classroom
- Second generation; mainly print-based, characterised by self-instructional design
- Third generation; integration of self-instructional print with media (audio and video)
- Fourth generation; use of interactive ICT to support course delivery and learning

It should be considered that in evaluating the various programs offered you should not only be concerned with what methods and technologies are employed to enhance the learning process for a particular audience but equally how they are used in place. The different institutions use a variety of technologies in their delivery of the study

material. Stellenbosch University makes use of interactive ICT, the internet, e-learning, and print. At the former colleges of education it was mainly print-based, characterised by self-instructional design and sometimes accompanied by audio and video tapes.

It can be observed that at the heart of the technological developments, is the internal multimedia network infrastructure that allows the institution to access, create and deliver educational multi-media services and a variety of modes. Basically, learning materials can be accessed or created in any format and stored digitally. Course designers can access this material electronically, re-edit and re-create learning materials, store them and export this learning materials in a variety of formats (Bates, 1995:240). What must be kept in mind is that institutions that explore the new technologies should fulfil the needs of the students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **5 New programs for in-service teacher education according to the NQF**

After the incorporation of colleges of education into the higher education sector a new set of qualifications had to be drawn up for teacher education. The qualifications have been prepared by the Educators in Schooling Standards Generating Body over a period of two years. They are based on the Norms and Standards for Educators (as regulated by the Minister of Education on 4 February 2000) but differ from them in certain ways. The first draft of the qualifications was made public on 22 May 2001. An abbreviated version was gazetted on 22 August 2001 (Welch, 2001:2)

The development of the qualifications framework was difficult in the sense that it is not easy to balance the demands for quality, equity, the integration of education and training, the requirements of higher education and the ease of articulation in different fields or in subfields. If education is to be achieved it is through the curriculum, the outcomes and the assessment of the outcomes.

The current situation for teacher education is that there is one main qualification, the B Ed, offered by one type of institution, a university or technikon. The Certificate in Education and Professional Diploma in Education are exit /entry points in that single qualification, not stand alone qualification

An exit point has however been created from the four year B Ed at 360 points. This qualification, the level 5 Professional Diploma in Education, will equip candidates to become professionally qualified educators in schooling. A relative educational qualification value of 13 and a level 5 qualification is still the official qualified teacher status. The National Professional Diploma in Education is a temporary qualification meant to help existing under qualified teachers reach qualified status.

As the purpose statement for the Advanced Certificate in Education, the ACE is a flexible level 6 qualification aimed at providing educators with an opportunity of either updating, enriching and supplementing their existing knowledge in a particular area of specialisation or of changing their area of specialisation. The former might become necessary due to new developments in an area of study while the latter may be a response to changing national needs or a need for a change in career path. Although the possibility for upgrading from level 5 to level 6 exists through the Advanced Certificate in Education, the preferred upgrading route is the second half of

the B Ed. This will provide a more thorough basis for further study at B Ed Honours level.

At NQF level 6, a candidate needs a greater ability to engage in reflexive practice, the ability to operate professionally in unfamiliar situations, but with sensitivity to those situations and a more in depth knowledge of the subject of specialisation. There should also be the ability to engage professionally not only within the school, but in the broader educational and social community (Welch, 2001:4).

In the teaching profession, continuing professional development should be an integral part of practice. It should be understood that teachers cannot perform their work properly unless they are continually adding to and deepening their knowledge and skills. In South Africa INSET teachers are required to do 80 hours per year of professional development. The idea behind the 80 hours of professional development needs to be seen as an occupational requirement.

## **6 Evaluation of the different programs**

According to Torpe (1998) in Rowntree (1992:204) evaluation is the collection, analysis and interpretation of information about any aspect of a program of education and training, as part of a recognised process of judging its effectiveness, its efficiency and any other outcomes it may have. Evaluation is focussed on Keegan (1996:186):

- The quantity of the learning achieved
- The quality of the learning achieved
- The status of the learning achieved
- The relative cost of the learning achieved

If one examines each of these you could explain it as follows. Under the heading of the quantity of learning achieved we consider the success of the system in widening access, not just in terms of absolute numbers but also in attracting specific target groups. Under the heading of quality of learning achieved is grouped the gathering of data for the evaluation of the learning materials provided by the distance education institution and the extent to which distance education is a suitable vehicle for educating students in certain subjects.

Under the heading of the status of learning achieved, indications of the status accorded by the learning achieved by distance education students come from the following, the extent to which other educational institutions recognise the studies for credit transfer purposes and the acceptance of the degrees and diplomas awarded as qualifying students to go on to higher level studies. It has been proved that distance education is cost effective in the sense that students who are studying by means of distance education are already working and can thus support themselves (Keegan, 1996:186-187). No replacements are required in the posts of the teachers.

As in the case of conventional instruction distance education cannot be described as intrinsically good or bad, effective or not effective. What is actually true is that distance education makes known a number of possibilities that is different to that of conventional instruction (Holmberg, 1995:206). In the evaluation of the programs for INSET it should be kept in mind that these programs should enhance the professional abilities of the teachers. The educational practices of the teachers must be improved.



At the former Roggebaai College of Education the pass rate per year for a course was on average 75 %. The pass rate for the different subjects differed. In Education for example the pass rate was on average 80% to 85 %. In 1989 there were 251 students who completed their courses successfully. In 1992 there were 351 students and in 1993 there were 351 students who complete their courses successfully. The feedback from students who completed these courses were, that they were able to implement the methods and methodologies in their classroom situations. After the completion of a course the teachers moved into a higher category which enabled them to gain higher status. It was cost effective in the sense that they could continue teaching while they were studying.

Lecturers in all subjects tried to make the study material as relevant as possible. The curriculum changed according to the needs of the student population. For example when the curriculum in the schools changed, the curriculum of the subject Education had to change likewise. When Outcomes Based Education was introduced, the study material had to change to accommodate the principles of Outcomes Based Education. This is one of the examples to illustrate that study material for INSET should at all times be relevant to the teaching situation in the schools.

The success rate of Stellenbosch is relatively high. The most important benefit for the students is that they can study at a residential university by means of distance education. There are other benefits as well. They have access to relevant education research.

## **7 Conclusion**

There is no common pedagogy of distance education because the tasks undertaken by teachers and lecturers are very different in each of its own traditions. However there is now some convergence between these traditions, giving rise to the concepts of flexible learning (Daniel, 1996:65). In South Africa as elsewhere in the world distance education made a great contribution towards the improvement of education. There has been a remarkable change in the quality, the quantity, the status and the influence of distance education provision. Distance education plays a major role in the provision of education. It has provided itself as a mode of instruction that has provided education to the masses and it has provided people with an opportunity to education that would otherwise not have been able to leave their work and home to study at a residential institution.

There is no doubt that INSET education programs are valuable for teacher development. INSET programs fulfil different functions, work in different ways and may entail different relationships with one another. The education of the good teacher is something much more interesting, more extensive and challenging. INSET programs should thus be challenging and enhance the professional and personal development of teachers in order to build communities that would be to the benefit of everybody concerned.

INSET distance education programs are still growing and it will continue to grow as long as people are in need of education.

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