JOURNAL FOR

New
Generation
Sciences

2011

JOURNAL FOR NEW GENERATION SCIENCES
ISSN 1684-4998

Editorial

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
JNGS 2011 Volume 9 No 2

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: STUDENT TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE QUALITY OF MENTORING AND TEACHING PRACTICE IN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

J BADENHORST AND B BADENHORST

ABSTRACT

In South Africa a high premium should be placed on the value of effective education and training to achieve an array of economic and social objectives. The development of a strong and functional education system is closely linked with the quality of teaching and learning taking place at schools. In this regard, the nagging shortage of skilled educators underscores the importance of effective training of student teachers to address the shortages and ultimately contribute to the establishment of a competitive and sustainable education system. The present article examines the effectiveness of mentoring and teaching practice experiences of student teachers at a South African university who completed their practical training at township schools. These schools are typically under-resourced, overcrowded and situated in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Not only are many of these schools' teachers under-qualified, but the schools also experience acute shortages of teachers in scarce subjects. An empirical study was conducted that targeted all final-year education students who had completed their teaching practice at 34 township schools. The empirical findings provide food for thought as to the success of mentoring in these schools. While 16 aspects of mentoring rendered a positive result ranging from 'positive' to 'strongly positive', seven aspects of mentoring were regarded as 'mildly adequate' and five skills were evaluated as between 'below adequate' to 'inadequate'. Even though the findings of this study cannot be generalised to mentoring at all township schools, some noteworthy trends were identified.

Keywords: student teachers; teaching practice; mentoring; township schools

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the cornerstones of any society. It plays a pivotal role in the achievement of critical goals such as social transformation, technological innovation and individual empowerment. South Africa is no exception: as it is a developing country, a high premium is placed on the value of effective education and training to achieve an array of economic and social objectives. The development of a strong and functional education system is closely linked with the quality of teaching and learning taking place at schools. In this regard, the nagging shortage of skilled educators underscores the importance of effective training of student teachers to address the shortages and ultimately contribute to the establishment of a competitive and sustainable education system.

Education in South Africa faces numerous challenges and the building of teaching capacity should top the priorities of the South African government. To this end, the quality of teacher training is crucial. According to UNESCO (2002:8) teacher training should be designed to achieve four objectives, namely improving the general educational background of student teachers; increasing their knowledge of the subjects they aim to teach; understanding the pedagogy of learners; and learning and developing practical skills and competencies. The question arises whether teacher training departments at South African tertiary institutions achieve these objectives. Marais and Meier (2004:220) point out that inculcating sound practical teaching skills is integral to teacher training. Research consistently points to two facts, i.e. the instilling of sound teaching practices is key to the effective training of student teachers, and next, practical teacher training is in need of vigorous improvement because, *inter alia,* the quality of supervisor teachers is inadequate, as is the linkage between theory and practice (Robinson, 2000; Sullivan & Glantz, 2000; Jonson, 2002; Sivan & Chan, 2003).

The term 'teaching practice' refers to a variety of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools (Marais & Meier, 2004:221). These experiences present numerous challenges to teacher training in a developing country such as South Africa. The benefits of practical training can easily be eroded by factors such as geographical distance, isolation, variances in the levels of teacher expertise, ineffectiveness and socio-economic circumstances (Ismael, 2000; Halse & Buchanan, 2000:40). The experiences of student teachers doing practical teaching in schools are therefore affected by diverse factors and challenges, many of which can often not be anticipated.

2.   RATIONALE AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This article is based on research that sought to examine the effectiveness of teaching practice experiences of student teachers at a South African university who completed their practical training at township schools. In the context of this study the term 'township schools' refers to schools situated in black settlements established during the pre-1994 political dispensation in South Africa. These schools are typically under-resourced, overcrowded and situated in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Many of the teachers at these schools are under-qualified. Moreover, the schools experience acute shortages of teachers in scarce subjects (DoE, 2007; Engelbrecht, 2009).

An analysis of the results of the Department of Education's rating system of schools, which depicts schools as either 'dysfunctional', 'underperforming' or 'functional', reveals that the majority of 'underperforming' and 'dysfunctional' schools are situated in township areas and informal settlements (Engelbrecht, 2009). In a study conducted in 2005, Taylor (2006:1) found that almost 80% of township schools were essentially dysfunctional.

The placing of student teachers for practical teaching experience and mentoring at schools labelled as 'essentially dysfunctional' is therefore cause for serious concern. Given the importance of worthwhile practical teaching experience and quality mentoring by competent teacher mentors, it is alarming that a considerable number of student teachers at South African universities complete their practical training at sub-standard schools.

In view of the above, it seemed mandatory firstly to inquire whether the practical teacher training that student teachers undergo in township schools meets the requirements of effective school-based training, and secondly to establish what students' perceptions are regarding the quality of the practical training and mentoring they receive at township schools.

3.   BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The increased importance of mentoring in practical teacher training courses

The term 'mentoring' denotes 'the support given by one (usually more experienced) person for the growth and learning of another, and for their integration into and acceptance by a specific community' (Malderez, 2001:57). In the context of modern-day student teacher training, Tomlinson (1995:7) defines mentoring as 'assisting student-teachers to learn how to teach in school-based settings'. According to this definition mentoring is not only undertaken by teachers whose advice and support may be actively sought, but also by teachers whose teaching practices and interactions with pupils may be witnessed by student teachers. It might thus be deduced that *all teachers* in schools which accommodate teacher trainees should be sensitised to the importance of mentoring and be equipped with basic skills in order to perform their mentoring role properly.

Various research findings point to the benefits of student teachers working closely with experienced practitioners or teacher mentors (Hobson, 2002; Marais & Meier, 2004; Caires & Almeida, 2005). Effective mentoring might present itself in different ways. It fundamentally comprises skills acquisition which is facilitated by various forms of 'coaching'. Where mentoring involves the development of a partnership through which one person shares his own knowledge, skills, information and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else, Gallway (2011) points out that a coach supports a coachee to identify, focus on and achieve his/her own goals. Sloboda (1986:32-33) asserts that '[r]eal life skills … are usually learnt with the aid of some form of coaching', and that appropriate feedback on practice, which he characterises as 'knowledge of what your actions achieved', is 'essential to skill acquisition'.

Edwards and Collison (1996:27-28) suggest various ways in which teacher mentors might coach, support and 'scaffold' student teachers, including listening to students; modelling teaching and general classroom management; analyzing and discussing [their] own practice; observing students; negotiating with students their own learning goals; supporting students while they teach; [and] … providing constructive criticism …' Student teachers might further explore mentor knowledge and beliefs by interviews, by discussing mentors' concept maps, by conducting stimulated recall interviews after the mentor's lessons, and also by discussing the content of mentorstudent conversations (Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2003:200). Luneta (2006:19) and Mohomo-Mahlatsi and Van Tonder (2006:387-389) mention specific competencies that should be mentored. These include effective guidance with regard to general classroom practice (lesson planning, instructional methods, learning activities, the effective use of learning and teaching subject media (LTSM) and assessment); the ability to deal with diversity in terms of gender, language, race and socio-economic status; managing learner behaviour; and school administration and organisation.

Research shows that student teachers, being those who primarily benefit from pre-service teacher training courses, perceive school-based mentoring to be a key element of their teacher training course (Hobson, 2002:16-18; Furlong, 2000; Malderez, 2001; John, 2001). It furthermore indicates which elements of school-based mentoring students value most, i.e. having supportive, reassuring mentors who are able and prepared to invest time in them, who offer practical advice and ideas relating to their teaching, and who provide constructive feedback on their teaching attempts. In addition, *Hobson (2002:18) found that students* expect school-based mentoring to be a vital component of their teacher training. To illustrate this point, 92,4% of secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students from four training courses who completed questionnaires at the start of their courses in 1998, regarded the joint planning of lessons with their school teacher/mentor as 'very valuable' or 'essential', while 95,3% of respondents stated that it would be 'very valuable' or 'essential' to have teachers/mentors observe their lessons and give them feedback. In his/her study, Hobson (2002) found that the students' expectations of the value of working with school-based mentors were significantly higher than their expectations of the value of any other aspects of their teacher training course.

Research moreover provides strong indications that the quality of mentoring varies significantly because it appears that some mentors, for example, do not provide a 'safe' and supportive environment in which their mentees can learn (Sullivan & Glantz, 2000; Robinson, 2001; Sivan & Chan, 2003;). Conversely, it appears as if student teachers commonly do not explore their mentor teacher's practical knowledge of their own accord (Malderez, 2001, Le Roux & Möller, 2002:184; Zanting *et al*., 2003:201).

They are inclined to focus on their own teaching. They expect their lessons to be evaluated by experienced mentor teachers, and thereafter to get tips, advice, and suggestions to improve their techniques. They focus on the mentor's teaching skills to a lesser extent. The observation of mentors' lessons provides student teachers with the opportunity to accumulate useful information on teaching practice. However, few students fully comprehend their mentor's teaching style because they do not enquire about the knowledge and beliefs that underpin the mentor's actions in class (Zanting *et al*., 2003). For example, in a study by Penny *et al*. (quoted in Zanting *et al., 2003*), it appeared that student teachers rarely ask questions about lessons given by the mentors. In addition, mentors are often not inclined to explicate the teaching knowledge and beliefs that underlie their teaching style (Edwards & Collison, 1996).

The relationship between student teachers and teacher mentors

Numerous investigations indicate that supervisor teachers or mentors have a considerable influence on the development of student teachers' orientation, disposition, conceptions and classroom practice (Marais & Meier, 2004:223; Sivan & Chan, 2003:187-191; Luneta, 2006). Students value a supportive, interactive classroom environment, especially with respect to the process of learning to teach (Marais & Meier, 2004:222). A good relationship between student and mentor is essential. Research has shown that conflict between a student and a mentor teacher is often the direct result of the mentor teacher's inability to match his/her mentorship style to the student's capacity to perform instructional tasks (Ralph 2000:11-12). The mentor teacher may also exploit an amicable relationship with the student by burdening the student with an excessive workload. Mentor teachers rarely question the correctness of the practical methods they employ in the classroom because the students do not query it. Students refrain from making enquiries about the teaching style and methods of mentor teachers, fearing they would incur a negative report. They would consequently rather suppress the teaching style they developed during their training and adapt to the style of the mentor. Mitchell (1996:47) says '[s]tudents become caught in the procedures and rituals of the classroom without considering, questioning or comprehending the overall purpose of what is being done'.

Research also reports that student teachers tend to be anxious about factors such as the maintenance of discipline and learner control, the quality of their professional relationships with their mentors, the level of their knowledge of the curriculum content, and the quality of their understanding of the learners (Christie, Conlon, Gemmel & Long, 2004:112). During teaching practice student teachers face the realities of this process and the complex roles that have to be mastered as part of the training. The complexity of these roles commonly causes considerable stress and anxiety.

Some mentors assume that students have already been equipped by the university with the requisite knowledge and skills to teach (McGee 1996:20) and they therefore deem it unnecessary to assist them with the development of much-needed basic skills. Under these circumstances students could, instead of being productive, view their practical teaching experience negatively, which could dent their self-confidence and lead to feelings of inadequacy (Rushton 2001:146; Marais & Meier, 2004:221). Many studies show that inadequacy in the mentor's guidance and training reduces the effectiveness of practical teaching and can lead to a negative experience of teaching practice overall (Sullivan & Glantz, 2000; Ismail *et al.,* 2000:44; Christie *et al.*, 2004).

In summary, the literature is unambiguous about the crucial role that teacher mentors play in the training of student teachers, and similarly, about the necessity for student teachers to make the most of the experience and expertise of their school mentors. However, the findings of the case studies mentioned above cannot merely be transposed to township schools because these studies were mainly undertaken in First World teacher training contexts that differ greatly from those in the townships. It was subsequently deemed necessary to establish the perceptions and experiences of student teachers on the quality of their practical teacher training at township schools, as well as the extent to which the guidance they receive meets the requirements of effective mentoring.

4.   METHODOLOGY

Research design

For this study, a mixed method research design was followed, focussing on the *sequential exploratory strategy*. According to Creswell (2009:211), this strategy involves an initial phase(s) of qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a subsequent phase(s) of quantitative data collection and analysis that builds on the results of the initial qualitative stage(s). The purpose of this strategy is to use quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of qualitative findings. This was the procedure of choice in the study under discussion in this article, since a quantitative data collection instrument needed to be developed based on the findings arrived at in the qualitative phase. Using a three-phased approach, the researchers first gathered qualitative data and analysed it (phase 1) and used the analysis to develop an instrument (phase 2) that was subsequently administered to a sample of a population (phase 3) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The study targeted a South African university's final-year education students who had completed their teaching practice at 34 township schools of which 14 were 'functional', eight 'underperforming' and twelve 'dysfunctional'.

Data collection and analysis

A review of the literature was undertaken at the outset to establish the importance of student mentoring during teaching practice. Each of the mentor teachers at the designated schools received an information brochure beforehand which explained their functions and assistance to the trainee teachers. This was followed by an analysis of student portfolios which had to be completed as part of the practical training assessment (first qualitative part of phase 1). The portfolios comprised, *inter alia,* a section that required students to reflect critically on their teaching practice experiences. These submissions were sorted according to the functionality status of the schools and subsequently textually analysed to determine students' views and uncover any trends and themes emerging from their practical teaching experiences.

Useful data was obtained from the text analysis, and in order to verify the data, a focus group interview was conducted with nine students (second qualitative part of phase 1). The selection of the interviewees was determined by the functionality status of the school where they had completed their practical teaching, i.e. at a 'functional', 'underperforming' or 'dysfunctional' school. Three students were selected from each school category. The objective was to ascertain whether the quality of mentoring could be correlated with the functionality status of the schools. The data from the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. The trends and general themes derived from the text analysis and focus group interviews were subsequently used to inform the design of a structured, quantitative questionnaire (phase 2) which was later used for data collection on a larger scale (phase 3). It was believed that a questionnaire would differentiate more effectively between themes and would highlight ranking orders (Kamper, Badenhorst & Steyn, 2009). The following recurring themes were identified: personal factors, subject knowledge, lesson preparation and instructional methods, learning and teaching activities, feedback on activities, managing learner behaviour, school administration and organisation, and finally a few general factors. The data collection process was therefore triangulated (text analysis of the teaching portfolios, focus group interview and questionnaire), which contributed to the reliability and validity of the study.

The questionnaire comprised statements to which the student teachers responded by indicating their level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (4). These statements aimed to bring to light the student teachers' perceptions of their mentor teachers' ability to supervise and assist them with various aspects of teaching. To verify the consistency of the inter-item reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were calculated by using the statistical package SPSS 13.0.

According to the guidelines for the interpretation of this coefficient, a result of 0,90 indicates high reliability, 0,80 indicates moderate reliability, while 0,70 indicates low reliability (Pietersen & Maree, 2007:216). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the 28 items was 0,919. The reliability of the questionnaire could therefore be regarded as very high.

Ninety six (96) questionnaires were issued to final-year students. The return rate was 100%. The following ethical measures were considered: the anonymity and privacy of respondents were respected at all times, the rationale of the research project was explained to respondents at the start of the focus group interview as well as in the cover letter to the questionnaire, and the researchers endeavoured to be objective when reviewing literature and obtaining data.

Findings

The data from the text analysis and the focus group interviews surprisingly revealed that the functionality status of the sample schools had no significant bearing on the students' ratings. The same conclusion was reached with regard to the questionnaires, which were sorted according to the functionality status of the schools before analysis. This finding refuted the researchers' expectation that notable correlations would be found in this regard.

When the data were analysed it immediately became evident that care would have to be taken to avoid over-generalisations in the interpretation of the data. Consideration was given to whether a result of 54% with regard to a particular mentoring skill, for example, could be interpreted as successful, or vice versa, a result of 46% as unsuccessful. In the first case 54% agreed or strongly agreed, which implies that almost as many (46%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Interpreting 54% as successful would therefore be inaccurate and misleading. To avoid such misinterpretations and subsequently enhance the validity of the data interpretation, we decided to use the cut-off points applied by Caires and Almeida (2005). In keeping with their criteria, a significant positive result with regard to a particular item would have to constitute the agreement of at least two thirds (66%) of the respondents. A result of 66 79% was thus deemed positive. If 80% or more of the respondents were in agreement the result was seen as strongly positive, while a result of between 50% and 66% was interpreted as a mildly adequate level of mentoring. If less than 50% of the respondents disagreed with a particular statement, the success of mentoring was regarded as below adequate to inadequate.

For purposes of determining the perceived success of mentoring in township schools, the findings are subsequently reported per category in correspondence with the categories in the questionnaire (also refer to Table 1).

Category A: Personal factors

Table I illustrates that an overwhelming 90% of the respondents reported a positive and supportive relationship with their mentor, while 88% felt at liberty to ask their mentor for assistance when needed. Seventy seven per cent (77%) indicated that their mentor played a significant role in helping them to teach with self-confidence. Seventy per cent (70%) agreed or strongly agreed that their mentor had assisted them in establishing a positive teaching self-concept. It is clear, therefore, that the participants generally experienced positive or strong positive bonds with their mentors.

Category B: Subject knowledge

The participants generally perceived their mentors to have solid subject knowledge (72%) and 66% agreed or strongly agreed that their mentor had assisted them in improving their own subject knowledge. Seventy per cent (70%) of the participants also believed that their mentors had a thorough knowledge of curriculum developments (34% agreed; 36% strongly agreed). These findings are encouraging, since adequate subject knowledge and a sound knowledge base of curriculum developments of mentor teachers are viewed as pivotal aspects of successful mentoring (Robinson, 2000; Hobson, 2002; Zanting *et al.*, 2003; Christie *et al.*, 2004).

Category C: Lesson preparation and instructional methods

With regard to lesson preparation and the use of instructional methods, the participants' views on the quality of mentoring were more discouraging in comparison with the foregoing categories. While 71% (33% agreed, 38% strongly agreed) reported that they got ample opportunity to observe their mentors' lessons, a considerable percentage (47%) indicated that their mentors did not assist them in preparing their lessons. Only 55% said that they discussed aspects of their mentors' lessons with them. This may be attributed to the fact that mentor teachers hardly ever question their own teaching methods (Marais & Meier, 2004:222). According to Marais and Meier (2004), student teachers seldom feel at liberty to reflect critically on their mentors' instructional methods in fear of a negative evaluation. Hobson (2002:7) points out that school-based mentors can benefit from insight into the perceptions and evaluations of student teachers, since it may constitute constructive feedback on their own (and other mentors') practices. It can thus serve to remove teaching obstacles and enhance effective learning of teaching in their own teaching practices, and additionally be helpful to future student teachers in perfecting their own teaching methodology (Zanting *et al.,* 2003:200).

Although 58% indicated that their mentors observed their lessons regularly, 61% reported that their mentors often left the class and expected them to take control of the teaching for extended periods.

Sixty per cent (60%) said that their mentors assisted them in using a variety of instructional methods. Research consistently indicates that the use of a variety of instructional methods enhances cognition and retention and furthermore promotes a classroom climate that is conducive to learning and teaching. The effective management of learner behaviour is an additional positive offshoot associated with the employment of several teaching methods (Christie *et al.*, 2004; Caires & Almeida, 2005; Luneta, 2006).

Category D: Learner activities and media

In accordance with item 12 where the majority of respondents indicated that their mentors had assisted them in using a variety of instructional methods, 69% (46% agreed, 23 % strongly agreed) reported that they were advised on using a variety of learning activities. Mentoring with regard to the use of various methods of assessment was not ranked very highly (only 55% agreed with the statement on this skill). Likewise, the use of learning and teaching media was also not ranked very highly. Sixty one per cent (61%) of the respondents indicated that their mentors did not employ a variety of learning and teaching media when teaching, nor were they advised on the use of different and interesting media (47%). The reason for this finding may be rooted in the fact that many township schools are situated in impoverished areas; these schools are constrained by financial difficulties and as a result they are under-resourced, not only in terms of inadequate facilities such as buildings, but also in terms of teaching and learning resources (Kamper, 2008; Engelbrecht, 2009).

Category E: Feedback on activities

Numerous studies point to the value of student teachers being observed by their mentors and thereafter receiving feedback and constructive criticism (Robinson, 2000; Hobson, 2002; Edwards & Protheroe, 2003). It serves as an invaluable means of developing their teaching skills. It appeared as if the students had experienced the highlighting of positive aspects in their teaching as particularly motivating. Many of the participants also attested to the value of suggestions, friendly 'challenges', setting targets and practical advice for the sake of professional development. Advice related to the 'practicalities' of teaching were particularly valued because it provided alternative strategies that can be utilised in certain situations. A particularly useful form of feedback came from scheduled (e.g. weekly) meetings with mentor teachers where matters of mutual interest and concern were discussed. In their study, Christie *et al*. (2004:115) found that student teachers became extremely frustrated and demotivated when they lacked proper feedback from their mentors, especially when they were repeatedly assured that their teaching practice was up to scratch although they were fully aware that the opposite was true. Feedback given offhandedly or hastily in snatched moments at the beginning or end of each day or during break also leads to disappointment and disillusionment (Garvey & Alred, 2000:124).

The present study revealed that feedback activities were disappointingly inadequate. Only 51% of the participants agreed (29%) or strongly agreed (22%) that they had regular meetings with their mentors about their general progress. A mere 50% (35% agreed, 15% strongly agreed) felt that their mentors gave them adequate advice and constructive criticism on their teaching abilities and the art of teaching, while 53% disagreed (21% strongly disagreed, 32% disagreed) that their mentors set them targets for improvement.

Category F: Managing learner behaviour

Hobson (2002:8) points out that many student teachers regard learner discipline as a thorny issue. Since the abolishment of corporal punishment in 1998 there have been frequent research reports on the discipline crisis in South African schools (Badenhorst, Steyn & Beukes, 2007). Rossouw (2003:414) describes various cases of learner misbehaviour and its impact on the effective functioning of schools and he asserts that a lack of discipline in schools strongly jeopardises efforts to establish a culture of learning and teaching in South African schools. Wolhuter and Oosthuizen (2003:333) cite studies in which disrespectful behaviour towards teachers is singled out as one of the most devastating forms of learner misbehaviour and moreover, as one of the most prevalent reasons why teachers resign. Studies conducted by De Klerk and Rens (2003:354) as well as by Mentz, Wolhuter and Steyn (2003:392) confirm this trend of misbehaviour and disrespectful demeanour of learners.

Managing learner behaviour did not appear to be problematic at sample schools in this study. Eighty per cent (80%) of the respondents agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (45%) that their mentors displayed good learner behaviour management skills, 75% agreed (39% agreed, 36% strongly agreed) that their mentors had assisted them in understanding learners and their characteristics better and 67% reported that their mentors had given them assistance in acquiring effective disciplining skills.

Category G: School administration and organisation

Many mentor teachers seem to overlook the administrative aspects of mentoring. By and large research focuses on the didactical aspects of mentoring while classroom administrative duties such as general paperwork, recording of marks and completion of registers seem to be neglected. Proper administrative management is crucial to effective teaching. Researchers appear to agree that effective teaching and learning go hand in hand with effective organisation and administration (Hobson, 2002:6; Chambers & Roper, 2000:42). Caires and Almeida (2005:118) point out that administrative functions and responsibilities assist student teachers in developing professional competencies in a structured manner, while preparing them holistically for the challenges of the teaching profession.

Sivan and Chan (2003:184) emphasise that to be academically successful a school needs to have a sound administrative structure: 'Effective management of administrative systems implies effective school management. Seldom would one find an academically successful school with a poor administrative structure.'

While the majority of participants in this study (80%) indicated that they had been given ample opportunity to perform classroom administration (29% agreed, 51% strongly agreed), only 47% reported that they had been exposed to general aspects of school organisation such as time-tabling and arranging cultural and sporting events.

Category H: General

Even though no clear response pattern emerged from the results of the foregoing items, the feedback on the general value of the teaching practice period was overwhelmingly positive. Ninety five per cent (95%) agreed (15% agreed and 80% strongly agreed) that they viewed the teaching practice period as an important component of their teachers' qualification, 90% felt that the experience had prepared them adequately for the demands of teaching, and 97% were of the opinion that the teaching practice experience had contributed to their personal growth.

5.   SUMMARY

Our initial research question enquired whether the participating trainee teachers perceived the practical teacher training that they underwent in township schools to meet the requirements of effective and quality school-based training as explained to them during their preparatory sessions. The empirical findings provide food for thought. When the cut-off points used by Caires and Almeida (2005) were applied, 16 aspects of mentoring were regarded as positive to strongly positive (66 69% and 80 100% respectively), while seven aspects of mentoring were regarded as mildly adequate (50 65%). Five aspects of mentoring were evaluated between 'below adequate' to 'inadequate' (less than 50%). Interpretation in accordance with these categories gives rise to the debatable question: Does a rating of 'mildly adequate' (50 66%) provide satisfactory proof of successful mentoring? It is our opinion that, for practical teacher training to meet the requirements of *effective* school-based training, all mentoring skills should ideally be rated as positive to strongly positive, thus from 66 100%. With this classification in mind, the following conclusions were reached:

- Students had positive and supportive relationships with mentors, and they felt at liberty to ask for assistance.
- Mentors gave assistance to students, thus enabling them to teach with self-confidence.

- Mentors displayed sound subject knowledge as well as a thorough knowledge of curriculum developments.
- Students were afforded the opportunity to observe mentors' lessons.
- Students were advised on the use of a variety of teacher and learner activities.
- Students were assisted in acquiring good learner behaviour management skills.
- Students were given the opportunity to carry out general classroom administration.

It is clear that the aspects of mentoring listed below have the potential to contribute significantly to the value of practical teaching in township schools. The researchers are of the opinion that these aspects need to receive more attention when mentor teachers are trained:

- Assistance with lesson preparation and/or checking of lesson plans
- Opportunities to discuss aspects of mentors' lessons with students
- Regular observation of students' lessons
- Advice on the use of diverse methods of assessment
- Advice on the use of a variety of learning and teaching media
- Regular meetings with students to discuss their general progress and to provide them with constructive criticism

Even though the findings of this study may not be generalised to mentoring at all township schools, some noteworthy trends in the mentoring of student teachers were identified. The findings can be applied fruitfully in the development of any practical teacher training programme for mentor teachers.

6.   CONCLUSION

Some limitations with regard to this investigation need to be noted. Although the student teachers were provided with criteria to guide their judgement, they had limited teaching experience and an incomplete professional background. Since they were only exposed to mentoring at township schools, their views on mentoring were confined to their experiences at those schools. Prior experience of mentoring at private or ex-model C schools would have enabled them to juxtapose their experiences and ultimately better judge the quality of mentoring at township schools. The investigation would have benefited and consequently yielded more comprehensive results had this been the case. However, in the opinion of the authors the afore-mentioned limitations do not invalidate the practical value of the findings of the investigation. The identified shortfalls should be regarded as serious problem areas and subsequently serve as criteria for teacher training institutions to assess their own practical teaching training programmes.

In addition, follow-up studies need to be conducted which could contribute to the empowerment of teachers as mentors of trainee teachers.

