Tasting their own medicine:
Experiences of ODL teachers undergoing upgrading through IGNOU

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Introduction

- This study focused on the experiences of ODL teachers undergoing an upgrading Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education Programme with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)
- Specifically the study sought to find out how the programme delivery by an ODL mega- university was perceived and experienced by the ODL practitioners in Botswana and Lesotho

Reasons for enrolling for PGDDE

- To gain knowledge and skills in ODL in order to become a better practitioner
- For personal development, increased opportunities for promotion and further professional development in ODL
- To improve the status of my profession as an ODL educator by acquiring the relevant a post graduate qualification in ODL

Research design and methodology

- A qualitative approach was adopted given the small sample of 20 participants that was initially anticipated. Only 11 ODL practitioners volunteered to participate, six females and five males. Three males and three females from Botswana & two males and three females from Lesotho
- Semi- structured interviews, a short questionnaire and informal discussions were used to collect data

Findings

support	satisfied	Remarks
Registration	100%	Their registration was done through SADC-CDE
O & A	90%	Orientation 6 months after registration
L/ Tutors	20%	These were appointed by IGNOU through SADC-CDE
Materials	100%	Support embedded in the learning materials
Assign T	10%	100% of females & 80% of males were dissatisfied, feedback came late and some after the exams & some even up to date
F/back	36%	80% of females & 40 % of males were dissatisfied
S/skills	82%	only 23% of females were disatisfed

cont.

support	satisfied Bots and Lesotho	remarks
Registration	100%	No challenges encountered
O & A	83% & 100%	Delayed but experience was highly rated
L/ Tutors	17% & 25%	Were perceived not to be appropriate. They wanted IGNOU tutors, this might have been due to their need for institutional connection
Materials	100%	Support embedded in the learning materials. They found the materials very comprehensive in both content and instructional design
Assign T	0% & 20%	Assignment turnaround time took very long e.g assignment one submitted in March, returned in October.
F/back	50%	Qulaity of feedback was considered to be good but came late
S/skills	100%	Study tips by tutor from IGNOU were highly appreciated during the once off contact sessions

Local & IGNOU similarities

- Limited institutional support
- Communication between the learners and the institution a serious challenge.
- Late assignment submission and feedback.
- Turnaround time of assignments was not good. Even our learners experience the same as tutors sometimes keep assignments for long.
- Interactive self learning materials Mailing and tutorials.
- Frustrations, hopelessness, alienation, isolation, anxiety as a result of: delayed delivery of learning materials, feedback, academic contact support not properly pre-planned and delayed exam results.

Reflections for practice

"I have appreciated challenges that are encountered in distance education. I have also appreciated a number of concepts, processes and procedures involved in distance education."

"Work better with learners and tutors"

"Through the problems were encountered, one can improve learner support services in the institutions. Improve the quality of services and of learning materials."

"It helped a lot with skills necessary for instructional materials development as I am a course writer."

"The feedback will be on time. The skills obtained from PGDDE are utilized for my institutions."

"To be able to give a living testimony in the distance education process."

Qualitative Impact as perceived by participants

"Appreciating the environment under which I operate as well as accommodating new changes"

"Personal development. I am better informed in understanding research"

"Its an added advantage to my field as I know what my job requires me to do."
"Help to get a promotion."
"Increased my knowledge and skills."

"The qualification has benefited me and my institution because I am well equipped with the systems of ODL as I was from the conventional system."

"I am able to understand and emphathise with my distance learners"

"Has made me an effective service provider in the distance learning mode. I am able to give guidance and counseling to distance learners by addressing their concerns about their learning."

- It has equipped me with all the necessary skills for the running and maintenance of an effective and efficient DE system. The challenges I experienced have made me very sensitive to the challenges experienced by the distant learners I work with."

Significance & Implications

- Strong learner support strategies critical in reducing challenges faced by distance learners.
- Quality assurance strategies, monitoring and evaluation of institutional learner support services and other facets of ODL systems need to be in place and applied consistently if DE institutions are to compete as centres of excellence and choices for lifelong learning
- Institutional branding and reputation is at stake if learners support services do not meet the needs of its clients
- strengthening of ODL practitioners' capacity by training in DE policy, skills, ethics and law is critical for best practice in ODL.

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