

## PAPER PRESENTATION FOR PAN – COMMONWEALTH FORUM II

**PRESENTERS:** D.M Akambadi, Staff Associate, University of Malawi,  
Chancellor College  
J. Kholowa, Lecturer, Domasi College of Education

**SUB-THEME:** STAFF DEVELOPMENT

**TITLE :** STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR DISTANCE  
EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

### INTRODUCTION

Before we start discussing the issue of staff development for distance education we need to talk about what **open** and **distance** education (ODE) are. **Open learning** has its sub-set, **distance education**. They both aim at reducing the barriers that can prevent students from attending formal education. ODE aims at providing a learning environment to learners who study for the highest probability of succeeding in their learning experiences. By using self-instructional materials, ODE open up opportunities for access to education and provide chance of success (Laymaman 2001:1).

However, for any educational system to be sustainable and effective, there is need for staff development. In the case of ODE programmes, well trained staff is vital. Based on ODE programme at **Domasi College of Education** under **Secondary School Teachers Education Project** (SSTEP), the issue of staff development is well motivated because of the following challenges: shortness of residential period, huge numbers of teachers-learners, need for the teacher-learners to be encouraged to learn on their own, need for lecturers to produce modules that are user friendly. The produced modules also need to be professionally written and edited. Another challenge is that facilitators, supervisors and teacher-learners should be aware of lack of adequate teaching and learning materials in secondary schools.

In view of these challenges, there is need for equipping teaching and supervising teams with special skills for the success of the ODE systems. This paper further highlights challenges that professional staff (lecturers and supervisors) meet in running an ODE programmes based on a similar programme existing at Domasi College of Education (DCE) in Malawi. Possible solutions to some of the staff development problems have also been suggested. However, we need to first of all, understand the nature ODE at DCE before any discussion.

### OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION AT DOMASI COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ODE at DCE is under SSTEP meaning Secondary School Teacher Education project. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funds this project. It is actually based at DCE. The project was set to assist DCE in offering a Diploma in Education through distance. On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2002, 300 teacher-learners from **Community Day Secondary Schools** (CDSS) were enrolled under cohort 1. The project was officially launched on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2000.

SSTEP has three important features of operation (Polepole 2001:2)

1. **Modules:** these are produced based on content in core learning areas of education, history, geography, theology and religious studies, linguistics and African Languages,

English, human ecology, biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and physical education. These courses are based on conventional programmes. Academic staff from Domasi College of Education, Chancellor College and Mzuzu University write these modules

2. Residential component: this is the time when students come to the college to receive training for about eight weeks on how to use their modules
3. Field supervision: by using cluster system created by DANIDA (to gather secondary school teachers to discuss issues relating to their clusters) SSTEP hires supervisors to supervise teacher-learners. Each supervisor is responsible for ten to fifteen students. The role of these supervisors assist students in professional issues and content areas basing on their expertise.

SSTEP is now in the process of receiving the third cohort of 300 teacher-learners to make a total of over 900. These three features of operation have registered a lot of challenges that have continuously required training lecturers and supervisors to make sure the project is a success.

### **CHALLENGES OF ODE AT DCE**

Production of modules or any instructional materials for ODE poses its own challenges. In module production the academic staff involved should have instructional design skills. They are also involved in editing such that they also need editing skills. Module production also needs module reviewing. All these skills are needed for quality instructional material production.

In case of the residential component, it attracts such challenges like shortness of the residential period. The growing number of teacher-learners now registered at 900 is also a concern. There is a strong need to instill the feeling of independent learning in the teacher-learners. All these need well trained staff to be equipped with facilitation skills.

The last component in the project is also a crucial one. Supervision involves a lot such that three quarters of the time of learning, students spend with their supervisors. During this time teacher learners need to be counselled. The supervisor gets involved in solving their problems, resolve their conflicts, assess them, help them plan and organize teaching materials, remind them about recent teaching methods like study circles. To encourage students on **Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources** (TALULAR) for supervisors to effectively, efficiently and competently take their roles as well.

Hence, staff development for ODE for both teaching and supervising staff is very vital for the quality and success of the output. The following section has a discussion on some of the areas that need to be concentrated in staff development for ODE.

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY FORWARD**

Two categories of staff (supervisors and lecturers) and how they can be developed for ODE are discussed here. In terms of lecturers they need special training in how to write and edit modules or any materials for distance education. They also need competence in how to facilitate residential sessions to a huge number of students within a short period of time using modules effectively and efficiently. For supervisors, they need training on supervision, counselling and other skills.

### **Module Writing and Editing (CDE Tabin and McCaughan-9/9/02)**

Instructional design of distance educational materials involve producing materials that are use-friendly, interesting, appealing, coherent, consistent, well organized, clearly written, relevant useful, accurate, educationally sound and accessible via distance delivery. They should also be free of cultural, racial and class gender bias. They are supposed to be developed to actively involve the learner that are written at appropriate level of reading. Such materials are also supposed to be respectful of copyright, affordable, of high quality and prepared by qualified content experts. The instructional designers of these distance learning materials should get trained on how to flow these guidelines for them to produce qualitative materials.

Modules for DCE distance education table of contents, an overview units, reference, glossaries and module tests. To standardize how to write modules with these parts there is need for special training (through at least workshops) to be offered to the ones involved in their production.