It appears that if teachers were better equipped for their role as mentors they would be motivated to revitalise their own instructional and guidance skills. What is more, such an endeavour would also advance the professional development of student teachers.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Frequencies of mentoring skills as perceived by student teachers

	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
	1	2	3	4
A. Personal factors				
1. I had a positive and supportive relationship with my mentor.	4	5	26	64
2. I felt at liberty to ask my mentor for assistance whenever I needed it.	3	9	40	48
3. My mentor played a significant role in helping me to teach with self-confidence.	5	17	42	35
4. My mentor assisted me in forming a positive teaching self-concept.	6	23	40	30
B. Subject knowledge				
5. My mentor displayed sound and solid subject knowledge.	9	19	37	35
6. My mentor assisted me in improving my subject knowledge.	9	24	37	29
7. My mentor displayed a thorough knowledge of curriculum developments (such as Outcomes-based education).	12	18	34	36
C. Lesson preparation and instructional methods				
8. My mentor assisted me in preparing my lessons or by checking my lesson plans.	19	28	34	19
9. I got ample opportunity to observe my mentor's lessons.	16	13	33	38
10. I regularly had the opportunity to discuss aspects of my mentor's lessons with him/her.	18	27	40	15
11. My mentor observed my lessons on a regular basis.	13	29	31	27
12. My mentor discussed and/or assisted me in using a variety of instructional methods.	18	22	41	19
13. My mentor often left the classroom and expected of me to teach his/her classes.	19	42	26	13
D. Learning and teaching activities				
14. My mentor advised me on the use of a variety of teacher and learner activities.	14	17	46	23
15. My mentor recommended and/or assisted me in using diverse methods of assessment.	15	30	40	15
16. My mentor employed a variety of learning and teaching media when teaching.	28	33	26	14
17. My mentor encouraged and advised me on the use of different and interesting learning and teaching media.	23	29	23	24
E. Feedback on activities				
18. My mentor made time for me by having regular meetings about my general progress.	18	31	29	22
19. My mentor gave me adequate advice and constructive criticism on my teaching abilities and the art of teaching.	18	32	35	15
20. My mentor set me targets for improvement.	21	32	34	14
F. Managing learner behaviour				
21. My mentor displayed good learner behaviour management skills.	9	12	35	45
22. My mentor assisted me in understanding learners and their characteristics better.	10	15	39	36
23. My mentor gave me assistance in acquiring effective learner behaviour management skills.	11	22	43	24
G. School administration and organisation				
24. My mentor gave me opportunities to perform classroom administration activities (such as completing the class register, recording assessment marks, marking tests).	11	10	29	51
25. I was exposed to general aspects of school organisation such as time-tabling and arranging cultural and sporting events.	26	27	23	24
H. General				
26. I see this teaching practice period as an important part of my teacher's qualification.	3	2	15	80
27. My teacher practice experience has prepared me adequately for the demands of teaching.	4	5	34	56
28. The teaching practice has contributed to my personal growth.	1	2	16	81

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EXTENDED DEGREES: A UNIVEN STUDY

P KABURISE

Abstract

The four year extended degree (ED) with a foundation provision is one of the academic intervention tools available to underprepared students in higher education institutions (HEIs). University of Venda (Univen) introduced this form of assistance in 2007 to students enrolled in the Schools of Human Sciences, Management and Law (HML). The 15% completion rate for this first cohort is a cause for concern. This paper examines the implications of this result in terms of Univen's implementation of EDs. EDs can be variously applied dependent on the peculiar situation in an institution and it can be assumed that Univen chose the current format after due consideration of all factors. The poor throughput rate of these students, however indicate otherwise, motivating this investigation. An examination of the curricula for the various degrees indicates that Univen is implementing a blend of the various academic interventions without the necessary reconfiguration of teaching and learning and this might be the cause for the poor performance. The final sections of the paper contribute to the debates on topical issues related to academic literacy and support such as an extended high school period and a four year generic bachelor's degree.

Keywords: Extended degree, underprepared students, academic literacy. Univen, results, curriculum

1.   INTRODUCTION

South Africa's graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world according to the National Plan for Higher Education compiled by the Department of Education in 2001. In 2005 the Department of Education (DoE) reported that of the 120,000 students who enrolled in higher education in 2000, 36 000 (30%) dropped out in their first year of study; 24,000 (20%) dropped out in their second and third years. Of the rest, 60 000, only 27% graduated within the specified three years duration for a generic bachelors degree, while one in every two technikon students dropped out between 2000 and 2004. According to Letseka and Maile (2008) it has since being established that in some institutions the dropout rate is as high as 80%.

DHET then went on to put this picture in financial terms. The Department noted, with concern, that the dropout rate was costing the government R4.5 billion in grants and subsidies to higher education without a resulting return on the investment. Economic results from such a scenario include poor growth rate of the country as skilled high level personnel and managerial skills for businesses and industries become scarce at a time when these are becoming increasingly essential for social and economic development in a knowledge-driven world.

The reason usually given for this most unsatisfactory state of affairs is the problem of inadequate articulation between secondary /high school and tertiary levels of education. It was realised that certain category of students have generally not been equipped with key academic approaches and experiences which are taken for granted and which are essential to traditional higher education programmes. This gave expression to the term 'articulation gap' as referred to by the 1997 White Paper (DoE 1997: 2.32). This gap manifests itself in students who lack skills such as, the ability to critically interact with issues, engage in academic discourse, handle the linguistic sophistication required to access lectures, lecturers and comply with the rigors of research.

This low success rate seen, predominately, in students from disadvantage communities makes the situation, socially, also worrying since it is also causing the defeat of one of the strategic objectives of the National Plan for Higher Education – 'to promote equity of access and outcomes and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that student and staff profiles reflect the demographic composition of South African society'.

Reasons for under-preparedness are various and dynamic but the reasons can be broadly grouped under lack of academic literacy (AL). AL is a complex, multifaceted term and its presence and development are dependent on a multiplicity of contributors. Hence, a discussion of AL cannot be taken in a neutral context but must be fore-grounded in the profile of the country, the lecturers and students' profile, an institution's philosophy, among others (Cliff *et al.* 2003). Where students' level of AL is such that it puts the students at risk of non-completion of their studies, some kind of intervention is usually offered. It is within this context that institutionalized academic support has been undergoing constant evolution in an attempt to come up with the most relevant design.

2.   AIM AND OUTLINE OF THE PAPER

This paper reports on an impact study of one type of academic intervention adopted in Univen, the extended degree (ED). The aim of this paper is to discuss the significance of the performance of one cohort of students enrolled for ED in the Schools of Human Sciences, Management and Law (HML). In 2007, 120 students enrolled in various degrees offered in HML; these should have completed their degrees by 2010. Their graduation rate of 15% as against the overall Univen rate of 21% is a clear indication that Univen's use of ED as a means of improving both access and success needs interrogation. Using Univen as a case study, this paper reflects on the implications of this result on ED as an intervention strategy for Univen students, lecturers, and policy makers. Closing discussions focus on possible alternative interventions such as, a generic four year degree or an extra year in the high school in line with some African countries which operate with 'O' and 'A' levels in pre-tertiary schooling.

3.   BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Paying attention to cognitively underprepared tertiary students in the South African education system can be traced to the late 70s as part of activists' reaction to the low presence of Black students not only in tertiary studies but particularly in certain historically white higher education institutions (HEIs). The need for effective academic development was further fanned by the political change in South Africa after 1994, where social consciousness and equality were expected to be exhibited in as many areas of the country as possible, including offering quality education to formerly disenfranchised sectors of the country.

Inadequate academic readiness for tertiary studies is not only a direct result of the quality of pre-tertiary teaching and learning but also other contributors like the socio-economic environment of the students. Schools from which Univen draws its students are characterized by poor resources, under-qualified teachers and cognitively unchallenging teaching and learning; while socio-economic influences include students coming from a non-tertiary studies oriented background, financial constraints and difficulties in adjusting to the elitism of tertiary culture (Warren, 1998; Eiselen and Geyser 2003). Socio-economic conditions prevent these students' homes from supporting the learning environment of the schools since most students are first generation scholars, therefore a stimulating academic milieu is not forthcoming preventing a school-home corporation in the learning of these students. Literacy within this environment is of the basic functional type which comprises academic skills at a fairly elementary survival level (Kilfoil and Van der Walt 1997). Functional literacy enables students to implement some language and calculation skills and to operate adequately in their immediate communities. Functional literacy however is the starting point in developing critical academic literacy, which is vital for the cognitive challenges of tertiary work. Critical literacy produces an independent thinker who can interact with text by analysing, evaluating, individualising and challenging the works of writers. When students do not possess or have not progressed in their pre-tertiary education to critical levels of literacy, tertiary work poses challenges.

Naturally HEIs could only attempt to find solutions to some of these academic and socio-economic challenges. The main solution offered for academic lacks were remedial additional classes outside the main stream with the aim of inculcating the lacking academic attributes to the students and some socio-economic support was offered in various forms of bursaries and affective intervention.

Univen in the far north of the Limpopo province attracts students at various levels of preparedness. Eiselen and Geyser (2003) Cliff *et al* (2003) have described students they would classify as academically 'under-prepared' and it can be said that Univen students exhibit these features at varying degrees.

A similar point is made by Kaburise (2010a) who note that the level of language sophistication demonstrated in writing samples by potential Univen students is below the threshold considered basic for successful tertiary level education (Bourdieu *et al*, 1994, Elder, C. *et al.* 2004). Since most of the underprepared students operate at the functional literacy levels, some kind of intervention was needed to enhance this type to tertiary-relevant critical literacy.

Supportive measures for student under-preparedness have been in the spot light for the past 30 years, in a variety of forms and institutional settings. These different approaches to AL enhancement in the higher education landscape have posed challenges for institutions on what is the most appropriate to their particular situation as the expected improvement in success rates for underprepared students did not materialise in the 80s. This led to a re-examination of issues like the whole concept of AL, the role of the various stakeholders, the nature of tertiary teaching and learning and flexible and needs-driven intervention strategies. This resulted in the spotlight also being put on the HEIs. Questions were then asked as to whether HEIs were also prepared for students from diverse backgrounds; whether there were barriers in HEIs themselves which were contributing to the poor success rates (Boughey and Volbrecht in Griesel, 2004). Tertiary success was seen as lying not only in 'fixing' the underprepared students but also in 'fixing' the HEIs' 'inaccessibility' to students. This saw academic support transformed from marginalised add-on remedial activities into a 'core Higher Education Development practice where the synergy of policy and strategy; capacity building; scholarship, research and evaluation is resulting in the development of national systems, institutions, staff, students and curricula and its responsiveness to societal needs.' (ibid). It is within this environment that extended support was conceptualised to not only offer access as remedial or bridging but extended support to ensure at-risk students success throughout their tertiary studies.

This saw the advent of academic development infused into the responsibilities of all stakeholders in the tertiary project. Hence main-stream content staff were sensitised to their contribution in terms of curriculum planning and support in teaching and learning. This kind of thinking saw the advent of different designs and implementation of academic support among them an extended degree with a one year foundation provision.

## 4.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literacy support is offered in HEIs in various forms dictated by circumstances like nature of the under-preparedness of the students and staff, ethos of the institution, finances, history or even the institution's physical location. Leibowitz (2004) identifies three perspectives or dimensions of support. The first is the inclusive type where as many of the stakeholders in the academic pursuit are involved.

Here the focus is on improving the quality of general teaching and learning in an institution. It is an acknowledgement that success is componential, therefore requires combined effort. With this approach support is diffused and each partner has certain responsibilities. Although seen as the one with the potential for long term effect and sustainability, it is also the approach whose relevancy may not be immediately visible to the student hence may affect motivation levels and may also provoke accountability challenges for the different partners. This is similar to the holistic approach of Amos and Fisher (1998) who talk of academic development as being essentially a change for the better in teaching and learning in higher education.

The second perspective of academic development of Leibowitz (2004) is of an individual nature where support is offered in a specific area of need. In this context, students are supported by tutors, mentors or tutorials organised by content lecturers and are aimed at mastering specific skills or acquiring particular academic attribute to enable students progress to the next levels in their studies. Although of immediate relevance, it is not targeted at educating the 'whole' person or acquiring literacy for future application and is more of a 'quick-fix' nature. Here development is compartmentalised and is aimed at addressing a particular under-preparedness.

The third type is extended support over a relatively lengthy fixed period of time, for example, over the duration of a degree or programme of study. Students exploiting this strategy have satisfied the basic entry requirements of a particular HEI but are deemed at risk for a particular discipline or may need extra years to complete their studies. Usually an extra year is deemed sufficient for such students to develop the literacy capacity to pursue their identified choice of degrees. This has come to be referred to as the 'extended degree' (ED). Since these are students registered in a particular curriculum, it is anticipated that for this system to have maximum impact such curriculum would be amended to incorporate the extra year.

Most HEIs would not claim to have adopted one approach to the complete exclusion of the others since some approaches overlap, others are a blend of approaches while others have been amended in response to issues like finances, lecturing personnel and the changing demographic profiles of the students. For example, the success of approach one (Leibowitz 2004) is dependent on lecturers having the ability and willingness to review their practices along AL development theories, while critics have mentioned whether it makes economic sense to make constant amendments to the curriculum for the relatively few extended degree students who may need that support.

The above AL approaches have some resemblance to Warren's 2002 separation of tertiary intervention into separate, semi-separate and integrated approaches.

Separate intervention is the situation where remedial modules are offered to the under-prepared students as a 'deficit' is deemed to exist in their high school preparation. Although such modules are of a generic nature a minimum inclusion of some mainstream requirements may be possible. Similar criticisms against the individual perspective of Leibowitz (2004) can be levelled here with the additional one of transferability or application. Seen as addressing a particular immediate need its relevance and support for future studies is not so obvious to students, making that period of the students' intervention autonomous (Street 1985; Lea and Street 1998). Bourdieu *et al* (1994) had similar reservations on the separate intervention model's ability to bring about overall literacy development.

Warren's 2002 semi-integrated approach is more in line with the ED concept. In this paradigm although students do have some recognisable levels of critical literacy it is not at the level for risk-free studies. Such students can be instructed, to some level, with their mainstream counterparts. Some HEIs implement this by offering some same modules to both ED and mainstream students and is seen as a more discipline-specific and narrow support. Narrow in the sense that AL was seen as socialisation to a homogenous context, in this case the world of the student's degree.

The socialisation approach, a reaction to the autonomous and separate approaches, saw students being introduced to the learning culture of tertiary institutions (Jones, Turner & Street 1999, Warren 2002). The recognition that there is no single tertiary learning culture, saw the concept of literacies entering academic development. Such an approach accommodates the multiplicity of knowledge creation existing in institutions. The notion of literacies mandates a new orientation to teaching and learning in line with Leibowitz's inclusive notion of academic development (2004). Theorists in this school of thought regard academic literacy as encompassing not only competence in subject matter but also a way of creating knowledge, a certain way of conceptualising, reacting to academic literature and expressing thoughts and ideas. This is possible from a new way of regarding teaching and learning.

5.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Univen, support for the students enrolled in HML can be classified as a blend of some of the approaches discussed above. In the first semester of the first year the approach is the remedial, autonomous, individual and separate approach (Street, 1985; Warren 2002, Leibowitz 2004) while the second semester students enrol in discipline –related modules which are intended to lay a foundation for the first year mainstream modules. Although these are discipline-specific modules minimum curricula reconfiguration is done to ensure alignment with main stream modules to accommodate the incoming ED students.

These students are therefore expected to tackle the issue of transferability and application of competencies of the first and second semesters of the first year to the remaining three years of their studies with the Schools making no provision for change in their teaching and learning styles. This state of affairs has not only adverse academic but also social implications for students graduating through extended degrees from Univen.

In 2007, 120 students enrolled for the first time for the extended degrees in HML and in 2010 15% of these students completed their degrees. With the extra levels of investment, both from the national government and Univen it was felt that a better throughput rate should have been achieved. Within such a context the issue of the most appropriate form of academic support needs to be debated. Although statistics are not yet available to establish whether the rest of the 2007 cohorts are still in the system or have dropped out from non-academic reasons, still this completion rate invites interrogation even for ED students who start their tertiary studies with higher levels of under-preparedness. These figures raise questions like: Is the four year extended degree as implemented appropriate for the profile of Univen students? Is the curriculum in line with theories of critical literacy development? How can the level of first year support (foundation provision) be maintained in the main stream? These questions will serve as focus of the discussions below.

6. HYPOTHESIS

There is a need for continuous interrogation of the academic support offered to students enrolling in EDs in the University of Venda.

7. METHODOLOGY

This investigation used Univen as a case study to examine the extended degrees as an academic support mechanism. As discussed above, the aim of the investigation was to determine the impact of the extended degree on Univen graduation figures of 2010. This was done by establishing the percentage of the 2007 first entering HML extended degree students who had completed their four year degrees by 2010 and were on the graduation list of May 2011.

A case study method was deemed most suitable as this investigation examines the interplay of variables affecting performance of Univen students enrolled on ED over their period of studies. Such an approach enables a complete understanding of an event or situation, and in this case the ED intervention in Univen. A comprehensive understanding of a situation is possible if a limited number of participants are subjected to intense scrutiny and an in-depth description of variables and activities over an extended period of study for a conclusion to be arrived at. This is how the data for this report was collected. Case studies are frequently situated and discussed within qualitative and naturalist approaches to research.

This ensures that a holistic uncontrived picture emerges promoting accuracy and reliability of data and its interpretation. The rich data obtainable through case studies introduces new variables and questions for further research and this was demonstrated in this investigation which allowed stimulating discussions of the implications of the results on ED as implemented in Univen and the whole concept of supportive measures in higher education.

8.   RESULTS

Although it can be argued that discussions based on only one set of results may be premature, there is very little justification to continue with a system if it is not producing expected results. DHET expects HEIs, annually, to provide detailed updates on the performance of students enrolled in the foundation provision of the EDs to justify the extra investment made on these tertiary students. If an unsatisfactory throughput rate is demonstrated by these students after four years then questions must be asked and solutions and alternatives discussed. It is within this context that the first cohort of beneficiaries of the extended degrees is the focus of this study. The result, 15% completion rate, indicates that there is a need to constantly review the extended degree in the form it is implemented with students on HMLF and also a need to interrogate academic literacy development in HEIs which attract students similar to those enrolling in Univen. A discussion of the results attempts to identify possible causes for the low completion rate and what amendments can be put into place to improve the rate.

A discussion of success rate in tertiary institutions is tied directly to the nature of teaching and learning, particularly, the curriculum. The restructuring of the curriculum is crucial to the success of the extended degree. Ideally, restructuring of the curriculum would be informed by the diverse profile of the students, cognitive demands of its various sections which are then judiciously organized with appropriate teaching strategies. This procedure should see different paths through the same content resulting in three year or four year graduates with the same discipline-specific knowledge. The supportive element resides in the fact that the extra year promotes a rearrangement of the curriculum of the extended degrees and the inclusion of facilitating modules permitting, cognitively, a more manageable spread of the content. This implies a complete restructuring of the curriculum and not just the dividing of the degree modules by four instead of by three years.

Univen offers extended degrees (EDs) in HML made up of a one year foundation provision which is a combination of facilitating modules (English, Maths, study skills) as well as degree-specific electives and in the students' second year they join the main stream first years starting their career courses. Univen offers the same curriculum for both the three year degrees and its four year extended equivalent.

Therefore, if the situation is that ED students follow the same content, with the same teaching strategies once they have completed the foundation provision then, even though access is negotiated for these students their success is not so well negotiated. Any ED support which does not involve restructuring of the curriculum along cognitive lines, in effect means EDs are similar to the three year ones. In fact, with this scenario more demands are placed on the ED students than on main stream (MS) students since ED students graduate with 480 credits as against 360 for main stream three year courses.

Kaburise, 2010 show that Univen students operate at the literal level of argumentation with little attempt to present cogent arguments, established characteristics of academic work. Their language ability demonstrates low levels of functional, sociolinguistic knowledge as well as strategic competence (Bachman and Palmer 1996). Other discrete language skills such as inferring, sequencing, differentiating between facts and opinions are not always evident. It was also evident from an analysis of students work that Univen students process academic activity at the surface level as against the deep level (Cliff, 2003) Operating at surface level is characterized by students who pay little attention to underlying arguments meaning. They interact very superficially with text, coming up with obvious and cognitively unchallenging interpretations. Creating a curriculum for an extended degree, in this context demands extensive knowledge of the models and acquisition of academic literacy, diverse ways of teaching and learning in addition to the normal requirements for a responsive curriculum. If an appropriate extended curriculum is not designed it is tantamount to ignoring the notion of ED and further disadvantaging these already disadvantaged, under-prepared students. It is logical that main-stream and ED students not be exposed to similarly structured curriculum although the cognitive demands must be the same. To achieve this it might be necessary for content lecturers to support the curriculum with extensive support materials or teaching strategies in the second to fourth years of the EDs. The reluctance of main stream lecturers to undertake this may stem from the challenges involved in designing a curriculum along AL development principles.

Eiselen and Geyser (2003) include the point that underprepared students, unless suitably supported, are likely also to be those who on graduating are not fully equipped to take roles in the job market. In other words, intervention strategies should not only be for successful access and completion of degrees but also to enable the graduates to take up appropriate positions in the job market. Any academic intervention therefore cannot be classified as 'successful' or 'appropriate' if it churns out graduates who are unacceptable to the job markets. For this not to happen, the curricula of the extended degree should be comparable to the demands of labour markets while remaining achievable by 'at-risk' students. This calls for a certain type of responsive curriculum, responsive to the profile of the benefiting students and epistemologically and cognitively acceptable to internal and external stakeholders.

Arising from the previous point is whether the three-year and four year graduates would enjoy equal recognition, socially and economically, in the job market. Univen, as mentioned earlier, only started its extended degrees in HML in 2007 and hence there has been no research to evaluate stakeholders' perceptions of Univen graduates from EDs. But I can imagine that the job market would view them differently if the ED curriculum is not appropriately designed. If graduates from EDs are discriminated against one would question whether employers are evaluating speed in completion of a degree or quality and quantity of the tasks completed in obtaining a degree. If graduates are to be discriminated on the time it took for completion of degrees, the government's whole notion of access, redress and education as a social equalizer would be called into question. If at-risk students from disadvantaged backgrounds become at-risk graduates and are again to face discrimination in the job place, the cycle of inequality would become further entrenched in South African society. It is imperative therefore that ED curriculum should be above board, be able to stand any educational and job market scrutiny.

This state of affairs calls for support not only for the students but for the lecturers in reconfiguring their curricula. This calls for academic development professionals who with a strong background in the various AL development models to assess Univen AL strategies currently in place, familiarise themselves with the profile of the students and lecturers, assess financial implications of the various models and evolve an approach which will make an impact on the throughput rate. Although this is a case study involving Univen and generalisation to other institutions is very limited, an assumption can be made that other HEIs with a similar academic environment could have similar issues.

In this regard, the government's discussions on the viability of a general four-year undergraduate degree make an interesting contribution. Former president, Thabo Mbeki and former Minister of Education Naledi Pandor in 2008 had discussions with stakeholders on the possibility of a four year degree based on the under-preparedness of the majority of students entering tertiary institutions and industry's complaints about the need to retrain graduates. Here Prof Ian Scott's advocacy of a four year degree has relevance. Ian Scott of UCT has since 2006 been advocating for a four year generic degree to combat this general lack seen in most universities. His argument is that since about 80% of students complete their undergraduate degrees in 4 years, would it not make academic sense to make 4years the norm rather than the exception? Such a policy would entail curriculum restructuring to make it flexible to allow above-average students to follow the old 3year degree structure.

Although this discussion indicates a general need for a longer exposure for the development of academic literacy and discipline content for students, it also opens the door for the ongoing debate as to the best place, educationally, to offer this type of support.

Professor Pityana of Unisa in an article in the Mail and Guardian of 13 May, 2008 may have been speaking for many when he objected to student academic development being the responsibility of tertiary institutions. If tertiary institutions are not the place for academic literacy then an extended secondary education would be the solution.

This point is usually dismissed as the cost of such a venture would not make economic sense as not all secondary students intend to pursue an academic career after secondary studies and subjecting all these number of secondary students to the rigors of developing academic literacy at the level required for successful tertiary life is questionable. However, an extra year in the secondary school is not an unknown phenomenon as is shown by educational systems where ordinary and advanced level exams are taken at the secondary level ('O' and 'A' levels). In such systems, students who want to pursue careers in middle-level jobs, for example artisans, would leave school after 'O' levels and those with tertiary aspirations would continue with the 'A' levels. In that situation the smallness of the 'A' level classes would have positive implications on funding. But of course, one of the final deciding factors about the location of the support would be whether the amount spent by the government on the EDs would compare favourably with the expenses of establishing 'A' level classes and which system would result in improvements in tertiary throughput rates. For with this system, students undergo two nationally-operated screening examinations – one for 'O' level and the second one for 'A' levels, ensuring that only a certain caliber of students continue into tertiary. However, like all assessment systems, the ability of any 'O' and 'A' level examinations to impact successfully on higher education will depend on the examination system's integrity in discriminating between achievers and non-achievers. If the examination system is not discriminating enough or if students are condoned into 'A' levels and into tertiary then nothing much would be achieved by the introduction of an additional year and screening exercise.

The success of the 'O' and 'A' level examinations is also dependent on the respect and acceptance of non-academic tertiary based occupations. In the current situation in which academic tertiary education is seen as the next obvious and logical pursuit after secondary is part of the root cause of so many under-prepared students entering academic institutions and attempting to pursue careers for which they do not have the background or the aptitude. In other parts of the world, artisans or those I call 'middle level workers' enjoy recognition. Those who have lived in developed countries know that a visit from a plumber or an electrician, charging by the hour, would play havoc with ones finances! Once there is this paradigm shift, students underprepared for tertiary academic education would explore other options for their capabilities which will translate into less unemployed and unemployable graduates.

9.   CONCLUSION

In Univen EDs seems to be a 'quick fix' for lacks in at-risk students. The merit of an ED programme lies in its ability to lengthen the period of study, making it manageable without reducing the cognitive demands of a programme. Labeling an initiative as a 'quick fix' indicates some lack of permanency about it and there is a need for Univen to devise support with long term effect otherwise EDs can become too narrow in focus to result in a holistic support for underprepared students who would be able to face the ever changing demands made on graduates. A holistic academic support would be one which amalgamates strengths of the different approaches in its conceptualization of AL and its development.

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THE SINGLE PUBLIC SERVICE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT TURNAROUND STRATEGY: INCOMPATIBLE OR COMPLIMENTARY FOR IMPROVED LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY?

H KROUKAMP

ABSTRACT

The South African public service has unfortunately rapidly gained a reputation for inefficiency, corruption and incompetence. Government has therefore introduced a variety of legislative measures to ensure that the public service would play a meaningful role in a well-functioning country, one that maximises its development potential and the welfare of its citizens. Examples of these measures are the Single Public Service (SPS) and the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS), two seemingly contradictory measures to accomplish the above-mentioned objectives. Concerns that a SPS was a move towards recentralisation by central government were countered by the LGTAS to strengthen local government *per se*. It was found that both projects endeavour facilitative measures for improved coordination and integration of services in local government to provide efficient and effective services.

Keywords: Local government, single public service, local government turnaround strategy, countermeasures for inefficiency

1.   INTRODUCTION

The onset of democratic transformation in South Africa in 1994 had a profound influence on local government, which progressed from being a third tier of government to an equal, autonomous sphere, with implications for greater delivery of services. The unrealistic expectations by the public generated through this process led *inter alia* to public disillusionment due to a failure of government to deliver basic services and create conditions conducive to local economic development. This failure to deliver may ultimately lead to reversals in efforts to deepen the democratic process in South Africa.

The introduction of the Single Public Service Bill in 2008 in South Africa brought new speculations that government was moving towards recentralisation after a period of 14 years of democracy. Assumptions were that the decentralisation policies adapted after the 1994 elections to enhance the quality and the effectiveness of public administration, had failed. Although developed and developing countries have shown a tendency towards decentralisation during recent decades, the present indications are that some governments are retracting these efforts and prudent steps are being taken towards recentralisation.

What were regarded as major advantages of decentralisation, are nowadays disputed issues. However, in December 2009 the South African Cabinet approved a comprehensive local government turnaround strategy (LGTAS) based on five strategic objectives to ensure that local governments will play their meaningful role as envisaged in the 1996 Constitution. This, in effect, raised the question whether the SPS idea had been shelved by the government and/or whether a differentiated approach was to be followed to accommodate both local government and a single public service. In this article attention will be focused on an analysis and critique of the South African local government, measures to counter inefficiency in local government and the Local Government Turnaround Strategy in order to determine the value of the various aspects of both the Single Public Service and the Turnaround Strategy in the current South African context to improve service delivery.

2.   SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PERSPECTIVE

One of the most important developments in terms of governance has been the movement towards the building and strengthening of local government throughout the world. There is a growing recognition that fundamentally different kinds of governance for public management and the delivery of local public services are required. Governance is described as the exercise of control over society and the management of its resources for social and economic development. Demands for increased governmental responsiveness and accountability have played a significant role in this development. According to Devenish, Govender and Hulme (2001:4), two factors contributed to the making of a modern democratic government. These factors include ensuring accountability through *inter alia* the existence of an open and unbiased judicial system that values general respect for the rule of law and human rights within a country. Such system should also build and sustain a vigorous civil society and ensure that governmental and political power is dispersed to prevent government from becoming too powerful. This situation is complicated when taking into consideration the new challenges of governing. These challenges include:

- fast-paced economic and social changes;
- a growing complexity of policy issues;
- problematic political/administrative interface;
- a need for a simpler and more transparent political process;
- multiplication of controls and too many procedures hindering change;
- low morale among public servants;
- low public administration productivity;
- growing financial constraints;
- weak financial management, fraud and corruption;
- weak public participation structures; and
- citizens' lack of confidence in the public service (Shiceka 2009a:16).

The constitutional change that paved the way for a democratic dispensation in South Africa directly impacted on the public sector. Prior to the national elections in 1994, the governing authorities were structured in terms of three tiers or levels (central, provincial and local). South Africa was a unitary state in the sense that the central legislature was supreme and all power was vested in it. Consequently, only those powers that had to perform specific functions were delegated to provincial authorities who, in turn, delegated where necessary to local authorities. However, the 1996 Constitution provided for an innovative approach to governance by introducing concepts such as cooperative governance, and by making provision for autonomous spheres as opposed to levels/tiers of government. These spheres of government, *inter alia,* had to:

- provide effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government for the Republic as a whole;
- respect the constitutional status, institutions, powers and functions of governments in the other spheres;
- refrain from assuming any power or function except those conferred on them in terms of the Constitution; and
- exercise their powers and perform their functions in a manner that did not encroach on the geographical, functional or institutional integrity of government in another sphere (Section 41 (1), Constitution 1996).

The introduction of the concept of cooperative governance explicitly indicated that the 'old' form of governance, where everything was centralised, had to be decentralised. However, it was not specifically stipulated in legislation how cooperative governance should take place in reality. Subsequently, the fact that the respective roles and responsibilities of each sphere of government were not always clear, gave rise to a situation whereby fragmentation, confusion and duplication occurred as various and different interpretations prevailed. This was evident from the report of the Presidential Review Commission (PRC) presented to President Mandela in February 1998. The report stated that:

> "Since little progress had been made in remedying the inequalities and inefficiencies of the past and that the costs and quality of the rendering of public services left much to be desired, the role and functions of the public services had to be reviewed and should the National Government not hesitate, in certain extreme circumstances, to resume functions delegated to certain provinces or their departments, where those provinces provide irrefutable evidence of inability to execute those functions" (PRC 1998:6).

It can therefore be deduced that if the initial drive of decentralising functions did not produce satisfactory delivery of services, such services would be centralised. Up to that point, no such actions were taken by the government, although dissatisfaction with the quality of services was rife.

Fraser-Moleketi (2007:4) furthermore asserted that insufficient attention was given to the capacity of the provinces to assume their devolved powers, especially given the poor financial control culture due to the lack of an effective system of monitoring and evaluation, and a continued 'silorised' approach in the delivery of services, resulting in poor integration of delivery efforts across government. Apart from the integration of services, the implementation of policies was, and still is, problematic (Republic of South Africa 2009b:9). On the one hand, policies are sometimes, due to a lack of time, interest, information or expertise, framed in general terms and the implementation is left to implementation agencies that might thwart the original intention of the policy (Republic of South Africa 2009b:12). On the other hand, the policies might embrace so much detail that the actual meaning becomes vague. Particular measures therefore had to be taken to address this situation as it was clear that national departments and provincial administrations did not have the capability or authority to improve the functioning of government.

3.   MEASURES TO COUNTER INEFFICIENCY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Various pieces of legislation were introduced to address the abovementioned situation, such as:

- the Local Government Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998);
- the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000);
- the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act 1 of 1999);
- the Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003);
- the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005 (Act 13 of 2005);
- the Municipality Property Rates Amendment Act, 2009 (Act 19 of 2009); and
- the Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Bill (2011).

These legislation established forums to promote and facilitate intergovernmental relations between the president and premiers and mayors, and ministers and provincial members of executive councils responsible for concurrent portfolios (Republic of South Africa 2008:1). Apart from the abovementioned legislation, the Public Administration and Management Bill was tabled in 2007, also known as the Single Public Service (SPS) Bill. The objectives of the Bill are as follows:

- to deepen integrated service delivery by creating service delivery points from which the citizen could access public services. Multiple institutions were to collaborate on creating a 'single window' of access;
- to align the institutions that comprise the machinery of the developmental state strategically in order to complement one another so as to operate effectively and fulfil the needs of South Africans; and
- to create common norms and standards for human resource management and development and conditions of service across the three spheres (Visser 2007:1).

Focus areas covered by the SPS Bill are:

- the facilitation and transformation of systems and mechanisms for service delivery to ensure smooth and seamless service delivery at and between all institutions of government;
- integrated service delivery platforms and front offices;
- integrated planning, budgeting and reporting measures across all spheres of government;
- ease of mobility of senior managers and staff between and within the spheres of government and other institutions;
- clearly defined roles, responsibilities, accountability and funding arrangements;
- aligned training and capacity building to ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills across all spheres;
- maximisation of economies of scale in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) goods and services; and
- elimination of duplication of costly ICT applications whilst replicating best lessons and practice (Conradie 2008:80).

The single public service is seen as a critical and strategic intervention of government to further enhance and strengthen the capacity of the system of government to be able to successfully deliver on the state's developmental agenda. According to Tshandu (2007:62), this decision was taken due to the belief that developing countries need strong governments, which lead administrative systems that bolster government efforts, and which implement their policies with expertise, compassion, efficiency and effectiveness.

The announcement of the SPS Bill was received with scepticism, and various concerns were noted (Conradie 2008:81). The SPS can be seen as an explicit drive towards recentralisation as the Bill repeals and amends various acts. The Bill bestows widespread regulation-making functions to the Minister of Public Service and Administration at all levels of government that would threaten the ability of municipal councils to determine and implement their own policies and practices when it comes to their employees, thus allowing government to enforce its own policies at provincial and local levels.

The SPS Bill encroaches on the constitutional integrity of local government to govern its own affairs. Furthermore it is silent on the question of who decides on the remuneration of municipal senior management and the fact that the appointment procedure and conditions of appointment will be determined by national law, not by the municipality (De Visser 2008:5). According to De Visser (2008:6) there is concern that performance management in local government will also be done according to the procedures and norms and standards prescribed by the Minister of Public Service and Administration with the risk that the synergy linking the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and budgeting framework with the performance management, will be lost. The SPS Bill therefore removes performance management from the budgeting framework and the instruction to municipalities to facilitate community involvement in performance management (Moloi 2007:32). It is furthermore argued by Conradie (2008:82) that the single public service will not be appropriate to solve problems in service delivery because progress in service delivery lies in the hands of public servants regardless of the system in place. If public servants are not dedicated, committed and supportive to government, there is no way service delivery will be improved. It is thus better to address the causes of poor service delivery, which include lack of resources, rather than resorting to a new system (Dentlinger 2008:3; Sexwale 2009:4).

Although the Minister of Public Service and Administration indicated in October 2009 that the SPS Bill will be enacted (Baloyi 2009:2), no such actions are forthcoming. However, in December 2009 the Cabinet approved a comprehensive Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) inter alia to strengthen local government's role in service delivery, raising the question whether the SPS idea has been shelved.

4.   LOCAL GOVERNMENT TURNAROUND STRATEGY IN PERSPECTIVE

The launch of the LGTAS resulted from two seemingly separate, yet interrelated concerns. The first concern is the increasing community dissatisfaction about poor municipal service delivery, resulting in protests and civil disobedience causing millions of damages to state and private property (Republic of South Africa 2009a:2). The second concern is the overwhelming number of municipalities (279 out of 283) receiving poor audit opinions, either disclaimers or qualified opinions, from the Auditor General during the 2007/2008 audit cycle due to a lack of controls, mismanagement and lack of governance principles (Republic of South Africa 2009b:4).

The LGTAS is a comprehensive strategy, which proposes a differentiated approach that recognises the different economic conditions, capacity and support needs of individual municipalities and focuses on five strategic objectives and six key interventions (Shiceka 2010b:2; Shiceka 2009b:2). The strategies for before and after the 2011 elections are also displayed in Figure 1 (Vika 2010).

Before 2011 elections

- address immediate financial & administrative problems in municipalities
- promulgate regulations to stem indiscriminate hiring & firing in municipalities
- tighten & implement transparent municipal supply chain management system
- ensure programmes of national & provincial government & SOEs are reflected in municipal IDPs;
- overcome "one size fits all" approach by differentiating responsibilities & simplifying IDPs (Vika 2010:1).

After 2011 elections

- infrastructure backlogs should be reduced significantly
- all citizens must have access to affordable universal basic services
- formalization of all informal settlements
- clean cities through the management of waste in such a way that it creates employment & wealth (Vika 2010:3).

Strategic objectives

- ensure municipalities meet communities' basic service needs
- build clean, effective, efficient, responsive & accountable local government
- improve performance & professionalism in municipalities
- improve national & provincial policy, oversight & support
- strengthen partnerships between local government, communities & civil society (Shiceka 2010b:2).

Key interventions

- national government (including state enterprises) organises itself better in relation to local government
- provinces improve support & oversight responsibilities over local government
- municipalities reflect on performance & identify tailor made turnaround strategies;
- three spheres of government improve intergovernmental relations (IGR)
- political parties promote & enhance the institutional integrity of municipalities
- a social compact on local government in place where citizens, public officials, those in the private sector, trade unions, professional bodies & traditional leaders are guided in their actions & involvement by a common set of governance values (Shiceka 2010a:2).

Figure 1: Strategic objectives and key interventions of LGTAS before and after the 2011 elections

A ministerial advisory and monitoring structure was established to ensure that all role-players effectively contributed to the LGTAS. The National Coordinating Unit (NCU) was set up in the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) to oversee, monitor and report on the progress of the LGTAS across government and society. An intergovernmental working group has also been established to support the implementation of the LGTAS. This group consists of officials from national sector departments, the offices of provincial premiers, provincial local government departments and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). Its purpose is to provide intergovernmental perspectives to the development and implementation of the LGTAS. Other functions include the provision of resources and advice. Technical Services Units (TSUs) were furthermore established provincially. These units are also coordinated by the NCU, as well as Rapid Response Teams within the NCU to attend to critical interventions in municipalities across the country to achieve a two-day turnaround response mechanism to community grievances (Shiceka 2010b:20).

A monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework with a set of indicators has been developed to allow for systematic gathering of credible data that will support implementation. The framework includes the Citizen's Report Card, which will ensure community involvement and oversight of the effectiveness of the strategy.

The question can be posed why the LGTAS will be different from previous efforts to improve local government per se. According to Vika (2010:21), previous interventions such as Project Consolidate and the five-year Strategic Local Government Agenda lacked political championing and failed to focus on the root causes of local government distress. In addition, they had no command system, and neither did they enforce a single window of coordination approach. Both Project Consolidate and the five-year Local Government Strategic Agenda applied a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, whereas the LGTAS caters for individual municipalities' specific challenges.

The introduction of the LGTAS and the functioning thereof raise the same concerns as was the case with the introduction of the SPS (see subheading 3). According to Shiceka (2010b:21), new provisions will empower the minister to prescribe the qualifications and experience of people appointed to management positions and to regulate their salaries and benefits to ensure stability in the leadership of municipalities. The amendments also prohibit:

- party political office-bearers from becoming councillors or municipal officials;
- the suspension without salary of managers charged with serious offences, including corruption and fraud, or
- inciting residents to protest against the municipality.

Managers facing disciplinary action will not be permitted to resign or seek employment in another municipality. Although the proposed amendments are laudable, it might mean that, if power is concentrated at the national level of government, too many minor decisions have to be referred up the hierarchy for approval. This does not necessarily improve the quality of decisions, but it almost certainly leads to bureaucratic delays that are costly and frustrating. Individuals and organisations at lower levels have too little discretion to do their jobs efficiently and are discouraged from taking initiative. Centralising tendencies are often reinforced by organisational structures and accountability systems that are geared more to allocating blame and punishing failure than to rewarding success or establishing incentives to accept responsibility. Hierarchical accountability adds layers of bureaucracy without necessarily securing more effective control. For these familiar reasons, over-centralisation leads to slowness and inefficiency in operational management and difficulties in adapting to change (Magnussen, Hagen & Kaarboe 2007:2131).

Taking cognisance of the above-mentioned, one should decide whether the introduction of the LGTAS will lead to shelving the idea of a SPS. When taking the objectives of both the SPS and the LGTAS into consideration, it seems as if these objectives can form part of a concerted effort to improve coordination and integration in government in order to facilitate efficient and effective delivery of services. Both projects envisage a single election for national, provincial and local governments with the benefit of a single manifesto, one financial year, common five-year medium-term planning, aligned human resource and budget frameworks and a single public service. Autonomous local government can thus be achieved with the introduction of the SPS, assisted by the LGTAS that will strengthen local government.

5.   CONCLUSION

Speculation that the implementation of the SPS was shelved due to the introduction of the LGTAS was rife after the approval of the latter strategy by Cabinet in December 2009. The same speculations have been voiced regarding inter alia the amendments to legislation to ensure more national and provincial involvement in local government affairs in respect of appointments and accountability. The impression that recentralisation was on the cards was created, contrary to the stipulations in the Constitution. However, instead of proposing and speculating whether this is true or not, it should be acknowledged that all access of citizens to services should be promoted through improved integrated public services by national, provincial and local government to give effect to the basic values and principles contained in the Constitution. Whether these two ideas, the SPS and LGTAS, are therefore mutually exclusive or complementary is debatable, but possible as the LGTAS supports the SPS idea of strengthening local government within a single public service.

However, service delivery cannot be solved through any model or system if public servants are not dedicated, committed and supportive to government.

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AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY IN LESOTHO

MLD SEBOTSA AND L LUES

ABSTRACT

The persistently negative state of food security worldwide has worsened the already compromised nutritional status of marginalised communities in Lesotho, thus highlighting the need to rethink current policies and strategies. This paper aims to reflect on the implementation and management of the food security strategies that have been adopted by the Lesotho government since 2004 in an effort to improve and sustain food security in the country. A questionnaire survey was conducted amongst senior government officials working in different ministries tasked with the implementation and management of the government's food security strategies. The survey revealed the lack of a sound knowledge base, proper co-ordination and a communication mechanism amongst different stakeholders, as well as poor commitment of most staff towards the implementation and management of the food security strategies. It thus appears that although food security strategies have been adopted by the government of Lesotho, the implementation and management thereof is ineffective.

Keywords: Food security, strategies, Lesotho, implementation, management

1. INTRODUCTION

Lesotho is a small mountainous kingdom with a population of approximately 2.2 million, situated in the southern part of Africa, where it is completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. The total land area of the country is approximately 30 355 km2, of which 75 % is mountainous and only 9 % arable. With a per capita income of US$ 730, Lesotho was among the 47 least-developed countries in 2004 (UN, 2004). The country currently ranks at number 71 on the Human Poverty Index of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2009). According to this international ranking, many of the households in Lesotho can be classified as poor. In fact, according to the aforementioned United Nations report (UN, 2004), more than half the population of Lesotho lives below the poverty line, of which 40 % are destitute. This situation of dire poverty has a direct impact on the food security of households in Lesotho.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO, 2002), food security is achieved through three essential components, namely the availability, accessibility and reliability of food. On this basis, it is evident that in Lesotho, the high level of poverty amongst the population has affected the status of household food security.

For example, the vulnerability exercise undertaken in 2003 by the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 2003) revealed that the major problem faced by poor households in rural areas is limited food availability, while the urban poor are faced with the problem of limited purchasing power due to lack of employment and high food prices. With regard to food accessibility, the vulnerability exercise also estimated a nation-wide food deficit, ranging from 10 % to 47 % of total access to food. This food deficit results from limited purchasing power and escalating global food prices. This situation demonstrates that the majority of poor households do not have a stable food base and as such are unable to consume nutritious and safe foods, which are essential for nutritional wellbeing.

The HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa has further contributed to the problem of food insecurity (SADC, 2003), since farmers are forced by illness to limit their agricultural labour or even abandon their farms. With the death of household members due to HIV and AIDS, the few people remaining can only farm smaller areas of land, or must resort to less labour-intensive crops that often have lower nutritional or market value (FAO, 2002).

In addition, food production in Lesotho is affected by low input in agriculture. In this regard, the FAO (2004) stated that severe soil and land degradation, inappropriate land tillage and inefficient utilisation of other agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, along with inadequate extension service capacity, have a negative impact on the food security situation in Lesotho.

Although the entire population of Lesotho is affected by the negative impact on food security, high-risk groups include the young, the poor, the elderly, the homeless, low-income women, and ethnic minorities (Hendriks, 2005; Nair, 2008). The devastating fact is that people are affected at both household and national level. At household level, for example, food insecurity leads indirectly to disproportionately high health and medical costs, high funeral expenses, and low labour productivity. Similarly, at national level, food insecurity can lead to social costs such as criminal expenses through theft, low investor confidence, and loss of capital investments. Rena (2005) and Pinstrup-Andersen and Herforth (2008) shared similar sentiments when stating that the negative impact on food security causes undesirable long-term effects such as malnutrition and poor growth and development, posing a major threat to the overall health of the population of Lesotho. This prompted the Lesotho government to implement and manage the food security strategies outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005). The aim of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) is to address the major challenges facing the country, such as HIV and AIDS, food insecurity, and unemployment. In the same vein, the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005) is focused on improving the adequacy, stability and utilisation of access to food supplies at household and national level.

The implementation and management of these national directives has been assigned to eight different government ministries and seven government departments.

In light of the Lesotho government having adopted this particular Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005), it is necessary to investigate whether these directives have indeed been implemented by the respective government ministries and departments, and also whether they are being effectively managed at this stage. The paper reflects on the survey respondents' knowledge base regarding the aforementioned strategies, as well as the implementation and management challenges of the food security strategies. The paper concludes with recommendations made to the Lesotho government in view of fast-tracking and enhancing the implementation and management of these strategies.

2.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey (quantitative method) was used for purposes of data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions, aimed at investigating the implementation and management of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005) by the responsible government ministries and departments.

A pilot study was performed by means of a draft questionnaire amongst 15 respondents with similar characteristics, employed by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and the Food and Nutrition Co-ordinating Office in Lesotho. These 15 respondents did not form part of the final data collection process, but based on feedback and observations from this pilot study, adjustments were made to the final questionnaire.

The eventual sample consisted of senior government officials (occupying posts designated as Nutritionist, Food Scientist, Deputy Director, and Director) in the eight government ministries and seven government departments tasked with directing food security in Lesotho. These government ministries and departments have been tasked with the implementation and management of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2004/2005-2006/2007) and the 2005 Lesotho Food Security Policy. A simple random sample of the officials was selected from each department using the Lesotho government establishment list, which indicates the list of all posts available in each ministry and department (Government of Lesotho, 2008). This method of selection was used to prevent under or non representation of parts of the population. Out of a total of 150 officials targeted for the questionnaire survey, 139 responded, giving a 93 % response rate.

The questionnaire responses were coded and analysed in collaboration with the Department of Public Management at the University of the Free State (UFS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the results in terms of frequencies and percentages for categorical variables and means or medians, as well as maxima and minima for numerical variables.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Eight government ministries (Finance and Development Planning; Foreign Affairs; Agriculture and Food Security; Local Government and Land Use Planning; Education and Training; Health and Social Welfare; Trade, Industry, Co-operatives and Marketing; Communications, Science and Technology) and seven government departments (Parliament of Lesotho; Disaster Management Authority; Food Management Unit; Food and Nutrition Co-ordinating Office; National AIDS Commission; Poverty Reduction Programme; Office of the First Lady) have been tasked with the implementation and management of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005).

Amongst the survey respondents, 36 % indicated that they were younger than 35 years of age, while 39 % were younger than 45 years, and 25 % were older than 45 years of age. These respondents were comprised of 63 % (n=88) females and 37 % (n=51) males. In this regard, it is interesting to reflect on the national literacy statistics, which show that the adult literacy rate in Lesotho is 55 % for females and 38 % for males (UNDP, 2009). Moreover, in Lesotho, professions related to nutrition are typically occupied by women due to the prevailing perception that nutrition is related to food preparation. The majority (57.6 %) of survey respondents indicated that they had between five and eight years of work experience in their current positions, while 27.3 % of respondents had less than five years of experience, and a mere 15 % had more than eight of experience. It can be deduced that the majority of respondents (57.6 % plus 27.3 %) might not have been involved in the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) or the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005) at that time.

3.1 Knowledge Base

The respondents' knowledge of the content of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005) respectively was investigated. They were asked to indicate whether they had any knowledge of food security strategies implemented by their government ministries or departments. If they responded positively, they were furthermore asked to indicate whether those policies were derived from the two relevant national directives. The respondents were then asked to list the food security strategies implemented in their respective government ministries and departments. Their responses in this regard are reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Distribution of the respondents according to their knowledge of the content of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Food Security Policy
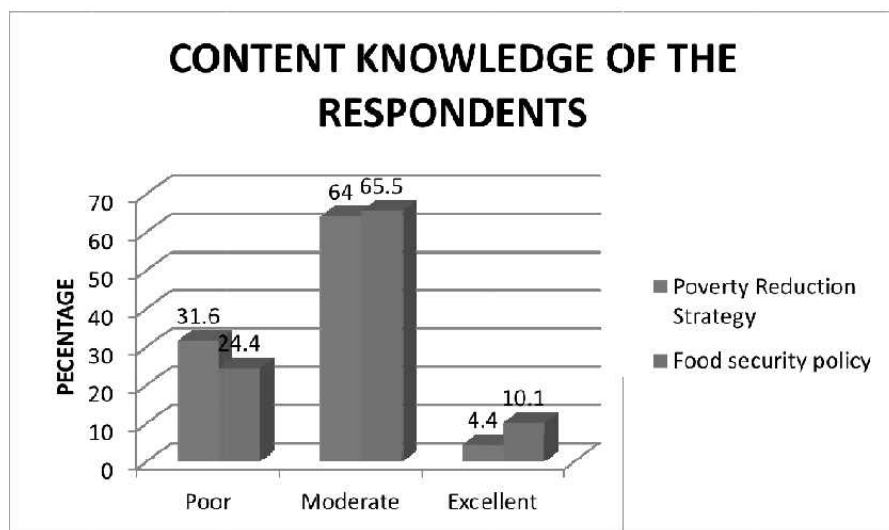

Figure 1 shows that 4.4% of the respondents claimed to have excellent knowledge of the content of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004), while 10.1% claimed to have excellent knowledge of the content of the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005). Of the respondents, 64% (n=89) claimed to have moderate knowledge of the content of the 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy, while 65.5% (n=91) claimed to have moderate knowledge of the content of the 2005 Food Security Policy. Of the respondents, 32% (n=44) claimed to have poor knowledge of the content of the 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy, while 24.4% (n=34) claimed to have poor knowledge of the content of the 2005 Food Security Policy. Although it appears that more than half the respondents have moderate knowledge of the content of the directives in question, 83.5% of the respondents (n=116) indicated that these food security strategies were being implemented by their respective government ministries and departments.

Amongst the respondents from the government ministries and departments tasked with implementing food security strategies, 56.4% (n=65) indicated that the strategies from the 2005 Food Security Policy had been adopted, while 30% (n=16) claimed that the strategies from the 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy had been adopted. A total of 13.3% (n=16) of respondents pointed to the adoption of strategies from other relevant documents, such as the Millennium Development Goals, Agricultural Policy, Health Policy, AIDS Policy, and Infant and Young Child Feeding Guidelines, all aimed at improving the general health of the population.

It can thus be concluded that the majority of the respondents had at least moderate knowledge of these directives and that they were implementing them to a certain extent.

In this regard, the literature has shown that for any strategy to be implemented effectively, the officials tasked with this responsibility must have adequate knowledge of the strategy in question (Pinstrup-Andersen and Herforth, 2008; Shimelis and Bogale, 2007). However, cause for concern is the fact that some respondents claimed to have poor knowledge of the content of the two national directives in question. This might be ascribed to the fact that during the development of these two documents, most of the officials concerned had not been in the employ of the government or occupying their current positions. It was further indicated that the last time they had mulled over the documents' contents had been during the official launching, which in a sense displays a lack of commitment towards the implementation thereof. Thomas (2002) cautioned against a lack of commitment amongst officials tasked with the implementation and management of government strategies, stating that whilst effective and efficient bureaucratic structures may be in place and attempting to implement a particular strategy, little will be accomplished without commitment from those responsible for the implementation of that strategy.

3.2 Co-ordination or communication mechanism amongst different stakeholders

Forty-seven percent (n=65) of the respondents indicated that their government ministries and departments had a plan of action for the implementation of the food security strategies, whilst 35.3% (n=49) indicated that no plan of action was in place, and 18% (n=25) did not know whether a plan of action existed. The existence of co-ordinating bodies for the implementation and management of the food security strategies, both within (37.4% of respondents) and outside (12.2% of respondents) the government ministries and departments, was confirmed. The co-ordinating bodies established within the government ministries and departments include the multi-sectored food security committees, while outside co-ordinating bodies include the Food and Nutrition Co-ordinating Office and the Ministry of Planning and Finance. According to the respondents, these co-ordinating bodies were not performing effectively and efficiently in their given role. Against this backdrop, it can be concluded that the few co-ordinating bodies in existence were not considered by the respondents to be effective in their functioning.

	Respondents' responses in respect of the challenges in the implementation and management of the food security strategies		
CHALLENGES	YES	NO	DO NOT KNOW
Ministry/department has a plan of action for the implementation of the food security strategies	46.7% (n=65)	35.3% (n=49)	18% (n=25)
There is a co-ordinating body identified within the ministry/department for the implementation and management of the food security strategies	37.4% (n=52)	51.1% (n=71)	1.5% (n=16)
There is a co-ordinating body identified outside the ministry/department for the implementation and management of the food security strategies	12.2% (n=17)	62.6% (n=87)	25.2% (n=35)
There is an evaluation and monitoring plan for the implementation of the food security strategies in the ministry/department	20.9% (n=29)	65.5% (n=91)	13.6% (n=19)
Staff in the ministry/department participated in the development of the food security strategies	57.6% (n=80)	29.5% (n=41)	12.9% (n=18)
Other stakeholders were involved in the development of the ministry's /department's food security strategies	71.3% (n=99)	15.8% (n=22)	12.9% (n=18)
Staff in the ministry/department was made aware/ informed of the existence of the food security strategies	48.2% (n=67)	33.1% (n=46)	18.7% (n=26)
Staff in the ministry/department was provided with necessary skills and education to implement and manage the strategies	36.7% (n=51)	57.6% (n=80)	5.7% (n=8)
Staff in the ministry/department was provided with the necessary resources (e.g. equipment) to implement and manage the strategies	28.8% (n=40)	71.2% (n=99)	0
Other stakeholders were involved in the implementation of the food security strategies adopted by the ministry/department	72.7% (n=101)	27.3% (n=38)	0

Table 1: Implementation and management challenges of the food security strategies

Table 1 shows that the minority of respondents (20.9 % or n=29) pointed to the existence of a monitoring and evaluation plan for the implementation of the food security strategies. However, those respondents who did confirm the existence of such a plan in their government ministries and departments also pointed out that evaluation and monitoring were not regular activities.

At this point it is important to note that 57.6 % of respondents (n=80) indicated that the staff had been involved in the development of the food security strategies, but 71.3 % of respondents (n=99) indicated that other stakeholders had also been involved (Table 1).

The last row of Table 1 shows that 72.7% of respondents (n=101) indicated that these other stakeholders had further been involved in the implementation of the food security strategies. This high level of stakeholder involvement might be due to the fact that according to the respondents, less than 50% of staff had been (i) informed about the existence of the food security strategies; (ii) provided with the necessary skills and education to implement and manage the strategies; and (iii) provided with the necessary resources for this responsibility (Table 1).

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the relevant government ministries and departments have been allocated different roles and responsibilities in respect of the implementation and management of the food security strategies. However, it is also evident that the two national documents do not clarify the lines of communication and co-ordination between and within these ministries and departments, and therefore nobody takes responsibility for capacity-building and the securing of resources. This lack of co-ordination is clearly illustrated in Table 1. This situation is of particular concern since the literature reveals that the large number of actors with different mandates, roles and responsibilities, combined with their lack of co-ordination, tends to add to the problem of ineffective implementation and management of strategies.

Moreover, the institutional structure as outlined in the two national documents has been built on existing structures. As such, the government has avoided the creation of new and large structures, which would hinder effective implementation. Although there are no new structures, there is an overlap between ministries and departments. For instance, "nutrition" as a responsibility is currently split between the Food and Nutrition Co-ordinating Office, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. This kind of overlap can be positive and complementary only if it is effectively co-ordinated. Lack of co-ordination leads to the duplication of efforts and a situation where nobody assumes full responsibility for capacity development and resource allocation.

3.3   Commitment

Sixty-seven percent of respondents (n=94) pointed to moderate commitment of staff in respect of the implementation and management of the food security strategies. Worryingly, 31% of respondents (n=43) pointed to poor commitment, while only 1.7% (n=2) claimed excellent commitment of staff. These findings are of particular concern, because according to Hussey (2000:35), lack of commitment amongst those responsible can render the implementation and management of the strategies ineffective or even non-existent.

Although some literature has shown that lack of strong and committed political and administrative leadership is the cause of ineffective implementation and management of food security strategies (Chandy and Pai, 2006; Rukuni, 2002; Shimelis and Bogale, 2007), the findings of this particular study revealed poor to moderate commitment of staff (including senior management) to the implementation and management of the food security strategies. This is probably due to lack of adequate skills and resources, as shown in Table1. One of the fundamental problems standing in the way of targeted and effective service delivery of food security initiatives is the lack of institutional capacity, which seems to be the case in Lesotho. Lack of institutional capacity in the form of human (skills, number), physical and financial resources, coupled with insufficient co-ordination and collaboration between government ministries and departments, make it difficult for government to implement their interventions and to monitor the effects of those interventions.

4.   RECOMMENDATIONS

From the conclusions above, it is clear that there is no effective implementation and management of the food security strategies by government officials. Therefore, the following recommendations are made to the government of Lesotho in view of their ability to effectively implement and manage the food security strategies so as to improve and sustain food security in the country:

Prioritisation of the strategies: Given the broad strategies outlined in both the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005), as well as the enormity of the implementation task, it is important for the Lesotho government to review the strategies and focus on a few priority areas that will yield the highest social returns with regard to achieving food security in Lesotho. It is now essential to investigate whether these directives have indeed been implemented by the respective government ministries and departments, and also whether they are being managed effectively at this stage (2009 onwards).