A unit for each module has an introductory section, objectives, keywords, content or notes with a learning activity at the end of each section. There are also assessment tasks, a summary, a text and answers (for both the self assessment learning activities and the test). There are indeed skills for developing each and every section. For instance, module writers are supposed to learn how to come up with learning outcomes or unit objectives which are supposed to be consistent with content, learning activities and assessment. These objectives further need to be clear, observable, measurable, achievable, and appropriate for the intended learners. The content of a unit should be consistent with the learning outcomes. The content also reflects current thinking in the field. The content is further expected to encourage students to work with it in terms of problem-solving and any other critical thinking skills. The content produced is also expected to provide clear explanations of the vocabulary, analysis, it should be appropriate in scope and amount supporting self-directed learning. All this knowledge is supposed to be known by the module writers, hence need for staff development in this field.

After the modules have been written there is also need for quality assurance which is achieved through reviewing, editing and evaluation of the content, objectives, learning activities etc. The staff involved in these activities are also supposed to be well versed in the skills that will bring a qualitative product.

Editors and writers of instructional materials should be in a position to know writing styles, tone, language, grammar, punctuation, presentation and formatting to ensure that materials are as clear and understandable as possible. They should know how to use information from other sources, respecting copyright, citing references in the text or with graphics citing references at the end of the unit or a module. They should also know how to create glossaries, using illustrations and graphics. Editing skills should be well known. These include editing for clarity and organization of information. The writers and editors should be well versed with a house style and use of editorial symbols. Staff for distance education has indeed got a lot to know for the success of any ODE. It is therefore advisable to organize refresher courses or workshops gearing towards the above listed skills for distance education quality assurance. SSTEP at DCE has been organizing a series of workshops to address these issues.

### **Facilitation during Residential Session**

Lecturers are also supposed to acquire necessary skills that can enable them to guide teacher-learners on how to use the modules. With the case of DCE SSTEP, lecturers received training through a facilitation workshop, which centred around four main issues.

- Facilitation as a learning strategy i.e. preparing for independent learning
- Preparing for learning i.e. identifying actions to achieve goals
- Learning i.e. principles of learning, best practices, integrated activities etc
- Planning for learning (which included ingredients of effective planning and developing of lesson plans)

### **Field Supervisors in Distance Education Supervision and Counselling**

The success of an ODE like one at DCE does not stop at module development and facilitation of residential period. It is the supervisors in the field who also play a very critical role as they frequently interact with teacher learners. For them to effectively deliver they need to be competent in supervision and counselling skills. They need to understand some of the recent practices in the education system. In case of Malawi, the teacher-learners are teaching in schools that fall under zones called clusters. They use study circles in their teaching. Hence the supervisors need to know of these for them to be relevant in the system they are serving.

Field supervisors for SSTEP at DCE have the following roles to play (**Kayira 2000:1**)

1. Classroom supervision: they provide feedback on appropriate teaching methodology, guide on academic content, provide information related to study skills, counsel
2. Facilitation: facilitate monthly field-based workshops and seminars, invigilate course examinations
3. Liaison person: between SSTEP office and participatory CDSS's, participatory communities and education division offices
4. Reporting: report trainee continuous assessment community projects which teacher-learners are involved in and results of classroom teaching methodologies

For effective and efficient delivery of these services, field supervisors at DCE have been receiving a series of training workshops. These field supervisors have learnt the following supervision skills in one of the workshops:

- General school management and leadership
- Teacher-Supervisor relationship
- Approaches (collaborative, directive, supportive, non-directive) to supervision
- Personality and supervision
- How to plan for meetings with teacher-learners and classroom observation feedback.

Since field supervisors also get involved in counselling they also need to receive training in (SSTEP supervisors have been trained in these as well):

- Counselling
- Traditional counselling
- Nature of counselling and helping
- How counselling differs from advising
- Actions of a good counselor
- Forms of traditional counselling
- Conflict resolution

## **CONCLUSION**

In this presentation the nature of open and distance education at Domasi College of Education has been described highlighting three important features, namely: module production, residential component and field supervision. Challenges that each feature brings about have been outlined and described. The need for training academic and supervising staff has been stressed. Areas of concern for training have been outlined closing up with counselling skills. It is therefore very important for the success of any ODE to train its staff.

## **REFERENCES**

**SSTEP Workshop, Counselling Skills Development**, Presented for the staff of Domasi College of Education, May 1-4, 2001 by Johanna Leseho.

**Writing and Instructional Design of Distance Education Material Workshop**, Presented for the staff of Domasi College of Education, January 2002 by Tabin.

**Editing of Distance Education Material Workshop**, Presented for the staff of Domasi College of Education, January 2002 by Tabin, K and McCaughan.

**Rationale for Open and Distance Education**, A paper presented at a meeting for establishment of the national association for distance education in Malawi, held at Domasi College of Education, March 30, 2001 by Laymaman C.F

**Report on SSTEP Model**, Presented at a meeting for the Establishment of the National Association for Distance Education in Malawi, Held at Domasi College of Education, March 30, 2001 by Polepole, M

**Supervision: General School Management and Leadership**, Presented for SSTEP Supervisors and Senior Education Methods Advisors held at Domasi College of Education, November 13-24, 2002 by Chakwera E.W. and Susuwele W.

**Clinical Supervision Workshop**, Presented for SSTEP Supervisors and Senior Education Methods Advisors held at Domasi College of Education, November 13-24, 2000 by Mussa, C. and L.J. Thawe.

**Counseling Skills Workshop**, Presented for SSTEP Supervisors and Senior Education Methods Advisors held at Domasi College of Education, November 13-24, 2000 by Maluwa-Banda, D Chimanya, M.C. and Selemani-Mbewe

**Facilitating the Learning Process: Preparing for Learning, Learning, Planning for Learning**, Presented for Domasi College of Education Staff, held at Domasi College of Education October 16-19, 2001 by J. Shaw, M. Smith, G. Nicol.