Institutional reform: There is a need for institutional reform that will allow for timely action and an appropriate response to food insecurity in Lesotho. The institutional reform for food security in Lesotho should enhance co-ordination and collaboration within the government ministries and departments responsible for food security. The institutional reform should also focus on strengthening information sharing among all stakeholders and within the government ministries and departments. In addition, both short-term and long-term training plans should be developed and implemented so that staff can be trained according to the needs of the government ministries and departments. Most importantly, staff should be provided with the necessary resources, for instance transport that will enable them to reach all communities, including those in remote areas of the country.

To allow for adequate resources, the government ministries and departments should allocate a separate budget for food security activities, as is currently the case with activities targeting HIV and AIDS. The existing structures should also be improved to provide for a range of functionaries, whose activities can be integrated to accommodate delivery on the mandate, as well as their advisory, evaluation, monitoring and co-ordination activities.

In addition, an integrated food security implementation and management plan of action should be developed by the ministries and departments concerned. During the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lesotho Government, 2004) and the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005), the government adopted an integrated approach to addressing food security problems at both household and national level, in recognition of the multidisciplinary nature of food security problems. In pursuance to this, a workshop should be organised for various ministries and departments and other stakeholders in an effort to develop an integrated food security implementation and management plan of action, which should consider the following:

- Gathering information on the situation of food supply and demand in different parts of the country, to be used to identify risk areas with respect to food access and use.
- Developing systems of information sharing among the ministries and departments concerned with food security.
- Establishing and maintaining a register of food-insecure households as part of a larger food security information management system, with food-insecure households being encouraged to become active members of a network of consumer/producer organisations.
- Categorising food security problems according to their nature and scope that is, whether they should be addressed over the short, medium or long term. In the short term, strategies such as income support measures will be considered. For medium- or long-term problems, strategy packages will be designed to improve the multifaceted nature of food security, for example, with links to nutrition, education and sanitation. The emphasis of these strategy packages would be on increasing food production, creating employment and generating income.
- Establishing and maintaining food security monitoring and evaluation systems as part of a broader system to mitigate, prevent, and respond to food emergencies.
- Providing support to improve institutional and organisational development, with special consideration of the human resource capacity. The goal is to improve programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

5.   CONCLUSION

Food security involves access to and consumption of adequate quantities of safe and nutritious food at all times by every member of every household in support of an active and productive life. However, poverty, HIV/AIDS, inequality, severe soil and land degradation and persisting droughts, along with inadequate extension service capacity, are having a negative impact on food security. This situation is increasingly evident in Lesotho. In an attempt to address the negative state of food security in the country, the Lesotho government developed two national documents, namely the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2004) and the Food Security Policy (Lesotho Government, 2005), outlining the adopted food security strategies. The implementation and management of these food security strategies was assigned to various government ministries and departments.

It is acknowledged that the success of any policy or strategy relies on the achievement of its objectives, which is only possible through the effective implementation and management thereof. The conclusion regarding the context is that the institutional arrangement as outlined in the two documents is in accordance with the literature. However, there is an overlap between the ministries and departments. This overlap may have a negative effect on the implementation and management of the food security strategies if there is no co-ordination, which is also lacking between and within the ministries and departments charged with the implementation and management of the food security strategies.

The findings show that there is lack of commitment of most staff towards the implementation and management of the food security strategies. This lack of commitment may be due to several factors such as inadequate resources, as observed in the case at hand, which in turn may result in ineffective implementation and management of strategies by the government officials concerned. There is also a lack of institutional capacity, which is a key determinant of organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, although there has been some stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of the food security strategies adopted by the government ministries and departments, there does not appear to be any effective co-ordination or communication mechanism between the different actors geared towards the implementation and management of the strategies. This lack of co-ordination may result in ineffective implementation and management of the strategies.

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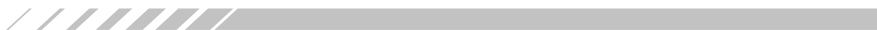
SUSTAINABILITY AND INTEGRATED REPORTING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE'S OVERSIGHT ROLE

B MARX AND A VAN DER WATT

ABSTRACT

Sustainability has been described as the primary moral and economic imperative of the twenty-first century and one of the most important sources of both opportunities and risks for businesses. Companies are also expected to behave, and be seen to behave, as responsible corporate citizens that is, as protecting, enhancing and investing in the wellbeing of the economy, society and the natural environment in which they do business. Accordingly the need exists for accurate, reliable and credible stakeholder reporting by organisations on their economic, social and environmental performances and achievements. An effectively functioning audit committee can play an important role in this regard to assist the board in providing accurate and credible sustainability reporting and disclosures that are integrated with the company's financial reporting.

The objective of the article is twofold: it aims, firstly, to provide a brief overview of the development of sustainability and sustainability reporting and the role that audit committees can fulfil in this regard; and, secondly, its intention is to provide evidence that the recommendations of the third Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (King III) regarding sustainability reporting, assurance and the audit committee's oversight responsibility for this are justified. This is done through a literature review of current sustainability and audit committee developments and practices, and this is supported by empirical evidence obtained from assessing the annual reports and questionnaires sent to the audit committee chairs of the Top 40 listed companies in South Africa. The main findings of the study are that the majority of audit committees at the largest listed companies in South Africa are not taking oversight responsibility for sustainability reporting on their boards' behalf, although they are dealing with some ethical and social reporting aspects. It was also found that reporting by companies in their annual reports on their audit committee's corporate governance, social and sustainability oversight responsibilities was limited and does not reflect the true state of affairs. These findings are of significance, as they provide support for the recommendations of King III (effective from 1 March 2010) that companies should in future provide integrated reporting in terms of both their finances and sustainability, and that the audit committee should take oversight responsibility for this.

The study is of specific relevance for Africa with its rich mineral resources, as it is of vital importance that companies that do business on the continent behave as responsible corporate citizens, respect the environment and society, and provide accurate, reliable and credible reporting on their financial and sustainability performance to all of their stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of corporate governance over the years has given prominence to the need for organisations to do business in a responsible manner and respect the society and environment in which they function. There has also been a shift in emphasis from profits for shareholders only to the recognition that organisations have a responsibility to those who give them their licence to operate, namely their stakeholders (Ackers, 2009:2; King, 2006:21; Marx, 2008:334; Mitchell, Curtis & Davidson, 2008:6769; Naidoo, 2009:246250). The third King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (hereafter King III) is of the opinion that "Sustainability is the primary moral and economic imperative of the 21st century and one of the most important sources of both opportunities and risks for businesses". It further states that it is expected that the company "will be and will be seen to be a responsible corporate citizen". This is described as involving "social, environmental and economic issues the triple context in which companies in fact operate" (Institute of Directors (hereafter IoD), 2009:1112). Against this background the need exists for accurate, reliable and credible stakeholder reporting by organisations on their economic, social, environmental and governance performances.

Audit committees have been in existence for many years and have been widely accepted as a key component of the corporate governance structure of entities. Various factors have given rise to renewed emphasis being placed on audit committees and their composition, the most significant of these being major corporate collapses and business failures, and the issuing of various corporate governance codes and new or amended legislation (Brewer, 2001; Carcello, 2003; Ferreira, 2008; Klein, 2000; Kukabadse & Korac-Kukabadse, 2002; Liu, 2005; Marx, 2008; Rager, 2004; Spira, 2003; Wayne, 2003; Weiss, 2005; Wymeersch, 2006: Yang, 2002). Given the current financial crises companies all over the world are experiencing, and especially the financial sector, the oversight role of the audit committee has become even more important (Ernst & Young, 2008:12; 2009:14; Marx, 2009:).

Through its oversight role the audit committee assists the board of directors (hereafter referred to as the board) in meeting its financial reporting, risk management and control and audit-related responsibilities and dealing with emerging issues such as fostering an ethical culture of doing business and overseeing the company's integrated sustainability reporting (Blue Ribbon Commission, 1999:67; Deloitte, 2006:1; Dobie, 2006:54; Institute of Internal Auditors (hereafter IIA), 2006:2; IoD, 2009 principle 3.4 & 9.1.2; Marx, 2008:326334; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006:1; Van der Nest, 2006:v).

As is evident from the above, it is imperative for companies to do business responsibly and ethically and to respect the rights of all the company's stakeholders, while still being accountable to the shareholders. In this regard an effectively functioning audit committee can play an important role in assisting the board in providing accurate and credible integrated reporting on its financial performance and its sustainability.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The next section presents the objectives, scope and limitation of the study. The sections that then follow describe the theoretical background of the paper, the methodology applied and the empirical findings and deductions. Recommendations drawn from the study are then provided, and conclusions are presented in the last section.

2.   OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The objective of the paper is twofold: to provide a brief overview of the development of sustainability and sustainability reporting and the role that audit committees can fulfil in this regard; and secondly to provide evidence that the recommendations of King III regarding sustainability reporting, assurance thereon and the audit committee's oversight responsibility thereof, are justified. This is done by way of a literature review of current sustainability and audit committee developments and practices, which is supported by empirical evidence obtained from assessing the annual reports (content analysis) in March 2008 and from questionnaires sent in April 2008 to the audit committee chairs of the Top 40 listed companies in South Africa. The fact that 35 of the 40 companies in the population were listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (hereafter JSE) Limited's Socially Responsible Index (hereafter SRI) at the time of the empirical study should provide added support to the findings and recommendations regarding sustainability reporting and the audit committee's role in this regard. The study has the specific limitation that the assessment is limited to the Top 40 JSE listed companies in South Africa, as defined by market capitalisation, and that they might not therefore necessarily be representative of the sustainability and audit committee practices of smaller listed companies, unlisted entities or public sector institutions.

3.   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1   Stakeholder Concepts and Sustainability Reporting

Corporate governance issues became prominent in the nineteenth century when the first limited liability companies were formed in the United States and the United Kingdom, and as such separated the management and ownership of companies both formally and legally. This resulted in the directors being entrusted with management power, while still being accountable to the owners of the company. Consequently the shareholders needed to protect their investments against abuse of power by the directors, and as a result the agency concept was created and the concept of corporate governance was born (Pullinger, 1995:7; Reynecke, 1996:34; Rossouw, De Koker, Marx & Van der Watt, 2003:3). The debate surrounding corporate governance has intensified since the 1990s as a result of business failures and corporate collapses. It is also interesting to note that corporate governance practices have evolved from initial structural arrangements aligning the management of companies with the interests of their shareholders to being extended to the interests of other stakeholders and society at large. In this regard Jhaveri (1998) states that corporate governance covers three types of issues, namely "ethical issues, efficiency issues and accountability issues" to its shareholders and other stakeholders.

The various corporate governance codes issued over the years gave prominence to the need for businesses to behave in a responsible manner and to respect the society and the environment in which they do business (for corporate governance codes issued internationally, see the website of the European Corporate Governance Institute at http://www.ecgi.org/codes_/all_co_des.php). Sustainability issues, in South Africa as well as internationally, have gained in importance since the publication of King II (IoD, 2002:20 , para. 41), which advocated a shift from the single bottom line of profits only, to a focus on corporate citizenship, sustainability and triple bottom line reporting. These principles have also gained momentum internationally through the publications, recommendations and guidelines issued by various institutes, professional bodies and other interested parties (such as inter alia the JSE's SRI index in South Africa; the United Nation's Global Compact and Principles for Responsible Investment; The Reform of United Kingdom Company Law, which requires directors to consider the impact of the company's operations on the community and the environment; the Norwegian government's White Paper on Corporate Social Responsibility (hereafter CSR); the Danish government's law on CSR reporting; the European Union's Directive on Transparency requiring companies to report relevant CSR information; and the sustainability guidelines of Organisations such as Account Ability, the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Ackers, 2009:17; IoD, nd;8; IoD 2009:1114; De Viiliers, 2004:2831; KPMG, 2010:23; Matutu, 2009; Wheeler & Elkington, 2002).

The stakeholder concept has also been widely researched and defined over the years. One of the first definitions of the term was that of Freeman (as quoted by Breckenridge, 2004:27), who defined stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives." This definition was slightly refined by Rossouw (2003:3) and Rossouw, et al. (2007:243), who defined a stakeholder as "a person or party who is affected by a business or who has the potential to affect the performance of a business". Mervyn King, who chaired the King Committee, has a totally different definition of stakeholders: he defines them as "the licensors of the business of the company" and states that "today, the licensor of a business is not only the regulator who grants the company the licence to operate its business. There are always other licensors for example, standard-setting or industry bodies; the media; the individual stakeholders linked to the company through its business such as its customers, employees, suppliers, pressure groups, public opinion makers, politicians etc. Any one of these licensors could impact positively or negatively on a business and will definitely be needed when the inevitable downturn is being corrected" (King, 2006:21). King III defines stakeholders as "any group affected by and affecting the company's operations" (IoD, 2009:127).

Stakeholders are interested in both financial and non-financial information regarding the company and its operations. Financial information was traditionally provided through the annual report, while non-financial reporting, which focuses on environmental, social, transformation, ethical, safety and health information, was provided as part of the annual report, or in a separate sustainability report. King II (IoD, 2002: 91, section 4) defined the concept of sustainability as follows: "each enterprise must balance the need for long-term viability and prosperity of the enterprise itself and the societies and environment upon which it relies for its ability to generate economic value with the requirement for short-term competitiveness and financial gain". This was refined in King III, which now defines sustainability as: "conducting operations in a manner that meets existing needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It means having regard to the impact that the business operations have on the economic life of the community in which it operates. Sustainability includes environmental, social and governance issues" (IoD, 2009:126). King III also requires that sustainability reporting and disclosure be integrated with the company's financial reporting (principle 9.2) and defines integrated reporting as: "the holistic and integrated representation of the company's performance in terms of both its finances and its sustainability" (IoD, 2009: 121).

3.2   The audit committee and sustainability reporting oversight

With the increase in focus and importance of corporate citizenship and sustainability reporting, the role of the modern audit committee has also evolved accordingly.

The audit committee's role now includes taking oversight responsibility on the board's behalf for ensuring that the company provides accurate, reliable and credible financial and non-financial information to the various stakeholder groups to ensure not only the short-term profitability of the company, but also its long-term sustainability. An effectively functioning audit committee can fulfil a critical role in this regard, as Williams (2007:14) remarks: "Anyone who supports the idea of corporate governance as holding companies accountable both to shareholders and other stakeholders has to see audit committees as a cornerstone of the structure".

An overview of the literature indicates that the term 'audit committee' is not always formally defined, but is quite often informally described as being part of corporate governance reports and legislative requirements. From the various audit committee definitions and descriptions, ranging from the earliest to the most recent, Marx (2008:41) concluded that: "the audit committee should function as a subcommittee of the board of directors of which the members should be independent non-executive directors. Although the audit committee is tasked with many and diverse responsibilities, the most important task of the committee remains its oversight role to ensure accurate and reliable financial reporting. Accordingly, it is imperative that the members are financially literate and have the necessary financial experience and expertise to perform this oversight function effectively". From this description (and supported by King, 2006: 7172) it is obvious that the modern audit committee, consisting of independent non-executive directors who are financially literate and who have the necessary financial expertise among themselves, is ideally suited to oversee the company's sustainability reporting. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the status and seniority of the audit committee, and the fact that it is generally regarded as being the most important subcommittee of the board, will further strengthen the importance of sustainability reporting if the oversight responsibility for this falls under its remit (Marx, 2008: 338339). By assuming oversight responsibility for stakeholder reporting the audit committee can ensure that the non-financial reporting information that the stakeholders use to base their decisions on is accurate, reliable and credible. This will in turn contribute to the protection and advancement of the individual stakeholder interests.

A review of audit committee and environmental, social and governance literature, however, indicates that there is very limited research into, reference to, or guidance material on the audit committee's responsibility for sustainability reporting (Blue Ribbon, 1999; Brewer, 2001, Ferreira, 2009; KPMG, 2005, 2007, 2010; Liu, 2005; Marx, 2008; Mitchell, Curtis & Davidson, 2008; Park, 1998; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005, 2006; Van der Nest, 2006; Rea, 2009; Van Altena,2009:42; Weiss, 2005). King III, however, addressed this shortcoming and now provides that the audit committee should oversee the company's integrated reporting, which consists of performance in terms of both its finance and its sustainability.

It also tasks the audit committee with oversight responsibility for the sustainability issues in the integrated report, and requires that the audit committee recommend to the board that the board engage an external assurance provider to provide assurance on sustainability aspects included in the integrated report. As part of this oversight responsibility the audit committee should also evaluate the independence and credentials of the external assurance provider (IoD, 2009: 60, Para. 3436).

4.   METHODOLOGY

The role of the audit committee in overseeing sustainability reporting was empirically tested (as part of a bigger study) through content analysis. This took the form of an inspection of companies' annual reports and through questionnaires that were sent to audit committee chairs for completion. The empirical study was descriptive in nature: it focused on the quality of information obtained rather than the quantitative nature of data. This approach is supported by Henning et al. (2004), who stress the importance of capturing the views of the subjects in the population. Holsti (1969) offers a broad definition of content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages." Content analysis has limitations (as noted by Unerman, 2000:66), but it is also widely recognised and accepted as a research instrument (Ackers, 2009:3; Barack & Moloi, 2010:45; Brennan & Solomon, 2008;893; Dawkins & Ngunjiri, 2008: 291292). When used in conjunction with well-designed and controlled questionnaires it can add to an understanding of the characteristics of the population.

4.1   Population

The study focused on audit committees at the large listed companies in South Africa and accordingly the population for the empirical study was selected as the largest 40 companies ranked by market capitalisation on the JSE's All-Share Index (referred to as the FTSE/JSE Top 40 Index) (JSE 2008a). At the date of the study these companies represented 87.64% of the total market value of the JSE's All-Share Index (JSE, 2008b) and as such would represent a wide spectrum of stakeholders' interests in South Africa.

4.2   Content analysis of annual reports

In this section of the study the most recently available annual reports of the 40 companies were inspected between 25 and 28 March 2008. This was done at the offices of the JSE in Johannesburg, or on the companies' websites in cases where the latest annual reports had not yet been received by the JSE (companies have six months to submit hard copies of their financial statements to the JSE).

All the annual reports of the companies in the population were inspected (100% coverage).

4.3   Questionnaire

The second part of the empirical study consisted of questionnaires (available upon request) that were sent to the audit committee chairs for completion on 4 April 2008. The questionnaires were also tested by a selected group of highly experienced people, consisting of academics, corporate governance experts, and audit committee chairs who were not in the population. They all provided valuable input into the questionnaire design and content, contributing to the relevance thereof. A response rate of 34 completed and usable questionnaires (85%) was achieved, while two questionnaires were returned, as it is the policy of these companies not to complete questionnaires (5%).

5.   RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents detail about the audit committee's oversight responsibility for sustainability reporting specifically and other corporate governance and social responsibility aspects in general.

Table 1: Audit committee responsibilities disclosed in the annual report

	Number			%	
	Total	Yes	No	Yes	No
Sustainability reporting	Total	Yes	No	Yes	No
Review of sustainability reporting	40	3	37	7.5	92.5
Corporate governance and social responsibility	Total	Yes	No	Yes	No
Review compliance with the company's code of ethics	40	10	30	25.0	75.0
Review/provide a channel for safe reporting (whistle-blowing)	40	8	32	20.0	80.0
Review of compliance with laws and regulations	40	28	12	70.0	30.0
Review compliance with corporate governance codes	40	8	32	20.0	80.0
Review the accuracy of information on BBBEE statistics	40	0	40	0	100
Review the compliance with BBBEE codes	40	0	40	0	100
Other corporate governance and business ethics-related responsibilities disclosed include reviewing compliance with the JSE listing requirements and Sarbanes-Oxley requirements, as well as reviewing of unethical conduct and fraud by employees.					

Source: Annual report disclosure (own analysis)

Key interpretations based on the above findings:

The above findings indicate that only three companies (7.5%) disclosed specific information that their audit committees review their company's sustainability reporting, while 70% indicated that their audit committees review compliance with laws and regulations.

The above findings further indicate that few companies are disclosing information on audit committee responsibilities regarding ethics compliance (25%), whistle-blowing (20%), and corporate governance compliance (20%), while none disclose their responsibilities vis-à-vis BBBEE (broad-based black economic empowerment).

An assessment of the annual reports for the period under review revealed that 37 of the companies (92.5%) provided sustainability reporting in one form or another, and that 13 of the companies in the population (32.5%) obtained external assurance on their sustainability reports. As noted above, however, this information is not mirrored in the audit committee's oversight responsibility for sustainability and social reporting. Thus it can be concluded that the audit committees are not assuming oversight responsibility for their company's sustainability and social responsibility-related disclosure or that, in cases where they do, such responsibilities are not disclosed.

These disclosure findings are further analysed and discussed in Table 3.

Table 2: Audit committee responsibilities performed as per the audit committee chair questionnaire

Sustainability reporting	Number	%
Review the fair presentation of the sustainability report?	16	47.1
Corporate governance and social responsibility	**Number**	**%**
Review compliance with the company's code of ethics?	22	64.7
Review/provide a channel for safe reporting (whistle-blowing)?	30	88.2
Review compliance with laws and regulations?	29	85.3
Review compliance with corporate governance codes?	30	88.2
Review the accuracy of BBBEE information/statistics?	8	23.5
Review compliance with BBBEE codes?	7	20.6

Source: Audit committee chair questionnaire (own calculation)

Key interpretations based on the above findings:

The above findings indicate that the majority of audit committees are assuming oversight responsibility for whistle-blowing (88.2%), corporate governance compliance (88.2%), and review of compliance with laws and regulations (85.3%) and the company's code of ethics (64.7%). Only 47.1% of the audit committees, however, review the fair presentation of the company's sustainability reporting, while only a small number review the accuracy of BBBEE information disclosed (23.5%) and compliance with BBBEE codes (20.6%).

As stated above, an assessment of the annual reports for the period under review revealed that 37 of the companies (92.5%) provided sustainability reporting in one form or another, and that 13 of the companies in the population (32.5%) obtained external assurance on their sustainability reports. However, the fact that so few audit committees are taking oversight responsibility for sustainability reporting (47.1%), as is evident from the audit committee questionnaires, is alarming and could also affect the accuracy, reliability and credibility of the company's sustainability reporting. The research was undertaken before the recommendations of King III became effective (1 March 2010) and the findings serve as justification for the requirement that the audit committee should take oversight responsibility for sustainability issues in the integrated report, and that sustainability reporting and disclosure should be externally assured.

Table 3: Comparison of audit committee responsibilities and functions performed as disclosed in the annual report and those actually performed as per the audit committee chair questionnaire

	Annual report analysis %	Audit committee chair questionnaire %
Sustainability reporting		
Review the fair presentation of the sustainability report	7.5	47.1
Corporate governance and social responsibility		
Review compliance with the company's code of ethics	25.0	64.7
Review/provide a channel for safe reporting (whistle-blowing)	20.0	88.2
Review compliance with laws and regulations	70.0	85.3
Review compliance with corporate governance codes	20.0	88.2
Review the accuracy of BBBEE information/statistics	0	23.5
Review compliance with BBBEE codes	0	20.6

Source: Annual report analysis and audit committee chair questionnaire

Key interpretations based on the above findings:

When the audit committee's responsibilities regarding sustainability and social reporting as disclosed in the annual report are compared with those actually performed by the audit committees, it is evident that more audit committees are in fact performing these functions than is actually reported. The reporting does not, in other words, adequately convey the important role that audit committees fulfil in providing accurate, reliable and transparent reporting to stakeholders.

6.　　RECOMMENDATIONS

Following from the findings of the study it is recommended that audit committees adhere to the recommendations of King III and take oversight responsibility for both financial and sustainability issues in the integrated report.

It is also recommended that companies' sustainability reporting and disclosure be independently assured and that audit committees assume responsibility for recommending the appointment of the assurance providers to their boards, as well as for evaluating the independence and credentials of the assurance providers. Audit committees should also ensure that sufficient information is disclosed in the integrated report on their oversight responsibilities regarding sustainability aspects so as to enhance the report's credibility and reliability.

7.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the article found that the majority of audit committees at the largest listed companies in South Africa are not taking oversight responsibility for sustainability reporting on their boards' behalf, although they are dealing with some ethical and social reporting aspects. It was also found that reporting by audit committees in the annual report on their corporate governance, social and sustainability oversight responsibilities was limited and did not reflect the true state of affairs. These findings are of significance as they provide support for the recommendations of King III (effective from 1 March 2010) that companies should provide integrated reporting on their finance and sustainability performance, and that the audit committee should take oversight responsibility for this. The study is of specific relevance for Africa with its rich mineral resources, as it is of vital importance that companies that do business on the continent behave as responsible corporate citizens, respect the environment and society, and provide accurate, reliable and credible reporting on their financial and sustainability performance to all stakeholders.

The study was performed prior to the implementation of King III, and it is recommended that an analysis similar to the one undertaken here should be performed for financial reporting periods beginning after 1 March 2010, the date that King III becomes effective. This should be done to assess the impact of King III on the sustainability reporting of companies and their audit committees' responsibilities in this regard. It is also recommended that future research should focus on sustainability reporting and the responsibilities of audit committees in this regard at smaller companies and public sector entities.

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CONNECTING THE I TO THE WE: USING INTERACTIVE REFLECTION DURING SERVICE LEARNING

L NAUDÉ

ABSTRACT

The value of interactive reflective activities in the development of a universal orientation among service-learning students is explored. Psychology students participated in a service-learning module that incorporated various reflective activities. The hypothesis that exposure to reflective activities would result in change with regard to students' universal orientation, was confirmed. The most significant changes were seen in students who were involved in interactive reflective activities. These results support the value of dialogue and group interaction in students' development toward a universal orientation to life. Interactive reflection (embedded in the philosophy of human mediated constructivist learning and connected knowing) models the idea of interdependence and maximises students' perspectives of "we-ness".

Keywords: reflection, service learning, group interaction, universal orientation, student development, higher education.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in the 21st century, particularly those in South Africa, face the challenge of globalisation, new knowledge societies and complex issues of social transformation and diversity (Department of Education, 1997; 2002; O'Brien, 2005). In response, institutions recognise the importance of the development of human beings with the ability of praxis, i.e. reflection and interaction with the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1968). Nationally developed generic outcomes prioritise competencies such as working effectively with others as a member of a group and demonstrating an understanding of the world as a set of related systems (Department of Education, 2002). From various spheres, the call for the importance of learning about being human is heard (Rubin, 2001). There is a need for holistic education with a vision of mind, spirit and heart (Aquino, 2005). True learning, i.e. creative, expressive, reflective, self-directed learning, must be the way of being (Clayton & Ash, 2004). In this regard, Von Kotze (2004) recommends that the academy should be stretched, and excellence redefined to include active engagement, a contribution to social justice, and life-world usefulness.

Various educators (Bringle & Hatcher, 2004; Clayton & Ash, 2004; Collier & Morgan, 2002; Connor-Greene, 2002; Eyler, 2000; McEwen, 1996; O'Brien, 2005) propose service learning as a pedagogy that can facilitate the social change, holistic development, and competencies mentioned above.

As far back as the 1970s, Chickering (1977:17) warned that the "door is slamming shut on the age of individualism and an era of interdependence is leaping out at us". People today need to acknowledge and cope effectively with interdependence. A universal orientation to interpersonal relations accentuates similarities rather than differences between the self and others. This is based on the perception of self-other similarities, non-categorisation, self-other integration, a sense of oneness relatedness with others, the development of empathy and an acceptance of divergent views (Phillips & Ziller, 1997).

2.   SERVICE LEARNING (SL) AND REFLECTION AS VEHICLES OF CHANGE

To reach Boyer's vision of a scholarship of engagement (Boyer, 1996), SL has become the "engagement tool of choice" for educators (Zlotkowski, 2005:153). It is an "educational approach involving curriculum-based, credit-bearing learning experiences in which students (a) participate in contextualised, well-structured and organised service activities aimed at addressing identified service needs in a community, and (b) reflect on the service experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as achieve personal growth and a sense of social responsibility..." (UFS, 2006:9-10). Various scholars have acknowledged the work of experiential learning theorists Dewey (1937; 1938) and Kolb (1984), Freireian ideas (e.g. praxis and the problem posing model of education) (Freire, 1968; 1973) and feminist epistemologies (such as views on connected knowing and situated learning) (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Lave & Wenger, 1991) as cornerstones in the pedagogy of SL.

Reflection has been noted as the essential element that facilitates learning in SL (Eyler, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolb, 1984; Stacey, Rice & Langer, 2001; Zlotkowski, 1999). From Bringle and Hatcher's (1999) definition of SL, it is clear that reflection assists in gaining a deeper understanding of module content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility. Schön, widely recognised in the field of reflective practice and learning systems, regards reflection as a continual interweaving of thinking and doing (Schön, 1990; 1991). This reciprocity is also clear from Freire's term praxis and Dewey's form of reflection as the backward and forward connection between prior and current experience.

Bringle, Hatcher and colleagues (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004), as well as Eyler (2000; 2001; 2002; Eyler, Giles & Schmiede, 1996) provide helpful principles for good practice during reflection. Their guidelines, complemented by the research and work of Ash and colleagues (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Ash, Clayton & Atkinson, 2005; Clayton & Ash, 2005), Collier and Morgan (2002), Rice and Stacey (1997), and Williams and Driscoll (1997) include the importance of continuity, challenge, contextualisation and communication during reflection.

3. INTERACTIVE REFLECTION

In this study, the use of reflection in an interactive dialogue will be explored further. Acknowledging reflection as a way of becoming aware and making meaning, it is postulated that the use of interactive reflection will reap the most benefits. Many scholars in the field of SL have expressed the value of reflection as a group process (Collier & Morgan, 2002; Eyler, 2002; Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004; McDaniel, 1998; Rice & Stacey, 1997; Schensul, Berg & Brase, 2002).

Interactive reflection is embedded in the assumptions of constructivism (Schön, 1990), which emphasises how learning is mediated by interactions, social relations and language. Through dialogue, understanding is refined (Atherton, 2005). Echoing these ideas, Dewey, Lewin and Freire emphasise associated living, democracy in groups and the importance of connecting the I to the we as the true ingredients of education. Dewey (1938:48) mentions that "collateral learning" is sometimes much more important than the intended lesson itself. From a social constructivist perspective, Vygotsky reiterates the importance of co-operative and mediated learning, as well as authentically embedded knowledge (Schensul, Berg & Brase, 2002).

Feminist epistemologies emphasise that learning should be part of connected life and that learning is a social practice, based on participation in a community of practice (Clinchy, 2000). Group reflection that values thinking with (and not against) others can facilitate understanding. According to Noddings (1984:201), to "meet the other in caring" is the pinnacle of learning during service. This is of special importance in a multicultural classroom with diverse and sometimes sensitive and conflicting ideas. King (2004) and Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin (2000) refer to the importance of caring and sharing as a vehicle to enhance the border crossing (from the self to others) that is often needed during SL experiences

From an African perspective, Waghid (2004a; 2004b) is of the opinion that an educated person is given to dialogue. In an African philosophy of education, social practice and listening to the voices of others are paramount. Waghid reiterates the importance of becoming a learning mediator, which implies critical reflective engagement with one's own and others' positions.

According to him, the key elements of an African university classroom include not only the socialisation of students with facts, knowledge, values and tradition, but also the initiation of a discourse and critical questioning processes. Furthermore, he emphasises the importance of critical reasoning and deliberation with others (Waghid, 2008; 2009). Students should be encouraged to challenge what they have been taught and enter into rival arguments. Through opportunities for systematic controversy, students form and reconsider their own views and evaluate presuppositions. Concurring with this, Francis and Hemson (2007) challenge educators in South Africa to consider greater reflexivity, discourse and social practice in their classrooms.

4.   INTERACTIVE REFLECTION FROM A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

The developmental dynamics that students bring to the higher education sphere (such as developmental readiness and construction of personal meaning) can inform educational practice (McEwen, 1996; Sperling, et al., 2003). According to Dewey (Dworkin, 1959; Wirth, 1966) the appropriate stimuli should be chosen to ignite learners' inherent interest and instincts. Thus, educators should use the person's developmental stage as a "map" to order learning experiences.

For adolescents and young adults on their journey towards commitment in relativism (Perry, 1981), facing the challenges of finding an identity and intimacy (Erikson, 1980), interaction between individuals and their widening social radius, support and collaboration from peers, and finding meaning through others are paramount. Erikson (1980) states that identity formation is a complex, ongoing process in which individuals make judgements about the self in relation to socially constructed criteria; from an embedded identity to a differentiated and integrated identity. Acknowledging these ideas, higher education should be focused on opportunities that facilitate an understanding of the self in relation to a changing culture. Structured opportunities for reflection can provide the intellectual scaffolding for entering social contexts and exploring aspects of the self and others (Brandenberger, 1998). Also Kohlberg believed that education using social interaction, cognitive conflicts, democratic participation and taking ownership can advance moral reasoning (McDaniel, 1998).

When group reflection is done, students can learn with one another in a reciprocal and interactive way. Feelings-orientated, reflective discussions assist students in realising that their feelings are normal, which can foster group bonding and trust. Group members can respect one another's vulnerabilities and provide comfort and support. Reflective discussions that are more cognitively orientated provide students with the opportunity to share insights and compare and contrast alternative viewpoints and conflicting evidence, and can facilitate critical thinking and cognitive insight.

Through voicing their ideas, hearing others' experiences and success stories and finding collaborative solutions to problems, students gain a mutual understanding, recognise limitations in their own thinking and clarify their values. When the student is used as an expert during these discussions, it can enhance his or her leadership skills and confidence. Co-operative learning strategies also increase pro-social behaviour, and the presence of others increases one's motivation to perform well (Brandenberger, 1998; Collier & Morgan, 2002; Exley, 1998; Eyler, 2002; Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004; McDaniel, 1998; Rice & Stacey, 1997; Schensul, Berg & Brase, 2002).

5.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research aim was to investigate the effect of different kinds of reflective activities on the development of students enrolled in an SL module. The hypothesis was that exposure to reflective activities (the independent variable) would result in change with regard to different dependent variables, such as universal orientation, civic responsibility and cultural sensitivity. The amount of the change observed was expected to differ depending on the kind of reflection that students were exposed to.

Third- and fourth-year psychology students in the Human and Societal Dynamics, B Psych, and Psychology Honours programmes volunteered to take part in an SL module called *The Study Buddy project*. This sample of 75 students participated in essentially the same SL activities over a period of nine months.

The students were randomly assigned to three groups: two experimental groups and one control group. Experimental group 1 received opportunities for individual reflection (weekly reports with feedback from the lecturer), as well as structured interactive or group reflection opportunities (which entailed bi-weekly contact sessions where a diverse group of students interacted and conversed about their SL experiences). Experimental group 2 only received opportunities for individual reflection. The control group was not exposed to any structured reflective activities (although informal reflection between peers may have happened).

Informed consent for participating in the research project was obtained from all students. Furthermore, to ensure confidentiality, student numbers (and not names) were used to match pre- and post-test data. All participants were invited to individual feedback sessions after the completion of the study. With regard to the SL practices employed, students were sensitised regarding their responsibility towards the community, possible risks during their SL endeavours and the scope of practice guidelines prescribed by the Professional Board for Psychology, Health Professions Council of SA.

In following a pre-post test experimental design, data with regard to the specified variables were collected at the beginning and again at the end of the SL module by means of a short biographical questionnaire and various multi-item scales. Amongst others, the *Universal Orientation Scale* developed by Phillips and Ziller (1997) was utilised to measure non-prejudicial attitudes based on perceived selfother similarities and communal perspectives that minimise group inequality (Bringle, Phillips & Hudson, 2004).

Cronbach's -coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the different scales in the context of this study (see Table 1).

Table 1: Cronbach's α-coefficients for the different scales

Instrument scale	α-coefficients	
	Pre-test scales	Post-test scales
Civic responsibility	0.748	0.695
Universal orientation	0.518	0.746
Social dominance	0.844	0.812
Social competence	0.783	0.792
Self-esteem	0.742	0.734

6.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes observed in the total research group

Table 2 summarises the mean and standard deviation scores of the dependent variables with regard to pre- and post-test scores as an indication of the changes observed in the total research group.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of the scores for the total research group with regard to pre- and post-test scores on the dependent variables

Variable	Pre-test		Post-test	
	$\overline{X}$	s	$\overline{X}$	S
Civic responsibility Highest possible score 116 Lowest possible score 29	97.69	6.79	104.33	5.68
Universal orientation Highest possible score 100 Lowest possible score 20	66.15	7.10	70.53	9.12
Social dominance Highest possible score 112 Lowest possible score 16	34.68	12.70	35.55	12.20
Social competence Highest possible score 80 Lowest possible score 16	63.36	8.00	67.37	7.31
Self-esteem Highest possible score 40 Lowest possible score 10	35.39	3.60	36.69	3.13
Hours	-	-	53.81	26.01

Table 2 shows that, for most of the variables (except for social dominance), the pre-scores obtained by students were on the upper level of the continuum. In spite of the possible role of the ceiling effect, there is a tendency towards higher average scores in the post-tests (as expected). Changes in dependent groups (using difference scores) were tested for significance by means of *t*-tests.

From the results (see Table 3), it is evident that all scores for the dependent variables, except for social dominance, changed significantly (at the 1% level of significance). This can be ascribed to developmental effects and natural maturation, but possibly also to the effect of the SL activities. These changes correspond with other research findings in the field of SL (Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001). Because these results cannot be compared with an equivalent group that was not exposed to any SL activities, it is not possible to ascribe the development effect to SL (this was not the purpose of the study, however).

Table 3: *t*-tests for the total research group with regard to pre- and post-test scores on the different dependent variables

Dependent variable	*t*-value	*p*
Civic responsibility	9.72**	<0.0001
Universal orientation	4.03**	0.0001
Social dominance	0.78	0.4383
Social competence	6.64**	<0.0001
Self-esteem	4.24**	<0.0001

** $p <= 0.01$ * $p <= 0.05$

Although only 40 hours of work in the community were expected from students, the average reported number of hours spent in the community was 53.81. This indicates that students were motivated to take initiative.

Investigating between-group differences

The MANOVA testing differences with regard to the dependent variables for a) the three groups in general and b) Groups 1 and 2 (the two experimental groups) versus Group 3 (control group), are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: MANOVA *F*-values for testing main effects and interactions

Independent variable	*F*-value	*v*	*P*
Group (1,2,3)	5.08**	12: 100	0.0001
Group (1+2) vs. (3)	1.73	6: 68	0.1275

** $p <= 0.01$ * $p <= 0.05$

Group 1 = Experimental 1; Group 2 = Experimental 2; Group 3 = Control

From Table 4, it is clear that significant differences (at the 1% level of significance) in the mean difference scores of the dependent variables exist for the three groups.

Table 5 summarises the results of the ANOVA tests that were done to determine which dependent variables showed significant differences (with the groups as independent variables).

Table 5: Results of the ANOVA tests with group as independent variable

Dependent variable	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	F-value	v	p	f
Civic responsibility	6.80	6.28	6.84	0.07	2	0.9346	
Universal orientation	12.00	0.68	0.48	17.61**	2	0.0001	0.70
Social dominance	2.00	-0.24	0.84	0.33	2	0.7201	
Social competence	4.88	4.08	3.08	0.74	2	0.4794	
Self-esteem	1.24	1.32	1.36	0.01	2	0.9875	
Hours	72.52	44.00	44.92	12.69**	2	0.0001	0.59

** $p <= 0.01$ * $p <= 0.05$
Group 1 = Experimental 1; Group 2 = Experimental 2; Group 3 = Control

From Table 5, it is clear that there are differences significant at the 1% level for two dependent variables, namely universal orientation and hours spent in the community. The effect sizes of both these results indicate large practical significance. According to the Scheffé procedure (to determine which of the three groups differed significantly from the others), Group 1 which received a combination of interactive (group) and individual reflective activities, differed significantly from the other two groups with regard to the two variables. Students in this group portrayed a greater shift towards a universal orientation and voluntarily committed more hours of service in the community than the other two groups.

These results support the value of interactive (group) reflection, as explicated above, as well as the importance of dialogue and group interaction. It is clear that, through dialogue, understanding is refined and development is facilitated. This finding is in accordance with the research of Connor-Greene (2002), who found that, amongst other things, group process, group discussion and interdependence enhance the value for students in an SL module.

It is believed that the potential value of working in groups, as proposed by various scholars (Collier & Morgan, 2002; Schensul, Berg & Brase, 2002, Simmons & Roberts-Weah, 2000) realised in this group of students. Through the sharing of multiple viewpoints, modelling and scaffolding, students gained insight into how context and background affect perceptions. They learned to think in terms of groups and not only as individuals. Furthermore, it is believed that the key elements of an African university classroom, such as discourse, critical questioning processes and opportunities for systematic controversy as proposed by Waghid (2004), were present in the interactive reflective processes in which this group was involved.

Although it was expected that individual reflection would also facilitate change (as in other research findings), this research did not find significant evidence for the role of individual reflection in facilitating development. It is clear that combining individual reflection with interactive group reflection proves to be a more effective educational practice.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article provided an argument for how the implementation of certain learning and developmental principles can enhance educational practice in the field of SL and reflective practice. As Bradley (2003) states, these theories can serve as filters or lenses through which higher education activities can be designed and student learning and development can be facilitated.

This study supports the value of interactive reflection, dialogue and group interaction in the development of students toward a universal orientation to life. Conversation, dialogue, peer interaction and sharing experiences maximise students' perspectives of "we-ness". Especially for adolescents and young adults in a diverse society such as SA today, human-mediated constructivist learning models the idea of interdependence and equips students with the competence needed in today's world.

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EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: A CASE OF THE BOTSWANA TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

RJ ODORA

ABSTRACT

Providing quality Technical education and training has for a long time been an area of concern for most African countries, given the fact that every year governments allocate huge part of national budget to this sector. The study sought to determine the perceptions of employers regarding the quality of the Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP) graduates in terms of three main attributes, namely: survival, technical and employability skills. The main participants for the study were drawn from employers of BTEP graduates. Altogether 62 employers participated in the survey. The study found that although 50.7 % of employers rated survival and practical skills of the BTEP graduates as high, a much greater percentage (60 %) of them rated the level of occupational and employability skills as average. The study also found that while outcomes-based BTEP programme provides relatively high level of survival and practical skills, the level of most work related skills are still below the employers' expectation.

Keywords: employers' perceptions, outcomes-based education and training, quality, Botswana Technical Education and Training.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational education and training (TVET) has been used by both developed and developing countries as an instrument of development and as a way of preparing people for the world of work (Atchoarena and Andre, 2001). Over the past three decades many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have carried out major reforms in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) with the main aim of improving the outcomes of such training programmes. One such reform is the shift from the traditional rigid craft-based to competency-based education and training (African Union Report, 2007).
In the case of Botswana, TVET reform has been guided by the Report of the National Commission on Education of 1994 (Government of Botswana, 1997) and to a large extent Vision 2016 (Akoojee et al., 2005). In the two policy documents, the government of Botswana acknowledged TVET as crucial to the countries' economic diversification from agro-based to an industrialized economy (Richardson, 2008).

Thus, following the Revised National Recommendation on Education of 1997 and Vocational Education and Training Act of 1997 (GoB,1997) the Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP) was introduced by the Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DTVET) in collaboration with employers in formal and informal sectors of the economy and the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA).

The Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP) is by its nature a modularized outcomes based programme which is designed to be delivered flexibly in a variety of modes to a wide range of different learners using individualized, constructivist methodologies (Richardson, 2008). Its overall objective is: "to ensure access for all Batswana to high quality lifelong education and training, with a view to producing self-reliant, knowledgeable and skilled individuals who will engage in achieving Botswana's development goals, in particular and creation of employment, reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty" (Government of Botswana, 1994:186).

While the BTEP programme has registered some positive results by addressing the problem skill shortage, improving the quality of work skills is seen a major challenge for most Technical colleges in Botswana.

2.   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

According to the United Nation Economic and Social Council (2005), the primary objective of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme in any country is to train skilled labour force which is adaptable to the requirements of the labour force. Such a key objective is difficult to achieve without quality vocational education and training programmes. Unfortunately quality technical education is difficult to define considering the various concepts about quality Everret et al (1999) argued that quality in technical education must be defined within the scope of the entire career and technical education system. According to Everret et al. quality in technical education is difficult to define because the programme serves two primary audience or clients: the students in the technical education and the employers.

Huba and Freed (2000) maintain that the first clients (the students) are expected to benefit from the teaching and learning offered by the vocational training institutions. They argue that in defining quality in vocational education it is important to recognise the degree to which teaching is learner-oriented. Learner orientation is the main reason for the recent paradigm shift away from traditional teacher-centred instruction to the learner-centred approach. The learner-centered approach is perceived as paying attention to performance rather than straightforward recollection or simple application of knowledge thereby allowing technical institutions to "aspire to become places where learning is continual, interactive, and self-renewing" (Rosenfeld, 2000:6).

In this model, students are believed to benefit from effective, flexible, assessable learning experiences that depend less on memorisation than on integration of skills. The model also considers learning not as the acquisition of isolated skills, but as the ability to apply a variety of learned skills sets to many job-relevant situations.

Ultimately, the student-centred approach indicates programme quality not only by internal means, (the grades that teachers give), but also by the student's performance away from the institution. Some writers have argued that the completion of a vocational education programme is only one indication of skills acquisition. What a student does with those skills is a much more compelling indicator of quality. For example, adult students, on the job or seeking employment, see the acquisition of skills as an objective at least as important as graduation. Thus, the assessment of a learner-centred post-secondary curriculum must see the acquisition of skills as an alternative to graduation in measuring success.

The second client (the employer), hires students or promote them based upon the vocational education and training that vocational training institutions provides. Whereas, in the past businesses often offered internal training in the form of apprenticeship, companies are increasingly collaborating with public training institutions to prepare graduates for the world of work (Young-Hwa Kim, 2002).

Knowing the specific needs of the employers is critical to producing quality students, whether degree graduates or simply to upgrade employees, so that they can perform to the employer's satisfaction and fit the employer's long-term goals. In this regard, Lynch, (2000) maintains that quality technical education and training programmes must not only teach subject matter and skills, but also improve workplace performance. Thus, the quality of technical education should also embrace in part the quality and degree of involvement and cooperation between the institution and the employer in dealing with multiple needs; they must be partners in the planning, development, implementation, and assessment of all technical education, from degree programme to customised workplace training.

Drawing on qualitative insights from the employer case studies, it was found that there are characteristics, skills and knowledge and intellectual capability elements that are required for specific roles at workplace (Lowden et al., 2011; Griesel and Parker, 2009). A further similarity with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) report of 2009 was that employers and their representative organisations thought that specific definitions of employability were less important than the agreed focus on how to promote employability skills and attributes.

Contrary to other qualitative case studies, other authors argue that listing of gradates attributes cannot be done in simplistic manner because employability is a far more complex notion (Harvey et.al., 1997). In this regard, York suggests that: "….employability goes beyond the simplistic notion of key skills, and is evidenced in the application of a mixed of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience in situations of complexity and ambiguity" (York, 2008:13).

According to York and Knight (2006:5), employability skills are influenced in the main by four broad and interrelated components: skilful practices (communication, management of time, self and resources, problem-solving and lifelong learning); deep understandings and grounded in a disciplinary base (specialised expert in a field of knowledge), efficacious beliefs about personal identity and self-worth and metacognition (self-awareness, and the capability to reflect on, in and for action). Drawing from this literature review it is clear that most employers value certain employability skill and attributes that are required for specific roles at the workplace.

3.   AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main aim of the study was to determine employers' perceptions of the quality of the Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP) graduates in terms of four main attributes namely: basic skills and understanding, trade-related skills, and employability skills. In order to achieve the stated aim, the following research questions were proposed:

- Do graduates demonstrate academic skills to meet workplace expectations?
- Do graduates apply trade-related skills when dealing with workplace tasks?
- Do graduates display employability skills that are necessary at workplace?
- What are the Graduate skills and attributes that are valued by the employers?
- How do employers assess the effectiveness of BTEP programme?

4.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While Technical education and training offers more opportunities for most countries in sub-Saharan Africa to produce skilled workforce needed for job creation and economic development, the need to evaluate its fitness for purpose for this mode of education and training remain a major challenge. The rapid growth of technology in commerce and industry and globalisation impact demand that graduates must attain relevant practical knowledge and skills if they have to fit in the modern workplace (Griesel and Parker, 2009).

To achieve this goal, Technical training colleges need to work hard towards making the training they provide more relevant to the needs of commerce and industry. Numerous surveys has revealed that drawing conclusions based on graduates experience surveys alone is found to be inadequate as employers often perceive knowledge and skills from a different perspective to that of other VET stakeholders (Odora, 2006). Other empirical studies are needed to determine the level of competencies of graduates exiting from Technical Colleges. For any Technical Education and Training programme to be relevant, quality education and training as measured by the graduates' level of competencies is necessary. Additionally, Technical education and training without employers' input is bound to lose relevance to the world of work (Green, 2004). It was anticipated that the findings would help educators and policy makers to understand and respond to the needs of the employers as well as better support the graduates in acquiring the necessary skills needed in the work place.

5.   METHODS

The research design

This study is based on descriptive research design utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Mixed methods was chosen for this study to serve the dual purposes of generalisation and in-depth understanding of employers' perceptions regarding the quality of BTEP graduates in terms of their skills and attributes.

Participants

The population for this study consisted mainly of employers in the following trades: Building construction, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, ICT, Hospitality, Operation and Tourism, Hair dressing and Clothing Design and Textiles. Altogether 86 employers were sampled for the study using simple random sampling method. Since the population of the employers in the trades mentioned was quite small, a simple random sampling method was used. The findings shows, the small population sample in some trades did influenced the responses given to each statement in the questionnaire.

Instruments

The data for this study were collected using structured questionnaire consisting of closed and open-ended questions and face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was developed based on the checklist provided by Zirkle (1998). The questionnaire consisted of general biographical information about the participants and a checklist of skills derived from three graduate attributes: academic skills, Technical/Occupational skills and Employability skills. Each statement had a Likert scale for rating each statement on a scale of 1 to 3 where 1 is low, 2 is average and 3 is high.

Procedure

Data collection procedure was through self-completed questionnaire. Depending on the location of the employer, questionnaire were sent either by post or delivered personally by the researcher. Enclosed with the questionnaires was a letter that described the purpose of the study, and soliciting the voluntary participation of the participants. Altogether 120 questionnaire were sent to the employers.

6.   RESULTS

In this study, the quality of BTEP graduates were assessed based on three quality indicators, namely academic knowledge and skills, occupational and technical skills and employability skills. In all the first three questions the respondents were asked to rate the skills levels of the graduates using a Likert scale of 1-3 where: 1 = low; 2 = Average; and 3 = High.

A.   Biographic summary of the respondents

Table 1 provides demographic data of the employers for each of the following trades: Building construction, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical engineering, ICT, Hospitality Operation and Tourism, Hair dressing and Beauty therapy, Clothing Design and Textile, Multimedia and Accounting. Initially 86 participants were sampled and of this number only 62 of them actually participated in the study.

Table 1: Employers per trade area

Trade area	Frequency	%
Building construction	5	8.1
Mechanical Engineering	15	24.2
Electrical Engineering	7	11.3
ICT	8	12.9
Hospitality Operation and Tourism	5	8.1
Hair dressing and Beauty Theraphy	9	14.5
Clothing Design and Textiles	4	6.5
Multimedia	1	1.6
Accounting	8	12.9
Total	62	100

Of the 62 participants, 15(24.2%) were found to be in Mechanical Engineering. It was also found that only 2 participants actually completed the questionnaire. It was obvious from Figure 1 that the number of participants varied from trade to trade.

The low number of respondents in some trades could be attributed to lack of employment opportunities in those trades.

B.   Do graduates demonstrate academic skills to meet workplace expectations?

This section addressed six items relating to academic skills. An overview of items and descriptive statistics is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Academic skill

Responses	% Low	% Average	% High
Technological literacy	9.7	48.4	41.9
Technical writing skill	9.7	43.5	46.8
Numerical skill	4.8	46.8	48.4
Computer skill	14.5	45.2	40.3
Oral communication skill	6.4	37.1	56.5
Reading skill	4.8	32.3	62.9
Average	4.3	42.2	49.5

The findings revealed that over 50% of the respondents rated graduates' competencies in reading and oral communication higher than other academic skills. Only a small percentage of participants (48.4%) rated graduates' competency in numerical skills as high, followed by technological literacy (40.4%) and computer skills (33.95%). On average 47.5% of the participants feel BTEP graduates as the necessary academic skills.

C.   Do graduates apply trade-related skills when dealing with workplace tasks?

This question consisted of six elements. Employers were asked to rate each item on a three point Likert scale where 1 = low, 2 = average, and 3 = high. An overview of items and descriptive statistics is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Trade-related (practical) skills

Responses	Low	Average	High
Health and safety skills	12.9	37.1	50.0
Machine operation skills (e.g. workshop or office machines)	11.3	38.7	50.0
Trade-specific reading skills(e.g. technical or business literature)	9.7	46.8	43.5
Work quality control skills	16.2	53.2	30.6
Work management skills	24.2	50.0	25.8
Average			

Descriptive data indicate that employers' perceptions regarding trade related skills were generally low. In particular, the findings point to Technical Literature interpretation skills, Maintenance of work quality and Work management skills as the lowest skill level. In the three items mentioned above, only a small percentage (34.9%) of the participants rated as high.

D.   Do graduates display employability skills that are necessary at workplace?

Employability skills as defined in this study are those skills that allow one to perform efficiently in an industrial/commercial work environment. A total of twelve employability skill areas were identified and used in the study. The response to the level of employability skills and descriptive statistics is provided in Table 3.

Table 4: Employability skills

Responses	% Low	% Average	% High
Interpersonal skill	3.2	40.3	56.5
Decision-making skill	32.3	48.4	19.3
Problem-solving skill	25.8	45.2	29.0
Teamwork	9.7	25.8	64.5
Self-management skill	29.0	30.6	40.3
Leadership skill	29.0	48.4	22.6
Time management skill	24.2	35.5	40.3
Trustworthiness	9.7	24.2	66.1
Negotiation skill	32.3	37.1	30.6
Creative thinking skill	33.9	38.7	27.4
Adaptability to work environment and technology	33.9	38.7	27.4
Enterprising skill	22.6	51.6	25.8

The highest number of participants rated high the following employability skills: teamwork and trustworthiness (66.1%) and interpersonal skills 56.4%). On the other hand, 71.4% of the respondents rated as low to very low the following employability skills of BTEP graduates: decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, leadership skills, negotiation skills, creative thinking skills and enterprising skills.

E.   Graduate skills and attributes that are valued by the employers

Semi-structured-interviews were conducted with the employers of BTEP graduates.

Major themes emerged around the issue of employability skills. The interviews with the employers of BTET graduates found that there are characteristics, skills and knowledge and intellectual capability elements that are required for specific roles. In addition, combinations of transferable skills were also deemed particularly relevant. Most employers mentioned some or all of the following employability skills outlined by Lowden et al (2011). These are: teamwork, problem-solving, self-management, knowledge of the business, literacy and numeracy related to the job, ICT knowledge, good interpersonal and communication skills, ability to use own initiatives but also follow instructions and leadership skills. In addition to these skills the employers also highlighted the need for particular attitudes and outlook including motivation, principled-minded and committed to work.

F.   Employer Assessment of the Effectiveness of BTEP programme

Semi-structured-interviews were conducted with the employers of BTEP graduates. Major themes emerged around the issue of effectiveness of BTEP programme in terms of preparing students for the world of work. Findings not many employers understand what BTEP programme is all about and what it intend to achieve. Comparing BTEP programme with the old Craft Certificate programme, most employers are of the view that the latter programme provided graduates with the necessary workplace skills. Also the programme provided higher academic achievement, higher employment rate and relevant work experience.

The few instructors that were interviewed highlighted the following problems related to the implementation of BTEP programmes. One instructor observed: ".. the programme should have been piloted first before expanding it to other Technical colleges".

Another instructor noted: "The artificial achievement pass of 100% does not reflect the true level of competence as required by the employers …. Such achievement model should be replaced with assessment model based on true performance of the student."

Another instructor noted: "…this is too basic stuff with shallow content. Teaching technical courses is not fun anymore as more time is wasted on repetitive tasks of assessment and report writing". The findings from the interviews were found to be consistent with previous study by Raynold and Sharpe, (1992) found that while most students viewed competence-based education and training positively, most teachers experienced pressure to pass students despite questionable mastery of the work on the part of the students and they also experienced difficulty with the implementation of competency-based programmes due to limited resources.

7.   DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to determine employers' perceptions of the quality of the Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP) graduates in terms of four main attributes namely: basic skills and understanding, trade-related skills, and employability skills. Several important issues emerged from this study the most pressing of which revolves around employability skills. The results indicated a highly favourable rating of academic and trade-related (practical) skills especially in the area of reading skills and oral communication skills.

On the contrary, the findings revealed that the majority of the respondents believe that most BTEP graduates have very low skill level in almost all trade-related (practical skills and employability skills such as decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, leadership skills, negotiation skills, creative thinking skills and enterprising skills. The relatively lower rating by the respondents of graduates' practical skills and employability skills are congruent with employers' impressions in other countries of deficiencies in term of work and other so-called "soft skills" which generally include most of the employability skills include individual's interpersonal, communication, and work ethics competencies (Kara and Rogers, 2008).

In addition to concerns towards work-related skills, some employers expressed concerns about the overall pedagogical preparation of the BTEP graduates. By its nature, outcomes-based education is restricted by a set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. This type of curriculum structure does not create adequate opportunities for flexible learning, as learning is limited to the achieving the stated outcomes. Although there is now formal, pre-service pedagogical training for most BTEP instructors, there is still a shortage of qualified instructors in some trades. The disparity in qualification and experience leads to a wide disparity in the quality of the teaching force. Instructors interviewed have indicated heavy assessment workload which often impacted negatively on classroom teaching. They were also concerned about limited placements for students who are required to undergo work integrated learning as part of students' practical training.

The debate about the effectiveness of the impact of outcomes led qualifications framework and quality assurance in formal education and training has been mixed. Alias (2006) argue that the National Qualification Framework (NQF) does not create adequate opportunities for flexible learning, as qualifications designed are being driven mainly by industry's immediate needs for skills development, rather than the requirements of the new national policy guiding sustainable development.

To further emphasise the concerns, Parker and Walters (2008) argued that South African's move to Outcomes Based Education (OBE) as the template for the whole education and training through the use of outcomes statements to create a communication's platform for portability of learning between different knowledge and occupational fields have not succeeded. Also as a result of massive decline in apprenticeship and other work based learning in South Africa, NQF has not met the expectations of business with respect to improving the supply of appropriately trained skill labour with respect to increasing access to educational and occupational opportunities. According Matseleng (2002), even South Africa with established training policies has achieved very little in terms of integrating education and training. The report noted the main reason for the limited progress in achieving NQF objectives as lack of common understanding about 'an integrated framework' which has resulted into the drivers of the NQF and their partners to interpret this concept in different ways.

In general, the views expressed by most respondents (employers) tended to further strengthen the perception that although outcomes-based BTEP programme provides a range of courses, the outcomes (quality of graduates) in term of academic and employability skills are still wanting. While the survey data indicated the majority of BTEP graduates are exiting Technical colleges with the qualifications necessary to successfully transition into the workforce, data from the interviews point to a need to a holistic programme review with the view to imparting the necessary skills required in the workplace.

8.   CONCLUSION

In summary, the following findings emerged: Most employers surveyed perceive the skills level of BTEP graduates as less satisfactory. The skill areas in which BTEP graduates appear to have low competencies include technological literature, reading, writing and numerical skills. The findings also indicate that BTEP graduates are weak in the following areas of occupational/technical skills: machine operation; trade-specific reading skills (e.g. technical/business literature); work quality control; and work management skills. The findings also indicate insufficient knowledge and skills in many areas of employability skills such as decision-making skills, leadership skills, self-management skills, creative thinking skills and adaptability to changing work environment and technology.

The study makes it clear that there is a real need to address gaps between employer expectations and the BTEP training outcomes. This is largely to do with a strong collaboration between Technical colleges and industry in order to address the issue of graduate skills other attributes relevant to the world of work. The study also demand a better understand by the employers of the aims of BTEP programme and the role they are expected to play which underscore the need for engagement between employers and technical colleges about ways in which to "narrow the skill gaps".

This will entail developing a common understanding, in the first instance, of the nature of perceived gaps; and secondly, of ways in which the gaps can most effectively and creatively be addressed on both sides of the interface between BTEP training and the world of work. This requires scrutiny of work based and work placed learning and Technical education institution based learning to understand better graduate skills and attributes that are valued by employers.

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CONSUMER INFORMATION INNOVATION FOR SOUTH AFRICAN TOUR OPERATORS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the consumer-related information tour operators in South African have access to. Data was obtained by means of a self-administered computer-aided questionnaire forwarded to 1 000 tour operators; it was viewed by 360 tour operators and a response rate of 42,45% was achieved. The results indicate that 68,4% are satisfied with their information systems while a concerning low 34,9% 'Agree' that their information systems do provide them with consumer-related information. Tour operators will not be in a position to satisfy the dynamic needs and wants of today's tourists, unless there is information system innovation.

Keywords: tour operators, consumers, information systems, innovation, South Africa

1.   INTRODUCTION

A continuous escalation in tourism statistics is recorded for South Africa and this leads to business opportunities for tour operators. Tour operators can be a formidable and influential force (Cavlek, 2002) and can profit from this trend if they are knowledgeable about the dynamic nature of their consumers, because knowledge will "enhance their awareness of customer needs" (Huang & Hsu, 2009). The key to success, according to Buhalis and Law (2008), "lies in the quick identification of consumer needs and in reaching potential clients with comprehensive, personalised and up-to-date products and services that satisfy those needs".

The dynamic nature of the local and global tourism, business and marketing environments directly influences tour operations and consumers, who are subjected to constant change. Added to this is the challenge of applying "internal knowledge chain activities to gain external knowledge that will enhance... competitiveness" (Tseng, 2009). Information systems should enable management to access information and knowledge and if tour operators' information systems do not provide such access then their information systems should be innovated. Tseng (2009) categorically stated that "knowledge is a key element for survival" in the present-day market.

Regardless of the magnitude of consumer-related information, it is unknown whether tour operators in South Africa do have access to this type of information and/or whether their information systems should be innovated so that it could be used as a tool for management decision making.

Tour operators and their information systems is a vast topic and cannot be covered comprehensively by a single study or paper. This paper sets out to obtain insight on the following:

- To obtain a better understanding of tour operators in South Africa in terms of four demographic descriptors: the type of tour operations they operate; the number of years they have been in existence; the size of their tour operations; and lastly, whether they do have an information system.
- To investigate the access tour operators have to consumer-related information.
- To investigate the consumer-related information needs of tour operators and their propensity towards information system innovation.

This paper consists of four sections and starts with a background review. Following this is an explanation of the research methodology and a presentation of the findings. This is followed by a discussion of the results and lastly the concluding remarks.

2. BACKGROUND REVIEW

Tour operations need to be "flexible, adaptive and (to) continually reinvent themselves", because, "if they don't they won't survive" (Skyrme, 2000:3). A tour operation's market (external) environment consists of variables (competitors, consumers, intermediaries, publics, and suppliers) (Wilson & Gilligan, 2005:129; Cant et al., 2006: Chapter 2; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006:Chapter 4) that affect a tour operation's ability to create value and customer satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004:107; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006:114). Tourism is an anthology of the following sectors: accommodation, transportation, attractions, travel organisers (including tour operators) and destination organisations (Bennett, 2000:42; Middleton & Clark, 2001:11; Middleton, Fyall & Morgan, 2009:11). A tourist's perceptions and experiences are based on the collective integrated collaboration of these variables. That is why information about these variables is of utmost importance.

Consumers are the reason for a tour operator's existence and they will keep a tour operator in business, provided their wants and needs are satisfied. An intensive analysis of the marketing environment forms an integral part of the situation analysis, the market analysis and the feasibility analysis processes where detailed information needs to be obtained concerning past, current, and potential consumers (Morrison, 2010:135-163).

A number of years ago it was said that information technology (IT) will enable enterprises, and this includes tour operators, "to engage its customers in interactive communication" and that enterprises will be "more successful if they concentrate on obtaining and maintaining a share of each customer rather than a share of the entire market" (Wells, Fuerst & Choobineh, 1999). In addition to this, Khoo, Chen and Yan (2002) advocated that a closer link between product re-innovation and consumer involvement should be established and they developed a prototype customer-oriented information system (COIS) for product concept development. Consumer contact and relationship building is not enough, according to Bove (2003:308-317), who explains that consumers should be seen as co-producers through participation. A later development is in-depth tourism, which is "a new travelling pattern which combines thematic experience and personal knowledge" (Chen et al., 2009).

Marketing is all about consumers and consumers should be the primary focus of any tour operation - finding them, satisfying them and keeping them (Morgan 1996:13; George 2001:4, 2008:4). Tour operators should regularly assess and reassess what their consumers really want together with their consumers' levels of satisfaction, and then consequently develop new tourism offerings. This is why tour operators should take consumer behaviour and all its influencing factors (cultural, social, personal and psychological) into consideration. Added to this is involving and disseminating consumer-related information to non-marketing managers and departments so that they also can incorporate it into their knowledge base to be able to understand and respond to the complex nature of the consumer (Korhonen-Sande, 2010). An information system will be an indispensable management tool in this regard.

It was professed at the turn of the century that the next approach in marketing would be Relationship Marketing (Czinkota et al., 2000:8), a change from conquest marketing to consumer retention. Paulin (2003) explains that value can be created by "linking the customer and the organization through the building and managing of relationship networks." Customer relationship management (CRM) can be used to ensure competitive differentiation and Lin and Lee (2004) proposed object-oriented analysis methods for the development of a customer relationship management information system (CRMIS) and a customer knowledge management information system (CKMIS) (Lin, 2007). Coussement and Van den Poel (2008) developed a model according to which tour operators can target their customer retention campaigns by means of a decision support system for churn prediction (predicting which customers are most likely to leave and then target them with incentives).

Furthermore, priorities should be assigned to the allocation of resources to be able to gain more competitive advantage through stronger relationships with fewer consumers.

Gök (2009) suggested a new and more consumer-oriented approach to account portfolio analysis where consumers are grouped and meaningful strategies are then developed for every group. Tour operators make many, or in some instances all, of their offerings available to the market via intermediaries and Bull (2010) indicated that surprisingly little research has been done on how organisations (tour operators in this case) make use of CRM systems to manage consumers with business intermediary (such as travel agencies) relationships. A tour operator should be able to identify those intermediaries who do not make a positive contribution towards building a relationship with consumers and then rather disintermediate such intermediaries.

Computer technology changed, and is still changing, the way marketers/tour operators consider their consumers and this technology is leading the transition from mass marketing to database marketing. Wood (2001) indicated that small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises "make use of informal marketing information systems which mainly concentrate on internal and immediate operating environment data." Further research revealed that "50% of SMEs (Small and Medium Size Enterprises) have some sort of web page but very few actually take full advantage of the Internet" (Buhalis, 2003). Migiro and Ocholla (2005) found that SMEs in the Durban area, South Africa, are more concerned with adopting IT to improve internal efficiency and that tour operators specifically use IT for taking orders online.

Computerisation and automation will enable a tour operator to gather and use information to form closer relationships with individual consumers. The acquisition and processing of information will enable a tour operator to customise appeals and offerings for consumers - the epitome of the marketing concept. Customisation, according to Khoo, Chen and Yan (2002), is "transforming customer information into specific product design." This is where interactive marketing, combined with an effective customer information system, enters the playing field and the emphasis is now on remembering what the consumer said so that tour operators can "personalize communications and customize product offerings" (Zahay & Peltier, 2007). The ideal is that the customer database is linked with and feeds into an information system.

It cannot be over accentuated how imperative it is that tour operators are knowledgeable about their current and potential consumers and this calls for information cornucopia. Not only is it accumulating information but also processing it into knowledge to support and guide decision makers. Buhalis (1998) advocated some time ago that information is "the lifeblood of tourism" and that technology should be utilised by adopting a strategic approach. Added to this is the continuous revolutionary change taking place in the domain of information and communications technology (ICT), and its impact on all aspects of a tourist's value chain. The art of modern-day marketing is encapsulated in creating genuine consumer value.

Tour operators are caught up in a relentless process of procuring information, whether informally or formally. However, managers still tend to muddle through information instead of "taking a longer-term planned approach (strategically) to develop and improve customer information utilization" (Rollins, Bellenger & Johnston, 2011). The process of awareness of what is happening in the market can only be supported by a systematic and scientific formal procedure an information system. Such a system will facilitate the procurement of regular and planned information, analyse it and disseminate it to designated decision makers.

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was empirical nomothetic descriptive research conducted in South Africa and is based on the positivism philosophy. The purpose was to investigate if tour operators do have access to consumer-related information. A quantitative survey was conducted and the research population was all tour operations in South Africa. The predetermined parameters were that (1) sample units must be a South African tour operation and (2) they must have some form of computerised information system in use during the course of this survey. An information system for this purpose could be any form of computerised data collection, being it in an informal manner or a formally acknowledged information system. A population frame was assembled through acquiring names and contact information from various published and electronic sources. There is no certainty that the list was inclusive of all tour operations in South Africa, neither could it be confirmed that all those listed were operational at the time of the survey and a non-probability convenience sampling method was followed.

The online web-based research tool used was QuestionPro.com and the research instrument was a web-based, self-administered, structured electronic questionnaire. QuestionPro.com's licence agreement restricted the sample size to 1 000 successfully delivered e-mail invitations. There were instances where an invitation could not be delivered electronically because of incorrect or terminated e-mail addresses and these were replaced with other names from the sample frame until 1 000 were successfully delivered. Non-responders received only 2 scheduled reminder e-mails.

Sample units received a personal e-mail explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate (data collection) by clicking on a hyperlink imbedded in the e-mail which activated the questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was activated, the ethical issues were firstly addressed and respondents had to indicate their informed consent (this was the only compulsory validation) before gaining access to the actual questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of interacting branches where the question sequence was determined by a respondent's responses. The actual questionnaire commenced with obtaining information regarding the descriptors used to better understand tour operators in South Africa.

This section terminated with a question where tour operators had to indicate whether they do have an information system and those who indicated that they do not have one was branched to the 'Thank You' page, seeing that they would not have been able to respond to the questions in the remainder sections of the questionnaire. Various closed- and open-ended questions, rating scales, and Likert scale questions   with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and extremely important to extremely unimportant   were used to obtain the required information. The web-based research tool automatically captured responses to closed-ended questions into a database and responses to open-ended questions were nominally enumerated.

Sponsored prizes were used to increase the response rate and these were obtained from Rovos Rail, Wilderness Safaris, Bill Harrop's Original Balloon Safaris, 1time Airline, Imperial Car Rental and Springbok Atlas. Questions were of such a nature that the prizes could not influence the outcome of the results.

The following section is a presentation of the findings that emanated from the responses received.

4.   RESEARCH RESULTS

The sample size was 1 000 successfully delivered e-mail invitations, the questionnaire was viewed by 360 respondents and a completion rate of 42,45% was recorded. It should be noted that the number of responses per question varies because the only validation question was voluntary consent and not all respondents responded to all questions.

Descriptive statistics was obtained for every variable in order to understand the data and to be able to achieve the stated objectives. A cross analysis was performed on linked and test variables to determine whether they compare. A uni-variate descriptive analysis was performed on all the original variables to obtain frequencies, percentages, cumulative frequencies and cumulative percentages. The following inferential statistics were used: Cross-tabulations and Chi-Square based measures of association (if in some cases there were expected values of less than 5 in a cell the Exact p-values were then calculated); MANOVA and ANOVA (to assess the relationship between two or more dependent variables and classification variables); and practical statistically significant tests and the Tukey's Studentized Range (HSD) test (to determine which means differ from each other).

4.1   Participant description

All the responses of tour operators who started the questionnaire were recorded for obtaining the participant description.

Tour operators were asked whether they have a computerised information system in use and the results indicate that 59,6% of the tour operators who responded do have such a system. Furthermore, the majority of them operate from small tour operations (61,4% of them with up to five staff members); focus on the international incoming market (69,9%); and have equally been in business for up to five years (31,05%) and between six to ten years (31,05%).

Further statistical analysis was performed and the results are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Cross comparison Do have an information system

Descriptor	Chi Square	P-Value	Exact Test
Type of tour operation	2.7058	0.4392	0.4368
Years in existence	5.4092	0.1442	0.1457
Size of tour operation	2.8409	0.2416	0.2411

The statistics obtained do not indicate any statistically significant differences between the different types of tour operations, the number of years tour operations have been in existence, or the size of the tour operation and their likeliness of having or not having an information system. It is recommended that the reasons why tour operators do or do not have an information system should be further explored with follow-up studies.

Tour operators who indicated that they do not have an information system were branched out and the data presented below is based on the responses obtained from those who indicated that they do have an information system.

4.2   Access to consumer-related information

Tour operators were requested to indicate the internal information sources they utilise as a component of their information systems by responding either 'Yes' or 'No' to a list of sources and the results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Internal information sources

Source	Statistics			
	n	Yes	No	Don't know
Internal records and databases	99	94.29	4.76	0.95
Reservations and sales records	94	91.26	6.80	1.94
Information provided by customers	**99**	**94.29**	**4.76**	**0.95**
Marketing research	89	87.25	12.75	0.00
Other sources not listed	30	33.33	44.44	22.22

Table 2 indicates that tour operators make use of internal records and databases and information provided by customers as internal information sources. Further statistical analysis indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the size of a tour operation and the type of tour operation as determinants of the internal information sources used by tour operators.

Tour operators did indicate that market environment-related information about customers, suppliers and competitors is extremely important (80,0%). Further statistical tests did not reveal any statistically significant differences between the size of the tour operation, the type of tour operation and the number of years tour operations have been in existence as determinants of the importance tour operators place on information concerning the market environment (ANOVA and Hotelling-Lawley Trace test p-values all are >0,05).

Tour operators indicated that their information systems do provide them with consumer-related information, based on the responses received on a specific statement and the attributes ranged from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. The results obtained are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Information provided about consumers
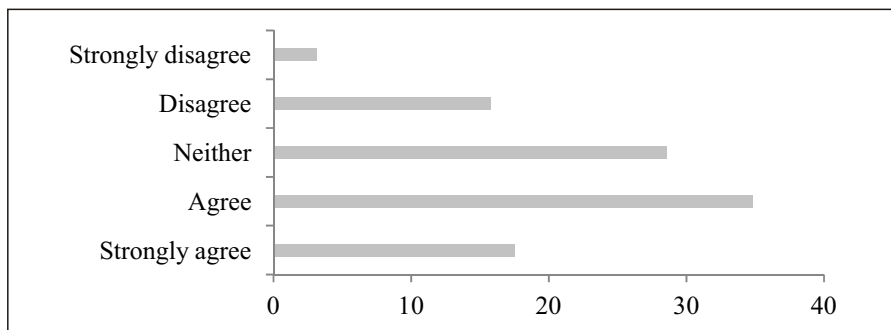
Based on the results obtained, tour operators indicated that they do have access to customer-related information: 'Strongly agree' (17,5%) and 'Agree' (34,9%). However, it is alarming that 47,6% collectively are neutral and tend towards the opposite. This could spell danger for tourism because consumer-related information is of the utmost importance, especially since today's tourists prefer to be co-producers of their experiences.

Further statistics did not reveal any statistically significant differences between the size of tour operations, type of tour operations or the number of years in existence as determinants of the consumer-related information tour operators have access to because all p-values are >0,05.

These results are confirmed by the p-values of the Kruskal-Wallis Test results, as well as by the Hotelling-Lawley Trace test (size - p=0,2434; type - p=0,8308; years - p=0,7712).

4.3   Information needs and innovation propensity

Tour operators were requested to express their perceived information needs in an open-ended question. Tour operators indicated that the sequence of information needed is as follows: firstly, market environment-related information (40%). What was mostly mentioned in this regard is information about consumers (trends, statistics, contact information, markets of origin, consumer preferences, spending patterns and consumer profiles). This is followed by competitor-related information and lastly, supplier-related information.

Tour operators were requested to indicate if they would support information system innovation. The model proposed was a system that operates on a national basis from a central location. This innovated information system is only an example and the idea originated from the TourMIS system and the Illinois Tourism Network (ITN). The results obtained indicate that 80% of the tour operators who responded to this question would support an innovated information system. Tour operators were then requested to provide the reasons why and/or why not they would support such a system and the results obtained are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3:   Reasons for/against an Innovated Information System (in %)

Reasons for adoption	%
Saving time and money	29
Easy access with quality information	39
Added business	32
Competitor information	
Reasons against adoption	**%**
Would not add value to business	71
Security and confidentiality	29

Tour operators would support an innovated information system operating on a national basis from a central location because such a system would be easily accessible (39%) and it is likely to contain quality, updated and cost-effective information. Such a system is also viewed by tour operators as beneficial, as it could lead to new/more business opportunities and markets (32%), as well as a cooperative tourism industry throughout South Africa and also because it could enable global connectivity. The least mentioned reason why tour operators would support such a system is based on time and money (29%).

The reasons received from tour operators who indicated that they would not support an innovated information system is that tour operators are of the opinion that such a system will not add value to their current business (71%), and this is followed by their concern about security and the confidentiality of their records and information (29%).

5.   DISCUSSION

South African tour operators can be a formidable force in the tourism industry and they will be able to propagate their business success if they are knowledgeable with regard to their consumers. This can be facilitated by means of an information system that serves as a tool for management decision making. Based on the results presented, it is questionable whether the current information systems of tour operators either provide them with sufficient consumer-related information, or whether these systems are able to process this information into an exploitable format. Information system innovation is crucial because the current state of affairs could result in South African tour operators being excluded from exploring potential viable opportunities in the tourism market, not only in the domestic market but also on a global scale. It is imperative that tour operators consider the proper organisation of information flow as an investment (a business asset that is strategically managed), and to incorporate this into their business planning and innovation, seeing that the introduction of new offerings is influenced by conducting environmental scanning.

Out of all the tour operators who participated in this study, 40,6% of them indicated that they do not have some form or type of information system, and this whilst they are part of the current business and global environment, known as the information era. Most of the tour operators in South Africa operate from small businesses (with up to 5 staff members) and this could be a reason why there are still so many tour operators who do not have some form or type of information system because they do not have the assets to invest in technology (capital) or know-how (human resources). But, can they afford not to invest? It would be an interesting study to investigate how many of these tour operators are still in business in five years' time. Added to this is the fact that almost 70% of the tour operators are involved with international tourists who, in all probability, are acquainted with and use technology themselves.

No statistically significant differences were detected between the different tour operation descriptors and whether or not they do or do not have an information system and the inference can thus be made that information system innovation will be beneficial to all tour operators, irrespective of type, size or number of years in existence.

The subsequent discussion is based on only the responses received from tour operators who indicated that they do have some form or type of information system.

It is concerning that 47,6% of these tour operators indicated that their information systems do not provide them with consumer-related information and this is in concurrence with the large percentage who indicated that they use mainly spread sheets as type of software in their tour operations. This type of software can provide tour operators with a record of their consumers but it is not suitable for transforming records into information and knowledge. This indicates that there is an earnest need for IT training in the tour operating environment, and this would in all probability also apply to the entire tourism industry in South Africa.

No statistically significant differences were detected between the different tour operation descriptors and whether or not their information systems provide them with consumer-related information they could use for management decision-making purposes. The inference can thus be made that information system innovation will be beneficial to all tour operators, irrespective of type, size, of number of years in existence.

It is not surprising that the information needs tour operators expressed concentrate around the market environment within which they operate because the information they can obtain from their information systems is inadequate. The focus of this paper is on the consumer-related information and does not include an analysis of the other variables of the market environment. It was coincidence that tour operators listed market environment-related information as their most critical need for information. The type of information listed as critical pivots around the consumer-related information an information systems should be able to provide. This confirms that information system innovation is of utmost importance because consumer reservation and transaction records are not interchangeable with information and knowledge needed for management decision making.

The information needs of tour operators are in concurrence with their propensity towards information system innovation. A specific model of information system innovation was proposed to the tour operators because IT innovation in itself is a vast topic and could include almost anything. TourMIS and ITN are both public-private partnership systems which are interconnected and integrated information systems where all role-players (members) contribute towards these systems by capturing their data online. The data is then collectively processed and members can obtain requested information. The inference is made that such an information system would be adopted by role-players in the South African tourism industry because it would enable them to obtain information that is in an exploitable format. This is in strong contrast to only the records tour operators currently have on their personal computers. Tour operators' biggest concern, that such a system would not add value to their current businesses, could be turned into a major benefit once the value of such a system is fully understood and experienced.

6.   CONCLUSION

Tourism and information technology are dynamic in nature and tour operators ought to have the necessary information systems in place that will continuously enable them to assess the alignment of their business practice with developments and trends. One of the challenges of modern-day tourism businesses is to have technology that is compatible to that used by its target market. This is especially relevant if tour operators want to (or rather should) establish a two-way flow of information for relationship building and for establishing loyalty amongst their consumers. This does not even consider the establishment of databases for direct marketing purposes. Expediting further information system research and innovation will be beneficial to the tourism industry and could also contribute towards establishing South Africa as a preferred destination in the global tourism market.

The inferences made in this paper are in all probability also relevant to travel agencies, as well as all the other sectors of tourism. Research in this regard should be viewed as imperative because information system innovation is of utmost importance. However, multi-disciplinary involvement, from system engineers and IT specialists for example, would be needed to enable tour operators to fully understand the consumer in their target markets.

Ritchie and Ritchie (2002) proposed guidelines for the establishment of a comprehensive state/provincial destination marketing information system (DMIS) for the tourism industry in Alberta, Canada. A similar information system would be beneficial for tourism in South Africa.

South African tour operators, on their own, will in all probability not be able to afford the investment needed to acquire, develop, and maintain sophisticated information systems and a cohesive venture is needed because information system innovation is imperative. South African tour operators are susceptible to innovative ideas and it is recommended that this issue should be further explored. Multi-level cooperation and partnerships between all minor and major stakeholders (public and private) in the tourism industry need to take place so that tourism as a collective economic sector is able to render memorable tourism experiences.

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GRAPHOLOGY IN PRINT ADVERTISING: ICONIC FUNCTIONS

A VAN NIEKERK AND A JENKINSON

ABSTRACT

Typography and layout are two powerful graphic tools in print advertising. They are used to arrest the attention of the target market by creating a positive association, a controversy or stimulate some kind of intellectual game. This means that much of the message has already been conveyed by creatively expanding and diversifying the conventional values embedded in certain graphic means and basing the advertisements on prevailing textual norms and our past experiences before the message itself has even been read, by just focusing on the typography used (e.g. compare the text layout and typography of a newspaper or a cell phone SMS). Based on a randomly selected South African dataset, aspects of the graphological options with their functional values will be described.

Keywords: layout, font, graphology, print advertising, icons

1.   INTRODUCTION

The word advertise comes from the Latin word, advertere, which means to turn towards. This is exactly the function of advertising and specifically the trend towards a more visual approach. The options and strategies, in terms of layout and typography, may be seen as the para-language of the visuals (Goddard, 1998: 22). However, it has been observed that "[…] the scholarly discussion of the impact of typography […] what many call the 'personality' of type, is still in its infancy" (Brumberger, 2003: 206).

In line with his view that "The literature on advertising images fails to encompass the rhetorical richness so characteristic of this form", Scott (1994: 252) advocates the development of a theory of visual rhetoric that moves away from the idea that pictures are symbolic artefacts constructed from the conventions of a particular culture. This implies the use of shared knowledge, different languages and conventions. Moreover, in terms of the view of pictures as symbols, visuals communicate by means of convention and not by resemblance to nature (Scott, 1994: 253).

Typography and layout are two powerful graphic tools which may be exploited to catch the eye of the potential buyers. When these visual images are used as a technique of persuasion, they become a form of visual rhetoric.

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[1] Graphology: This term is used by linguists to refer to the writing system of a language. Graphological analysis is concerned with the minimal contrastive units of visual language (Crystal, 2003: 211).

The utilization of visual rhetoric to create a positive association, a gleam of humour, an element of surprise, or even an intellectual game of controversy, facilitates conceptual rhetoric and enhances the attractiveness of the advertising text. By creatively employing the conventional values embedded in certain graphic means (that are based on our collective internalized experience), it is possible to convey part of the message before the advertisement has even been read (e.g. compare the layout and typography of a newspaper with those of the SMS text of a cell phone).

This can be achieved by superimposing typographical imitations of these text types upon the conventional orthography of the text in order to mimic the real item. By means of this multiple-level layering of typography, layout, ideography and orthography (analogous to linguistic "double articulation"), these advertisements possess a complex semiotic composition and they are semantically more transparent than an ordinary written or printed text. In terms of communication model dynamics, such multiple-layered semiotic compositions are texts which have a degree of functional redundancy encoded to overcome the "noise" in the medium or channel; the noise or distortion in the media being the competing advertisements in the newspapers, magazines or other publications. The functional redundancy in the multi-layered text enables it to stand out above the competition - and hence be noticed. The conventional mode (the orthography) and the semantically driven modes of textual signification (graphological iconicity) create a synergistic textual composition, a kind of visual rhetoric (or conceptual rhetoric) which facilitates the semantic decoding of the intended message of the advertisement.

The perceived appropriateness of assigned meaning to font is based on the connotative meaning of font per se, and is independent of the type of product described that has been based on recent research in consumer psychology (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006: 112).

2.   OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives are:

• to give an overview of the graphological options used in print advertisements; and
• to describe the symbolic meaning of these language-related visual signs within print advertising.

The secondary objectives are:

• to give a broad background on the principles of layout and typography in advertising design as background to the primary objectives; and
• to justify the growing tendency towards a visual focus and list the options in a visual focus in print advertising.

3.   DATASET AND ANALYSIS

An empirical study was done based on a randomly selected sample of print advertisements gathered from magazines that have been in general circulation since 1996. These were initially used in several different applied linguistic courses. Although the advertisements were initially gathered to study other aspects of advertising communication (such as intertextuality, mythology, brand names, the use of controversy, etc.), a pattern of iconic resemblance in terms of layout and type was soon discovered and confirmed after reading research done by Fischer (1999).

The primary dataset on graphological iconicity was selected from the initial dataset by means of the above-mentioned research by Fischer (1999), which to an extent served as a blueprint for identifying graphological iconicity in South African data. Fischer's (1999) research focuses primarily on the appeal of the spelling and writing conventions including font, type, space, etc. In our research we argue for an expansion of the domain of graphological iconicity (see diagram 1), not only to appeal to linguistic knowledge but also to appeal to textual knowledge and extra-linguistic knowledge. Different types of graphological iconicity were identified by Fischer (European examples until 1998); and South African advertisements employing the same types of graphological iconicity have been identified and analysed in this article. In classifying the South African examples of graphological iconicity, it was necessary to expand on the domain and classification of Fischer (1999).

The secondary dataset includes examples of advertisements with a visual approach in order to explain the reasons for a visual focus and the use of graphics as an attention-getting device. The Rapport advertisement showing a rugby ball in the form of a human skull is an example of an advertisement making use of a visual focus.

4.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent research indicates that personality judgments are based on the typeface used and the appropriateness of aspects such as the type and font based on the genre, context and purpose of the advertisement (Shaikh, Chaparro & Fox, 2006).

Irrespective of the opposing perspectives regarding the relationship between written and spoken language through the history of language, modern communication provides for two very different systems with unique characteristics that influence one another (Crystal, 1995:178-179). The attempt to display the sound of spoken language in very early literature can be seen as the basis of the graphological options used in modern print advertising. These graphic conventions are language specific: for instance emphatic speech is usually printed in heavy typeface in Chinese fiction but not in English.

The graphic effects widely used are the alteration of the punctuation system, altered spelling to represent accent, etc., with a variation in the use of capital letters conveying loudness, etc., a variation in type size and spacing, the repetition of letters and hyphens to show extra spoken emphasis, etc., the use of italics to convey tone, etc. (Crystal, 1995: 180-181).

Crystal (1995: 182-184) distinguishes between pure linear, interrupted linear, lists, matrices, linear branching, non-linear viewing and graphic symbolism. The latter is very relevant for this research because it surpasses the linguistic and textual domains when it is used to represent the extra-linguistic world in an iconic manner (Crystal, 1995: 184). Crystal (2003: 224) defines an icon as "A suggested defining property of some semiotic systems, but not language, to refer to signals whose physical form closely corresponds to characteristics of the situations to which they refer." This semantically driven - and thus decodable - physical form (concept signification) correlates with Fischer's (2006: 6) definition which states that an icon is an image that reflects something from the real world.

These graphic representations are still widely used in modern communication and print advertising and also include the use of animated letters to help children learn to read. Distinctive typographical designs can be used to reinforce the relevant message in context by means of some form of "double articulation", for instance a danger sign near a construction site where the -e in DANGER falls out of place.

According to Crystal's (1995: 194) definition, "Graphology, in its linguistic sense, is the study of the systems of symbols that have been devised to communicate language in written form". In addition, a functional and formal dimension can be identified. The former includes writing systems such as orthography, stenography, cryptography, paedography and technography. The focus of this article is on the formal dimensions within print advertising language while keeping the communicative goal in mind.

5.   RHETORIC

Rhetoric is defined as "the study of how effective writing achieves its goals […] which typically focuses on how to express one correctly and effectively in relation to the topic of writing or speech, the audience and the purpose of communication. […] Cicero, the ancient Roman orator and writer, described rhetoric as 'the art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end'" (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1999: 316).

In line with this, the rhetorical approach has become popular in recent years to explain how visual aspects of advertising are understood. It is widely accepted that the target market comprehends these messages by drawing on their cultural knowledge of features such as symbols, contextual clichés, etc. (Phillips, 1997: 78; Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

The linguistic segment of this article focuses primarily on the visual aspects of type, font and layout, which are collectively referred to as graphological iconicity (Phillips, 1997: 77).

Phillips refers to other authors, such as McQuarrie and Mick (1996) and Scott (1994), when explaining the value of such an approach that focuses on any expression that systematically deviates from the convention an aspect that is also stressed by Fischer (1999) - from conceptual to visual rhetoric.

An article by Van Niekerk and Möller (2006: 164) describes the unique character of the genre of advertising messages as one that has its own conventions. When studying graphological iconicity (thus focusing on font, type and layout as part of the marketing message), the emphasis is on the so-called visual "attractiveness" to be effective.

6.   SEMIOTICS

The research on semiotics by Umberto Eco, in his Theory of Semiotics (1976), is regarded as being seminal to the world of codes and signification. Crystal (2003:412) defines semiotics as "the scientific study of the properties of signalling systems whether natural or artificial".

Knowledge of semiotics and reference to the topic are relevant because knowledge of the different modes of existence, different signifiers and the different ways of calling up a certain context make it possible to identify the visual or graphological icons used to create a context or specific message. A Shell Helix advertisement uses the Braille (The headline only looks like Braille, but it is not Braille.) typography to attract attention This device makes sense in terms of the marketing message that implies that even in Braille (to blind people), which is not something smooth to touch the uniqueness of Shell Helix lies in its smoothness.

The (specific visual character of the) layout, type and font (graphological icons) may function as symbols of something else. A distinction may be made between the signifiers (the physical form) and the signified (the intended meaning). This study of signs is part of the academic field termed semiotics.

According to Jordan (1996: 66), semiotics draws parallels between music, (legal) language, theology, architecture, advertisements, visual art, etc. Eco (1976: 7) describes it as follows: "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else". The graphological icons are instrumental in creating a world of make believe. For instance, it is possible to portray the advert as if it is a newspaper article or a post-it memo note, although it is in fact an advertisement.

In terms of the semiotic model, the differences between symbols, icons and indexes are formulated by several authors, such as De Saussure (1966) and Barthes (1977). Myers (1994: 137-139) gives powerful concrete examples of what is meant by a symbol, an icon and an index in advertising. The relationship or resemblance found between a picture of a can of Coke and a real can of Coke is called an iconic relationship. A relationship where the signifier results from or is associated with the signified (such as in tyre tracks that signify a car; or water droplets on a can of Coke to signify cold) is called indexical. A relationship based on an arbitrary (language) convention such as the letters THIRSTY beneath a can of Coke or the use of a butterfly to indicate the freshness of perfume, is called a symbolic relationship.

This selection and combination of icons to convey a certain message is known as iconicity. De Saussure's first principle of the nature of the language sign states: "The linguistic sign is arbitrary" (1916: 67). This arbitrary principle used to be the dogma of formal linguistics but, according to Nöth (2001: 17) and Fischer (2006: 1), recent studies indicate a new iconic paradigm: "More and more iconic features are being discovered in language and literature at the levels of phonology, morphology, word formation, syntax, the text, and the domain of language change" (Nöth, 2001: 17). This iconic paradigm can be traced back to the use of pictograms as early as 3000 BC. Some of the early writing and communicating systems (pictograms and ideograms) are more visual, as is the case when educating illiterates or young children today. This means that the signs used are semantically inspired and transparent. Modern language and literate people are able to communicate on a more abstract level that consists of a more complicated conventional system of language (words alone). In the modern visual era there seems to be a tendency to move away from language as an arbitrary complementary system because the writing system in advertising language tends to be more iconic than previously. This is very evident when comparing the design of school text books (to include newspaper articles, advertisements, postcards, etc.) with books from twenty and more years ago.

The focus is on the way written language can be used in an iconic or mirror-like manner. In contrast to signs icons are not arbitrary or conventional but relatively natural, transparent and motivated.

7. GRAPHOLOGY: SEMIOTIC OPTIONS WITHIN THE VISUAL RHETORIC

Advertisements often function as self-reflective artefacts in the sense that their "very physical substance imitates or enacts the meaning that it represents" (Fischer, 2006: 5). The textual iconic simulation and the conventional writing reinforce and replicate the message.

The semantic associations and connotations attributed to type go beyond the content of the text and may even change the meaning of the message and the brand (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002: 666-668).

Iconicity (as a semiotic notion) refers to a natural resemblance or analogy between the form of a sign (signifier) and the object or concept (signified) it refers to in the world - or rather, in our perceptions of the world (http://home.hum.uva.nl/iconicity/). The chosen graphic options indicate the context: in other words, whether the message should be interpreted as, for example, a cell phone message, a newspaper billboard, a love letter, a magazine questionnaire, etc. By creating an intertextual context, meaning is facilitated. One of the basic copy-writing principles, "less is more", may be achieved by choosing specific graphic design options to say more, but without using more (pictures or words).

A specific text type, the simulation of the real "hard copy" text echoes specific messages. A "copy cat" duplicate of a specific text type is needed. "Iconic words or structures are attempts to represent the way in which we perceive the world more concretely; they aim to give a text more palpability" (Fischer, 2006: 1).

The term graphology indicates that this form of linguistic iconicity uses font, type and layout as means with which to deviate from the conventional Roman system (Fischer, 1999: 251). Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that not all deviations from the writing convention inherit iconic potential. Any deviations should be semantically transparent or prompted - in other words, form should mimic meaning.

Graphic contrasts (such as the use of italics, boldface or colour) are ways of conveying the relative importance of parts of a message. The use of Gothic type in contrast to Roman type may signal connotations such as classical, antique, or old fashioned, although different languages have different possibilities. For example, all nouns in German start with a capital letter but capitalization has no use (hence no value) in Hebrew (Crystal, 1995: 204).

The history of the non-phonological system of writing can be traced back to the study of pictograms, a writing system dating from 3000 BC. Ideograms (a later development of pictograms) have an abstract and conventional meaning with a less clear link to the extra-linguistic world. The symbols represent words or sounds such as in early Egyptian scripts (Crystal, 1995: 196-198).

Modern-day signs - such as "no dogs allowed" or "do not iron" - represent a mix of pictograms and ideograms and are very often found in print advertising communication. Examples of this are discussed in the following four categories: typed based visuals, visuals mirroring text, pictures as letters and letters as pictures.

Diagram 1:
An overview of graphological iconicity in print advertising communication

When the examples are analysed and classified, it seems that graphological iconicity always appeals to either our linguistic knowledge (e.g. how a word sounds or how a word is spelled), our knowledge of different text types, "hard copies" of visual intertextuality (e.g. the format of the Bible versus the format of a telephone directory), or the extra-linguistic knowledge or background knowledge of the target audience. These multiple levels of articulation (A, B and C in the diagram) enhance the semantic interpretation of the text. Thus, visual rhetoric facilitates the conceptual rhetoric (comprehension of the text). An indication of the type of appeal will be given when discussing the different examples.

Visual rhetoric as continuum ▶

From conventional orthography[2], symbolism[3] and graphological iconicity[4] to extra-Linguistic artefacts[5]

A) Linguistic representation

- Phonology
- Spelling
- Writing system (Roman, Gothic, Braille)

B) Text type/hard copy realization

- Newspaper
- Dictionary
- Cell phone SMS
- Medicine usage sticker
- Etc.

C) Extra-linguistic externalization

- Two-dimensional graphs (growth indicated by upward curve)
- Three-dimensional objects (*Flake* chocolate wrapper, sample or part of the product)
- Real life experiences, cultural or world-knowledge of for instance the human scull [*Rapport* ad],
- Etc.

Complementing conventional linguistic aspects to include textual and extra-linguistic graphological representations

-Finite set   Productive set   Potential infinite set

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[2] Linguistic signs
[3] Children street crossing sign
[4] SMS text format
[5] Chocolate wrapper as advertisement

8. CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS OF RHETORIC IN SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION IN ADVERTISING

The excessive use of graphological iconicity may be ascribed to the externalization of linguistic and textual elements which often have intertextuality in mind.

According to Myers (1994:4), a copy-writer and author of the copy-writing textbook, Words in Ads, the concept of intertextuality can be described as the way in which linguistic features of one text are interpreted in relation to those in other texts. since "all ads, even those making no explicit allusions, carry associations from other texts, ads, movies, novels, everyday talk."

Intertextuality is the way in which one text echoes or refers to another text, according to Goddard (1998: 124). Thus it can be said that besides creatively experimenting with the modern writing conventions (font, type, size, spacing and combination of letters), the textual type as a holistic entity is sometimes chosen in an intertextual way in which to appeal to our conventional knowledge of what the look and feel of the texts that have been referred to (as "hard copies") are like. This visual intertextuality is a specific example of graphological iconicity and, as such, contributes to visual rhetoric. These dimensions of the text structure all contribute significantly to the comprehensibility, intellectual appeal, authenticity, acceptability and attractiveness of the text with the purpose of maximizing the conceptual rhetoric. There may be several reasons for activating the target market's knowledge of the writing conventions and textual types.

• Visual intertextuality as basis for graphological iconicity

As stated in the section describing the domains of graphological iconicity, very often the device used to arrest the consumer's attention is a function of the appeal to our knowledge of certain textual types. An appeal is often made to our knowledge of the look and feel of specific text types: for instance, a medical prescription note (Engen advertisement), newspaper (Rapport), a handmade gift card by a preschooler (Tipp-Ex), the handwriting on a memo note (Flake), a photo-story magazine (Pendoring). The examples are included in the addendum or are electronically available from the authors.

• Intellectual appeal

The most obvious reason is that the product or service being advertised is inherently linked to the layout: for instance, when the layout of a newspaper advertisement resembles the conventional look and feel of newspaper advertising posters (Rapport); or when the layout of a magazine advertisement resembles the layout found on an Internet website in order to indicate in this way that the magazine is also electronically available (SARIE).

Graphological iconicity opens the possibility of making the message come as close as possible to the real product/service. This practice of conveying the same message in text content and design options - complementary representations - makes perfect sense in terms of the unique characteristics of advertising as a genre - where repetition is expected and needed. Furthermore, it perfectly enforces the IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) principle widely accepted in Marketing Practice today (Percy, 1997), namely that a powerful message could come across if a "one voice one image approach" is followed in all aspects of the promotional mix. This is an even more valuable approach if that "one voice" and "one image" may be found in one advertisement and may be seen as an interesting way of repetition.

On the other hand, the use of a conventional text type (such as the prescription sticker on a medicine bottle to advertise a fuel station (Engen), may attract the attention of the target market in order to make sense of the incomprehensible connection between the product or service being advertised. Paradoxical deviations from the conventional representation may be successful in attracting the attention but they are risky because manipulating the conventional layout could be misunderstood or rejected.

• Authenticity: synergy between text and context

The Flake chocolate advertisement, which consists only of an empty chocolate Flake wrapper with a seemingly conventionally familiar post-it memo note on it in a font, type and layout that resembles hurried handwriting, is an example of a design that is used to convince or to authenticate. Nobody would write "Stolen" on his/her friend's or partner's chocolate or would type him/her a message, but at most would write a note saying "Sorry, I am the guilty one" or as the advertisement says: "Sorry, just couldn't resist!"

The same convincing layout is found in the pork advertisement, which resembles a typical magazine questionnaire in terms of the layout. By completing the questionnaire (look-alike advertisement), you get the marketing message that, unlike your dog, you do have a choice in what you eat and that there is more than one option in white meat.

9. TYPES OF GRAPHOLOGICAL ICONICITY IN PRINT ADVERTISING

• Visuals mirroring text

Visuals and text
This mirroring is the result of the incorporation of extra-linguistic aspects such as spatial orientation and inverse movement, the presence or absence of entities, analogous features, logical deduction, contradiction and transformations.

The Uno car advertisement in the addendum is a very good example because the visuals echo the textual content of the advertisement exactly; the text is the visuals. The Uno advertisement conveys that the car is light on fuel to and from any destination ("Lig op brandstof soontoe en terug"). The visual includes a cut-out car moving to the right direction of the page and when one turns the page, one sees the same cut-out Uno going in the opposite direction. A Consol glass advertisement conveys the message that glass does not affect the content of anything that is stored in it. The advertisement (in Afrikaans and English) says: "Glass is like nothing" (in Afrikaans: "Glas is soos niks"). The visuals contain a blank white page with the cut-out shape of a Consol glass bottle. On turning the page, one sees a whole page of tomatoes - because the glass (of the container) has not changed the shape, colour or taste of the content in the container.

Type-based visuals

The layout of a very ordinary font and type is constructed in such a way as to echo the content of the advertisement by means of a visual image of that content (text). In this way, the target market receives the same message (Integrated Marketing Communication Principle of "one voice, one image") from both the text and the visuals. In its extreme form, the text would be laid out in such a way that it formed the image needed for the marketing message visually. In the Air Mauritius advert in the addendum, the text is laid out in the form of a deck chair, and in case of an advert for endangered species, the text/content is laid out in the form of a tadpole (any animal form referring to an endangered species would have done).

• Iconic transformation: the Roman alphabet and the iconic alphabet

Pictures as letters

In terms of the conventional Roman alphabet, letters are not combined or replaced by pictures that are not part of the Roman alphabet. In this category letters are often replaced by pictures of objects that resemble letters, replace the letters and, in so doing, the visuals and text echo the same message. Consider the Chicco example in the addendum in this regard where the letters are often replaced by typical baby type of pictures (play blocks for example) or icons since this is a baby product company.

Letters as pictures

Fischer (1999: 275) argues: "All letters of the alphabet can be used in this fashion, but […] certain letters such as the round O lend themselves to iconic modifications more easily than others." If one examines the American Swiss example, the letter O is formed by the diamond jewellery piece and the mirror image of the word MOM spells WOW.

Even the form or position of a letter can be manipulated to call on the iconography of a specific relevant object. The letters KK in the word HAKKE (meaning heels in English) are slightly tilted to the right in the promotional article on high heel shoes to represent high heels by means of an icon.

- Iconic play with spacing and margins

Conventionally writing moves from left to right horizontally; and any alteration in this pattern is used to signify change or reversal (Fischer, 1999: 252).

The second most conventional type of writing is horizontal writing elevated in an upwards direction to carry a positive association in the same way that a negative notion may be conveyed by writing in a downward direction.

Fischer (1999: 262) maintains that because conventionally words are separated by empty spaces and syntactic units by punctuation marks, the manipulation of these conventional, anticipated spaces - or the excessive use or non-use of punctuation marks - may indicate details such as an interruption. The alteration of the conventional use of spaces between words and letters may result in a secret code which requires the active involvement (intellectual play) of the target market to crack the code in order to understand the message and, in so doing, give their active attention to the advertisement. The Soviet advertisement in the addendum is an example of this technique.

The change in the spacing between letters and words may also result in a functional type of ambiguity as in the SA Post Office advert which is poskantoor in Afrikaans and because of the change in the spacing, also conveys the message that postage (pos) can (kan) perform magic (toor).

Furthermore, the unconventional use of margins and the violation of conventional norms of layout (which may result in the cutting off of letters or parts of the message) also have several iconic functions. As Fischer (1999: 268) indicates, besides using the unconventional margin space of a page, there are many other possibilities to indicate loss or absence iconically.

Another example of an advertisement that uses the same graphic tools to create interest is that of ABSA Bank in the addendum. The use of two different sets of margins (indicated by a dotted line) opens up the possibility that the target market could receive two totally different messages.

- Unexpected size, position, repetition or combination of letters

In print advertising, emphasis is often managed by manipulating the conventional font in unexpected and unconventional ways in order to stress, integrate or accommodate the product name, the logo, the main feature or the main message of the advert.

For example, the brand name Lose it which is both the product name and a description of the type of product that is emphasized in the typography and layout of the message, which says in Afrikaans "Bly vet of LOSE IT" (Stay fat or LOSE IT). The headline of the advertisement of an Elizabeth Arden beauty product (in lower case and black) is: "Reveal your inner beauty", but the -e and -a in reveal are in a different colour (red) in order to stress (part of) the brand name. Typography and layout are the graphic means by which advertisements are created to be both smart and beautiful (Felton, 1994:161).

The unexpected repetition of letters or unexpected combination of letters in a specific language may also have different functions iconically. One of the main functions is very often simply to emphasize the brand name. Examples such as the headline fantazztic in an advertisement for the TAZZ car brand; velo-city to advertise the brand name of a specific Citi Golf car known for its speed; and C-kuriteit/C-curity instead of the normal lexicon items (sekuriteit in Afrikaans and security in English) in a Cell-C phone advertisement makes use of such unexpected combinations to emphasize the brand names (TAZZ, Cell-C). Another technique that is often used (and which Fischer does not mention) is the use of unexpected letters in a specific language in order to refer to something else in terms of their icon. In case of the fcuk advertisement, the "strange" brand name is conventionally accepted because of the icon (fcuk French Connection, UK) in which a rearrangement of the letters would spell fuck and the controversial advertising message: Everyone's talking fcuk® is both ambiguous and also controversial.

The use of abnormal spelling to stress, identify or contrast implies that a name or trade mark is very old. S Jacobson (1966) (in Crystal, 1995: 204) listed examples such as Bar-B-Q, EZ lern (U.S. driving school) Koffee Kake, Savmor (discount store), etc.

Another feature closely linked to the typography of the advertisement, is the play with the colour and size of specific letters in the advertisement to create a controversial message or a seemingly controversial message. The ATKV (an Afrikaans language and cultural organisation) advertisement in the addendum is not controversial at all, but because of the bigger font of just one phrase in the complete text, the target market at first glance sees only wit mense dink nie (white people do not think), which is very racist and controversial in post-apartheid SA. Yet the complete text says that white people do not have the same attitudes towards (i.e. think the same about) race anymore, conveys a message that is totally opposite to what was indicated by the first impression. The same is true for the Kyk-net television channel advertisement, which by means of the different colour and font within one word (also given the choice of visual focus), at first glance conveys a very controversial message: "dit is paartyd" which means "it is the mating season". This controversial interpretation is reinforced by the sperm-like appearance of the microphone.

When reading the complete text, one realises that the message means that it is time for people to enter a singing competition in pairs.

Myers (1994: 42) gives the example of a UK Campaign aiming to reduce the risk of cot death with the slogan Back to sleep, where the B is in a horizontal position in order to reinforce the message by means of the icon.

- Extra-linguistic knowledge as a basis for graphological iconicity

Examples of the last category in our diagram on the domains of graphological iconicity, which appeals to our extra-linguistic knowledge, are included in most of the above-mentioned examples. The ATKV advertisement (unexpected size, position, repetition or combination of letters), where the size of the letters has been manipulated to create controversy, also appeals to our world knowledge about apartheid and the political history of South Africa. The same holds true for the Kyk-net advertisement, which requires prior extra-linguistic knowledge about the appearance of a sperm cell in order to be attracted to the visual controversy showing a female egg and male sperm.

10.   CONCLUSION

All writing is done in a specific font style and this conveys covert messages through the choice of typeface used in the advertisements, brand names and even packaging for a specific brand.

Using the right or appropriate typeface can definitely contribute to the image and sales of the brand (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006: 112-122).

Synergy is the key, not abundance or clutter; in other words, there should be a synergic link between the visuals and the language. To get the attention of the target market, we need to focus on one aspect of the product initially.

Secondly, one idea or concept per advertisement is the ideal; this may be mainly a visual or linguistic idea (word play, for instance).

Although "less is more", several options are available in terms of the design, such as:
- o   a letter-dominant layout;
- o   an image-dominant layout; and/or
- o   a multi-element layout (Felton, 1994: 196).

Moreover, the marketing concept also has to fit the visual representation. This means that the visuals, the type, the font and layout as graphic means all have meaning in terms of a semiotic model and they are the 'voice' of the message. To achieve brand identity and brand awareness, this voice is very important: without a focus on the content, it would be possible to identify the brand being advertised immediately.

This is made possible by being consistent in terms of using unique and identifiable graphic means (unique italic font of Coca Cola versus the bold type of Absa Bank), the same spokesperson or character or concept (e.g. stereotyping men in the First for Women insurance advertisements).

Typography and layout are graphic means used to make the advertisement interesting, clever and beautiful and - most importantly - to help create brand identity.

ADDENDUM

The following brand names/advertisements were referred to in the article. The examples are briefly analysed in terms of graphology but no assessment has been done on the effectiveness of the advertisement. No judgments are done on the brand or advertisement. Brand owners were informed of the inclusion of these advertisements for the purpose of the article. These examples are also available in full colour electronically from the authors. Many more examples of the same type (same categories) of graphological iconicity were found but due to space restrictions only one example per category is included where necessary.
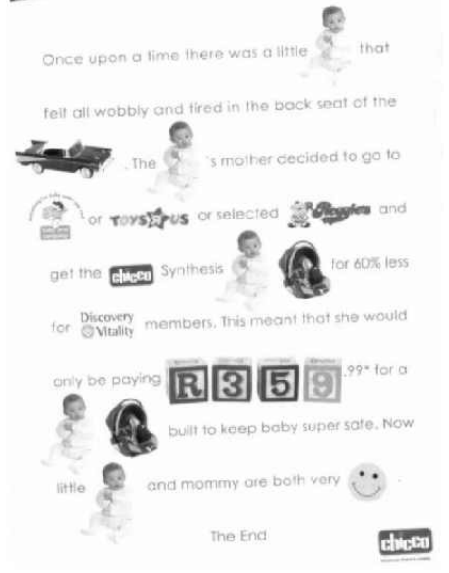
Brand names and examples referred to:

Rapport, Rapport magazine, June 2006
Shell Helix, Huisgenoot, August 1996
American Swiss, Huisgenoot, June 2008
Cell C, Landbouweekblad, September 2000
Engen, Huisgenoot, September 2005
Flake, SARIE, June 2000
Kleenex, You, September 2006
Pendoring, Tuis, July 2004
Uno, Huisgenoot, July 1999
Air Mauritius, You, September 2005
Soviet, FHM collections: Summer 2002
ABSA, Huisgenoot, August 2004
Chicco, Discovery: Spring 2004
ATKV, Taalgenoot, 2005
Kyk-NET, Huisgenoot, March 2003
Hakke met houding, SARIE, March 2008
Women 24, SARIE, August 2003

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RECONCEPTUALISATION OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION AT THE TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY: A CASE STUDY

ML WESSELS AND JM JACOBSZ

ABSTRACT

In universities of technology there is much confusion regarding the concept cooperative education and related terminology. The aim of this article is to offer a conceptual alternative for cooperative education, based on findings from the literature, workshops conducted institutionally and nationally in universities of technology and supported by a PhD study conducted by the first author. The findings suggest an alternative approach towards the conceptual understanding of cooperative education and its associated components. In addition, the proposed conceptual framework provides a directive towards structural development and managing applicable learning types in a university of technology environment with regard to work-integrated learning and service learning.

Keywords: cooperative education, work-integrated learning, experiential learning.

1.   INTRODUCTION

There is a need for a fresh perspective and redefinition of cooperative education as a curriculum model (Kerka, 1999; Wilson, Stull & Vinsonhaler, 1996). This is especially true for universities of technology and comprehensive universities in the higher education sector in South Africa. The term cooperative education has traditionally been used in the former technikon sector. There is a great deal of confusion among academic and support staff on the terminology used in universities of technology, such as in-service training, experiential learning, professional practice, apprenticeship, articles, candidature, co-op, field-based learning, internships or interns, project-based learning and school-to-work (Groenewald, 2004:19). Whatever term is used, the practice of cooperative education is about connecting "learning with work" (Kerka, 1999:1). It remains one of the most important teaching and learning strategies in higher education (Engelbrecht, 2003) which aims to enhance learning (Groenewald, 2003:1) by integrating learning with work experience.

Currently, in the new higher education sector (after the 1994 elections and the merging of several higher education institutions), the use and practice of cooperative education has mostly been confined to universities of technology and comprehensive universities. Since the publication of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) in South Africa in 2007, the shift towards work-integrated learning (WIL) has created even greater confusion among academics, who are uncertain as to which term should be used.

The inclusion of service learning, together with WIL, has complicated matters even further. This confusion, which has become evident even globally, is articulated by slogans such as "Cooperative education for the advancement of work-integrated learning".

In South Africa the merging of the former technikons, Northern Gauteng, North West and Pretoria, resulted in the establishment of the Tshwane University of Technology. This necessitated reconsideration and reconceptualisation of the principles and practices of cooperative education and experiential learning as had been practised at the former three institutions. The practices of the former autonomous institutions (technikons) required some standardisation within the context of one merged institution in order to establish an adapted but cohesive philosophy on cooperative education. A cohesive philosophy would firmly serve as fundamental approach to support the associated practices. After numerous workshops for all relevant stakeholders, consensus was reached within the university on the basic principles, nature and best practice of cooperative education; consequently, standardised policies and procedures steering cooperative education within the merged university were established.

In one way or the other, universities of technology and comprehensive universities have had similar experiences as a result of the mergers. If the previously mentioned higher education institutions did not consider cooperative education as a priority, this very important practice might have become extinct. It is clear that the cooperative education community needs to educate the remaining academic community.

The aim of this article is to share experiences on the outcome of deliberations between academics at institutional level. This case study, which could serve as a directive for other universities of technology and comprehensive universities, was informed by a literature review, postgraduate research and a series of university-based workshops. Finally, a conceptual framework is proposed for the clarification of the concept of cooperative education and its related components and associated terminology.

2.   THE LITERATURE

2.1   What is cooperative education?

Engelbrecht (2003:6) describes cooperative education as a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals. It provides work experiences in integrating theory and practice. Cooperative education is a partnership between students, educational institutions and companies with specific responsibilities for each party. This definition provides the essence of what cooperative education is.

Although the term cooperative education may have originated in the USA, the concept or the idea of an integrated curriculum did not (Carlson, 1999). The policies and procedures for Ontario secondary schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000), refer to cooperative education as a culmination of a series of experiential learning opportunities that include job shadowing, job twinning and work experience and are often an integral part of the curriculum. Such procedures on cooperative education also involves a partnership arrangement between education, industry, students, and business, community organisations, parents, employers and supervisors.

According to Baumgart, Kouzmin, Power and Martin (1994:107) the Canadian Association of Cooperative Education defines cooperative education as a process which formally integrates the student's academic study with work experience in cooperating employer organisations. Terminology on cooperative education shares some commonalities which include the following: it is a structured teaching and learning strategy; it provides progressive experiences in integration of theory with practice; there must be a partnership; and different components are identified in cooperative education. It must be emphasised that cooperative education should not be confused with cooperative learning, which is defined as "a small group of students working together to achieve a common goal" (Groenewald, 2004:4).

A variety of terminology related to and often confused with cooperative education is used both locally and internationally. Some of these terms are in-service training, experiential learning, work-integrated learning and service learning.

Engelbrecht (2003:14) defines in-service training as

> … non-formal transfer of knowledge and the acquisition of skills with the objective of producing a more useful employee who may be utilized in a particular practice / profession for broader applications than his/her present knowledge/ experience of a particular occupation permits; also training (for a specific placement) within the organisation, systematically planned and provided by a trainer on the staff internally or by one acting on behalf of the organisation externally.

Garavan and Murphy (2001:282) define experiential learning as "learning that occurs when changes in judgement, feelings, knowledge or skills result, for a particular person from living through an event". Engelbrecht (2003:24) defines work-integrated learning (WIL) as "specific skills acquired through work and directly related to classroom teaching. It may be defined as a form of education that integrates periods of academic study with periods of work experience in positions relating to the learner's studies".

[1] For the purpose of this article experiential learning and work-integrated learning are used interchangeably.

Engel-Hills, Garraway, Jacobs, Volbrecht and Winberg (2009:4) identified four types of work-integrated learning: work-directed theoretical learning (WDTL), problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning (PjBL) and workplace learning (WPL).

According to the Higher Education Qualifications Committee (South Africa, 2004:24), work-based learning refers to "a component of a learning programme that focuses on the application of theory in an authentic work based context". Both Groenewald (2007:97) and Brennan and Little (1996) describe three strands of work-based learning: learning with work, learning and work and learning through work.

Service learning is applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into the curriculum and learning programme. It could be credit-bearing and assessed and may take place in a work environment (CHE, 2006:24). A number of commonalities between the described terminology have been identified which include transfer of knowledge, behavioural change, monitoring, assessment, reflection of learning of students, integration of learning with work experience and being a credit-bearing component of the curriculum.

The commonalities identified in the terminology described above were used as a basis to reconceptualise the concept of cooperative education. A brief review of the theories of learning relating to cooperative education is provided in the following section.

2.2   Theories of learning

Van Gyn and Grove-White (2004:27) hold the view that cooperative education practitioners need to have theory to guide the practice in working with students to enhance learning. According to Eames and Cates (2004:37), the theories allow the explication of what a student should learn in the curriculum in the classroom and the workplace. They emphasise that a sound theoretical basis can assist the cooperative education practitioner in justifying the inclusion of work placement components in the learning programme.

2.2.1   The theories of learning

Piaget's cognitive development theory

Piaget (1952a, 1952b), who formulated a comprehensive theory about how thinking develops, believed that the human infant is born with both the need and the ability to adapt to the environment. Piaget describes how intelligence is shaped by experience and believes that intelligence arises as a product of the interaction between the person and his environment.

Eames and Cates (2004:40) mention three processes described by Piaget, namely (1) the development of logical thinking, consisting of assimilation, which refers to the integration of external elements into the student's internal structures; (2) accommodation, which refers to the student's adjustment in his or her internal structures and transformations in thinking and equilibrium; and (3) the set of processes that maintains cognitive organisation during the student's changes in thinking. In cooperative education, equilibrium is the area that is the most significantly affected. The simultaneous development of reasoning strategies for both education and work enables students to maintain the organisation of their cognitive structure more easily and explains why a cooperative education student makes the transition to work immediately upon graduation whereas the non-cooperative education student undergoes an adjustment period. The adjustment of the student's internal structure and subsequent change in thinking creates a state of disequilibrium, which explains the problems companies describe in students with no cooperative education experience. Therefore cooperative education students experience less disequilibrium compared to non-cooperative education students during their transition (Cates & Jones, 1999:19; Eames & Cates, 2004:40).

Gagne's conditions of learning

According to Gagne (1970:1), human skills, appreciations, reasoning, hopes, aspirations, attitudes, and values are dependent for their development on events known as learning. The events that students will experience will determine what they will learn and what kind of people they will become. Through the cooperative education experience students develop a sense of what information will be most useful to them for their future and career path and devote more attention to that information. Cooperative education students who are exposed to the realities of the field for which they are preparing may have a greater sense of purpose for classroom learning to guide the entire learning process (Eames & Cates, 2004:41).

Atkinson's model of achievement motivation

According to Atkinson (1974:29), when an individual undertakes an activity and succeeds, there is an increase in the expectancy of success on doing the same or similar tasks, and when the person fails, the expectancy of success of that or similar tasks decreases. The cognitive change produced by success or failure consequently also produces a change in the incentive values of future success or failure. The cooperative education process is a typical series of successes or failures that build upon one another. From the first résumé to the final job offer upon graduation, most students build upon previous successes or learn from previous failures (Eames & Cates, 2004:41).

The social learning theory of Albert Bandura

Bandura's social learning theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social context. According to Bandura (1977:16), experiential and physiological influences interact in subtle ways to determine behaviour, which is formed through the integration of many constituents' activities of differing origin. Eames and Cates (2004:42) also point out that "cooperative education students experience social learning as they observe the behaviours and consequences of those behaviours in their colleagues in the workplace". Students learn not only from their own successes and failures but also from other successes or failures (Eames & Cates, 2004:42; Cates & Jones, 1999:19).

Kolb's experiential learning model

Johnston, Angerilli and Gajdamaschko (2004:157) as well as Cates and Jones (1999:19) mention that Kolb's theory of learning is one of the most relevant theories of informing cooperative learning. The advocates of experiential learning relied heavily on the work of Kolb, which describes experiential learning as "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Maudsley & Strivens, 2000:538). Kolb (1984:38) defines learning as "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". This model is particularly useful in explaining how learning can be integrated between the classroom and the workplace (Eames & Cates, 2004:43). According to Johnston et al. (2004:159), within this model, learning is continuous during the learning experience and is directed by the student's needs and goals with periods of reflection and observation.

Groenewald (2007:94) contends that the study of the theory of learning would be incomplete without mention of the neurobiological approach, which relates to electrical and chemical events in the body, which in turn relate to the functioning of the brain and nervous system in terms of learning.

2.3   Why cooperative education?

According to Engelbrecht (2003:2), the cooperative education principle is well established. Cates and Jones (1999:23) point out that Charles Kettering, a former Vice-President of General Motors Corporation, postulated that "co-op education is the education of the future. It doesn't dwell on reporting the learning of the past."

A cooperative education programme is multifunctional in that it yields many and differing benefits for the various role players, namely students, educational institutions and industry.

Garavan and Murphy (2001:282) maintain that companies seek to recruit individuals who are capable of more than a simple response to change. They prefer adaptive, adaptable and transformative employees who will aid the organisation in the maintenance, development and transformation of the organisation, while anticipating change. Higher education institutions need to address this need and produce suitable graduates who have a realistic expectation of the workplace (Garavan & Murphy, 2001:282). The role of higher education institutions is to provide such graduates through the practice of cooperative education by preparing students for experiential learning and the workplace.

According to the World Association for Cooperative Education, cooperative education allows students to experience the connection between education and work and may result in increased interest in class work. Furthermore, it aids in the development of the students' cognitive skills, self-confidence and personal and work-related knowledge (Garavan & Murphy, 2001:282).

Cooperative education affords a pathway for dialogue between education and industry and gives companies the opportunity to inform the educational institutions of the skills and knowledge that future graduates ought to possess, thus providing industry with more suitable potential employees and aiding the educational institution to remain at the forefront of innovation and creativity (Garavan & Murphy, 2001:282). The methodology that was used in the research on which this article is based is described below.

3.   METHODOLOGY

The research was informed by numerous workshops conducted with the purpose of reconceptualising and by the compilation of a policy, strategy and managerial structure for cooperative education. The research was conducted by the task team leader for cooperative education during the merger process, and was supported by the first author's doctoral study.

3.1   Literature survey

A literature survey was conducted that covered literature published both locally and internationally in order to identify the scope and range of the problem and to conceptualise and formulate a new framework for cooperative education for the Tshwane University of Technology. The literature survey as briefly alluded to in this article provided support in terms of the research conducted. The literature also informed management and implementation strategies that can be followed in cooperative education within this unique merged university context.

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[2] More than 20 workshops were conducted.

3.2   Institutional workshops conducted

A newly established task team was appointed during the merger process (2003 to 2004) for the Tshwane University of Technology. It consisted of a task team leader and two members each from the Technikon Northern Gauteng, the Technikon North West and the Technikon Pretoria. The task team was tasked with developing and compiling a policy, a strategy and a managerial structure for approval and implementation in the university. This required the reconceptualisation of cooperative education in the university. A series of workshops were conducted under the leadership of the task team leader appointed by the DVC Academic. In the development of the policy all task team members needed to reach consensus on the standardisation of the concept of cooperative education and related terminology to be used institutionally. Similarly, consensus needed to be reached on the process followed, the procedures, as well as the functions, roles and responsibilities of the three main role players (employers, students and academic staff). It was also necessary to reach consensus on the position of cooperative education in the university.

A survey conducted on academic heads of department and employer supervisory staff in industry indicated overwhelming support for the practice of cooperative education in universities (Wessels, 2007). The main challenge in terms of re-conceptualisation and structural development was to reach consensus amongst academic and support staff in the university. The task team attempted to be as inclusive as possible to ensure buy-in from all staff members of the university. Workshops were conducted in each faculty to offer an opportunity for academic and support staff to present inputs and reach consensus on information proposed before submission to Senate for approval.

External facilitators were mainly used where possible to facilitate workshops to ensure the neutrality of decision making.

4.   FINDINGS

4.1   Policy and strategy development on cooperative education

A policy on cooperative education was compiled after numerous workshops were conducted in the university. The draft policy compiled by the task team was then presented and circulated to academic staff in all faculties. The policy stated the position of the university on cooperative education and identified a number of components (see Figure 2) of cooperative education, which mainly included experiential learning and liaison (see Figure 1). Experiential learning, described as learning by doing, makes provision for different types of learning, which include work-integrated learning, service learning and the workplace component of learnerships. In liaison, on the other hand, it distinguishes between partnerships, advisory committees and guest lectures.

The policy made provision for defining the relevant terminology. The definitions were formulated and chosen to provide a directive to academics relating to cooperative education for standardisation purposes and included rules to adhere to.

In addition to the compilation of a policy on cooperative education which describes definitions, rules and guidelines, a strategy was designed to describe the functions, procedures, roles and responsibilities, service provision and reporting mechanisms by all relevant role players in the directorate and faculties. It included a management structure for the Tshwane University of Technology consisting of a centralised/decentralised model, which made provision for both institutional and faculty cooperative education (Figure 3).

The policy, strategy and management structure was presented at national level to cooperative education forums for critique, benchmarking and input purposes. The policy and strategy documents were then approved for implementation by the senate of the university. The policy framework for cooperative education for the Tshwane University of Technology is depicted graphically in Figure 1 below.
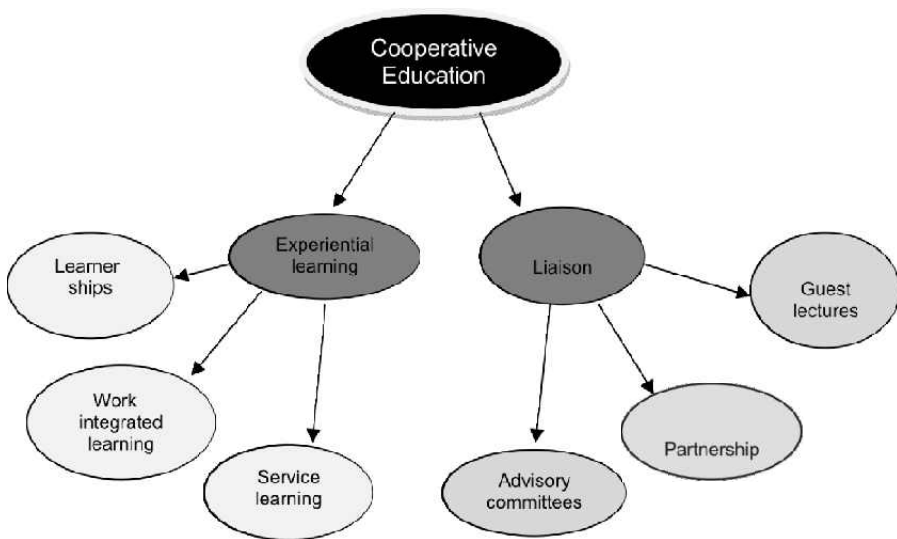
Figure 1: Policy framework for cooperative education for the Tshwane University of Technology

4.2 Formulation of an institutional conceptual framework for cooperative education

As Mouton and Marais (1990:143) indicate, during the compilation of a model an attempt is made to demonstrate the relationship between the main elements in the process. Fourie (2000:252) defines a conceptual model as a constructional representation in which complex problem statements and variables are placed in relation and cognitively aid in explaining theories and indicating the relationship between the variables concerned.

A conceptual framework (see Figure 2) was drafted for the university in a graphical and descriptive format to be consistent with the policy and strategy of the university on cooperative education (Wessels, 2007:318). The conceptual framework illustrates that cooperative education consists of mainly two components, namely (1) experiential learning, which consists of various learning types such as work-integrated learning, service learning and learnerships (workplace components) and (2) liaison, entailing guest lectures, partnerships and advisory committees. Experiential learning and liaison were thus identified as the two core components of cooperative education activities at the university (see Figure 1).
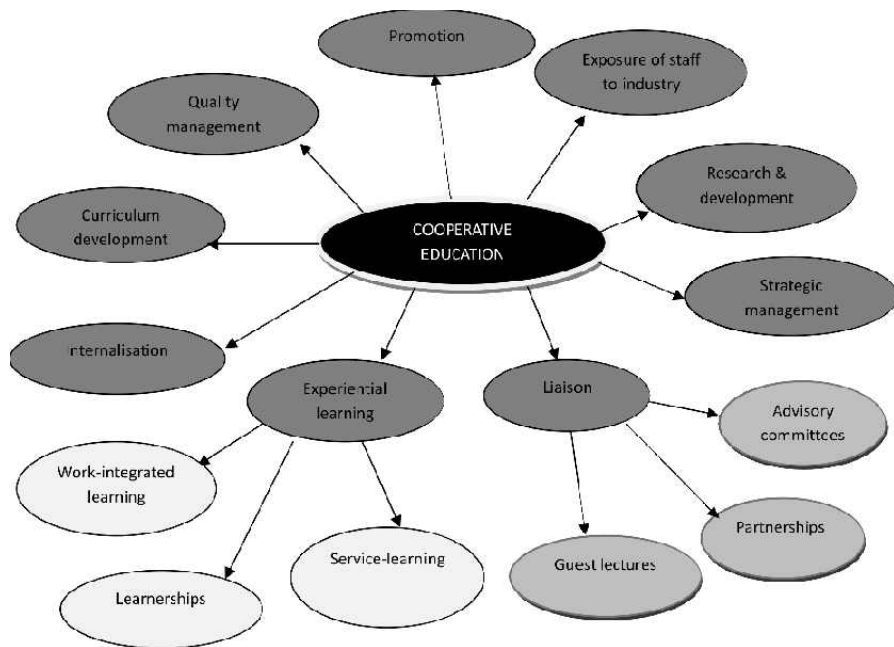
Figure 2: Conceptual framework for cooperative education

4.3 Management of cooperative education

From the policy and strategy, a management structure was proposed and approved by senior management and the Senate of the university. This management structure makes provision for institutional and faculty cooperative education (see Figure 3).

DIRECTORATE: COOPERATIVE EDUCATION
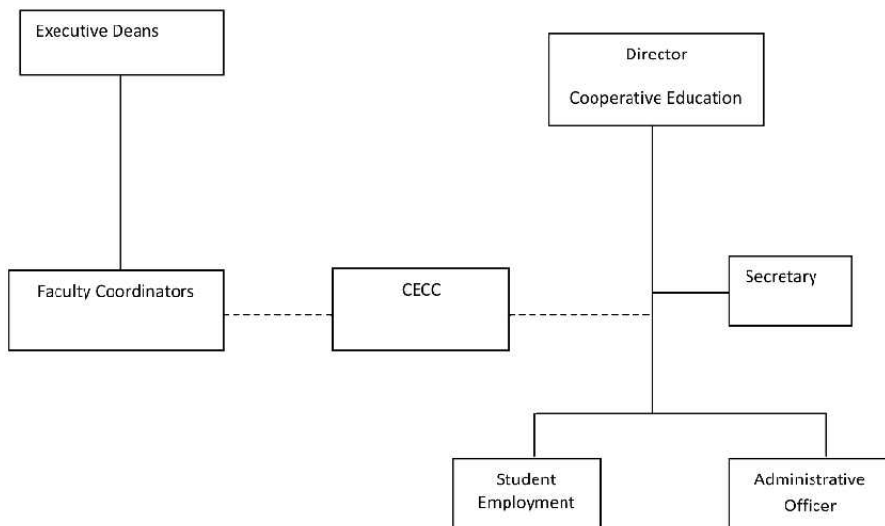
Figure 3: Management structure of the Directorate: Cooperative Education of the Tshwane University of Technology

4.4 Quality assurance of experiential learning: experiential learning management

Finally, a procedure was drafted in support of quality assurance for the management of experiential learning which included work-integrated learning and service learning for each learning programme in the university (see Figure 4).

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[4] CECC: Cooperative Education Central Committee.

Tshwane University of Technology *We empower people*	**Directorate:** Cooperative Education **Process:** Experiential Learning (EL)	**Process:** Experiential Learning Management 23 June 2005 / Page 1 of 1 **Appendix B**	

Purpose: To manage and administer Experiential Learning (EL) within the University.

Scope: Includes the required process for the successful completion of Experiential learning.

Definitions: TUT means Tshwane University of Technology; **EL** means Experiential Learning; **AC** means Advisory Committee. Defined definitions could be found in the Policy on Corporate Education

Input	Flow Diagram	Output	Doc's	Who
Start Students that successfully meet the admission requirements for EL Approved employer	Coop Ed/ Acad Staff prepare students on the nature and requirements of Experiential Learning	Preparation of students for EL and the workplace. Class Attendance and pass mark	Student prep. manual	Students: Coop Ed /Acad staff;
	Coop Ed/ Acad Staff identify suitable placement environment			
	Coop Ed/ Acad Staff visit placement site and verify suitability		Employment letter; Approval from Acad dept	Students; Coop Ed/Acad Staff.
	Students are placed for Experiential Learning- assisted by Cooperative Education/ Acad staff	EL placement		
	Registration of students and payment of registration fees for Experiential Learning.	HOD approve admission to do EL; EL Registration per cue dates	Proof of registration and payment for EL; Logbook; Policy	Students: Reg. Dept; Coop Ed/Acad Staff;
	Placement at workplace ← Remedial action			
	Continuous monitoring of Experiential Learning students	Minimum one visit per semester plus telephonic a.o. contact	Report; Logbook; Policy & guidelines	Students; Coop Ed/Acad Staff;
	Debriefing and Assessment of EL students after completion of EL			
	Student Outcomes Achieved? — No			
	Yes → Acad Admin is informed that conditions have been met	Assessment; Issue of qualification	Assessment mark; Logbook with Policy & guidelines Projects	Students; Coop Ed/Acad Staff;
	Reflection (debriefing) of EL by lecturers	Students who completed EL successfully Convene AC	Written report or feedback session.	Students; Coop Ed/Acad Staff;
	Discussions with Advisory committees – academic programs → **End**			

Process owner: ML Wessels: Cooperative Education
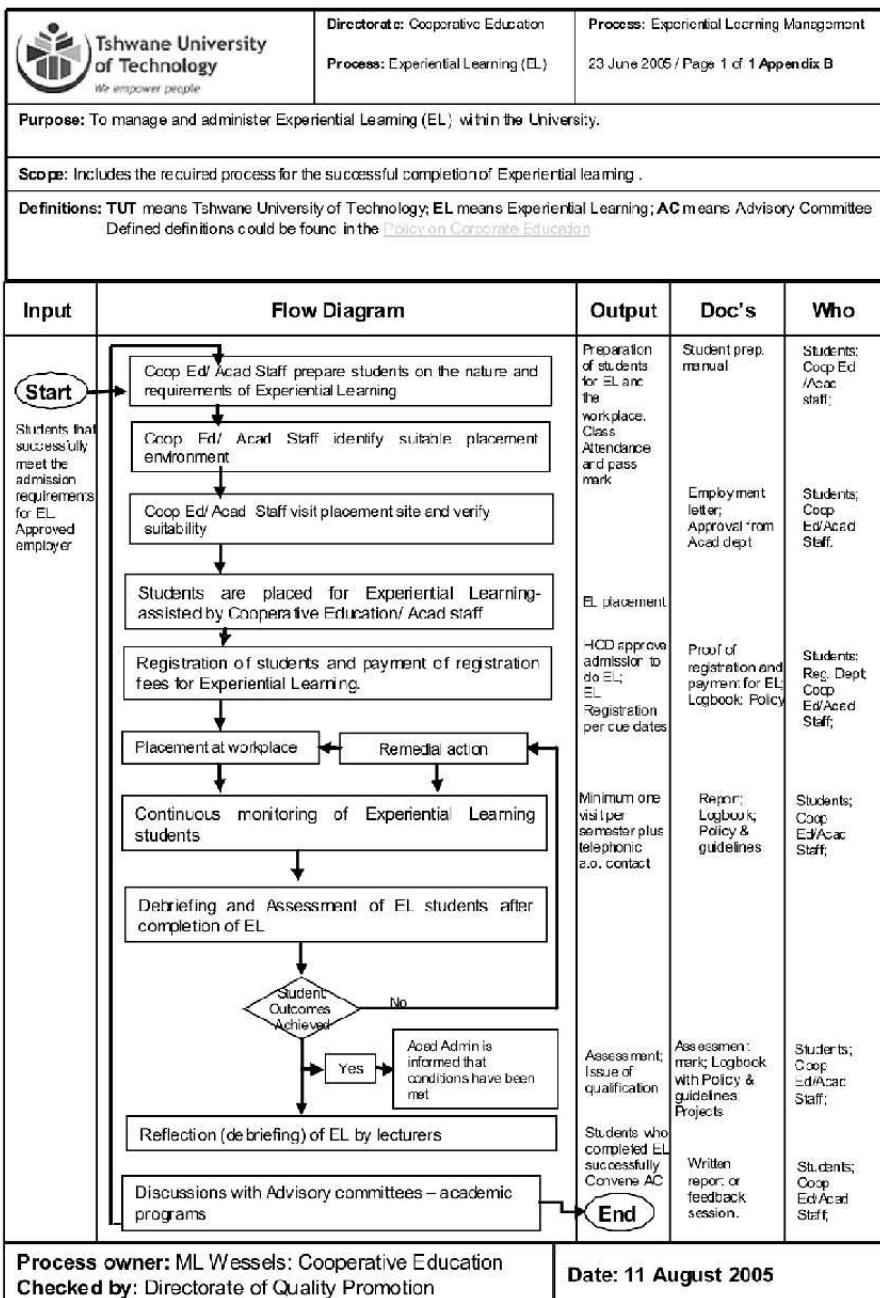**Checked by:** Directorate of Quality Promotion

Date: 11 August 2005

Figure 4: Quality assurance cycle for the management of experiential learning/work-integrated learning

5.   DISCUSSION

Some constraints identified during the development of cooperative education at the university included differences in paradigmatic perspectives between representatives from the former technikons and different management models used in the cooperative education environment. The lack of permanency and the high level of mobility of senior managers due to retrenchments at the university was one of the main hurdles the task team needed to overcome in order to achieve its objectives. These constraints hold a serious threat for the survival of many departments and staff at the university, including cooperative education. It must be emphasised that senior management provided full support for cooperative education at the university since it was recognised as a system which allows the student to be exposed to a period of learning in the labour market (TUT, 2008:4). The philosophy of cooperative education enables the university to provide career-focused education (TUT, 2005:36).
The university successfully developed and implemented a policy, strategy and managerial structure on cooperative education. This policy and strategy provided the directive for cooperative education in terms of a conceptual framework at institutional as well as operational level. Contributions to the successful outcome of cooperative education included agreements on the position, concept and related terminology. The success of the outcome lies in the continued engagement of both internal and external role players on cooperative education.

The development of an institutional conceptual framework as a result of workshop deliberations and supported by postgraduate research resulted in the university positioning itself with regard to the concept of cooperative education and related terminology. The university's position on cooperative education was discussed and supported in relevant forums outside the university. These forums included various role players.

A centralised-decentralised management model for the management of cooperative education at institutional level was formulated. This entails an institutional office that should provide leadership in cooperative education in the university. A cooperative education central committee (CECC) as sub-committee of the academic committee (consisting of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, deans and academic support staff) convenes regularly to coordinate and communicate cooperative education activities at the university. Such a committee consists of faculty coordinator representatives from faculties and is chaired by the director of cooperative education. At operational level faculties have been allocated a full-time cooperative education coordinator responsible for the coordination and communication of cooperative education at faculty level. This includes meetings on a regular basis, chaired by the faculty coordinator, with representative lecturers (WIL coordinators) from each learning programme.

A quality assurance process for the management of experiential learning, which includes work-integrated learning and service learning, was compiled by the task team in collaboration with faculties as part of the strategy on cooperative education. This process would guide academic staff in terms of the preparation, placement, monitoring, assessment and debriefing of students in learning programmes. It must be noted that provision is made for the remedial action of students who did not achieve the outcomes as required for specific experiential/work-integrated learning.

6.   CONCLUSION

The aim of the article was to present a reconceptualised approach to cooperative education at the Tshwane University of Technology. It was necessary to establish a new conceptual framework on cooperative education for the university and to standardise the usage and application of cooperative education and related terminology and practices.

The authors, together with the members of the task team, objectively analysed cooperative education theory and practices to accomplish the scientific formulation of a conceptual framework that would ensure consistent application. The authors presented a conceptual framework on cooperative education after policy and strategy development. The conceptual framework that was presented in graphical and descriptive format on cooperative education not only clarifies the concept but the roles and responsibilities related to the relevant role players. It must be emphasised that the authors and the task team were able to take a stand in terms of cooperative education in the university. This achievement was extended to a senate-approved policy and strategy, which incorporated a management structure for the university and a quality assurance model to ensure that all learning programmes comply with a specified minimum standard.

This article offers a new approach towards the conceptualisation of cooperative education in higher education. The authors' model suggests an alternative but inclusive approach to cooperative education and its components in the university environment. It can be concluded that the conceptual framework on cooperative education offers a way to manage learning types in the higher education sector, such as work-integrated learning and service learning.

It is recommended that the cooperative education community engage more readily with academics on this topic in a more formalised way to establish a position on cooperative education in universities. In addition, cooperative education practitioners should make an attempt to educate academic staff at universities on this topic. Senior management of universities should provide support to cooperative education practitioners to ensure that this practice does not become extinct because of current or future turbulence in higher education.

In conclusion: this article could provide a directive for universities that take cooperative education seriously as a philosophy to provide career-focused education. Institutions often fail to recognise that the key success factor of viable cooperative education programmes in a university is faculty ownership (Groenewald, 2004:2). The conceptual framework as implemented at the Tshwane University of Technology could act as a directive for higher education institutions in recognising cooperative education as an important teaching and learning strategy.

It is hoped that this article will trigger further discussion in higher education institutions and related forums on this topic to ensure that the "state of confusion" becomes minimised or even extinct.

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