

Bachelor of Education in Educational Management Students' Perception of their Programme of Study: Case of University of Botswana

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Abstract

A survey study was conducted to establish perceptions of students who completed in 2008 and 2009 respectively in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in Education Management regarding the study provision and conditions, therefore the perceived value and quality of the study programme. Theories of learning which point to the influence of the 'inner world', the 'work environment' and the 'other people' on learning and therefore perceptions of programmes were used as the theoretical framework. B.Ed. Educational Management students filled in a questionnaire which had both open and close ended items. Perceptions were deduced from views on, among others, facilities to support the programme, usefulness of the programme for work, quality of the programme and support availed students. The findings showed an overwhelming positive perception of the programme. By implication, the programme would be expected to positively enhance learning thus, produce managers who would have a positive impact in the schools. Among the recommendations made were that the Ministry of Education and Skills Development of Botswana considers sponsoring more inservice management students to the local programme to reduce on costs, with cognisance being taken to avoid inbreeding where every manager would be coming from the local institution. Another recommendation is to conduct a study to establish the impact of these graduates on education where they are deployed as school managers.

Keywords: learning theories, perceptions, support, motivation, B.Ed. in educational management, programme, Botswana.

INTRODUCTION

The B.Ed. in Educational Management is an in-service programme for school administrators, teachers and members of other organizations such as the Police, the Defense force and any other Non Governmental Organisations which may want to upgrade professional qualifications of their staff members. In this respect, most students are adults who come with baggage of their social and economic personal lives such as work challenges, family responsibilities, family projects, and loans to service and at times marital challenges. For this reason, learning for these people is always a challenge which needs to be cushioned to override the multi-challenges of the learner's lives.

Background and Theoretical Framework

When performing any task, motivation plays a key role. The extent to which students perform is a function of their motivation towards such job. When student study they are influenced by certain factors such as the learning environment, the extent to which they perceive the future utility of a programme of study, the faculty variable as well as the availability of support materials. House (2002) emphasises that student characteristics, living and learning conditions as well as instructional activities contribute to the student's positive learning. According to Sanders (1998), a major factor which affects students' academic growth and therefore positive perceptions of their programmes is the effectiveness and variations that are brought about by different faculty in presenting their varied courses. The quality of such faculty available to students is therefore critical to perceived quality of any program of study. The variations in the teaching methodologies brought by faculty members thus add spice to the students' academic experiences and perception of a given programme. This is further enhanced by the type of support students get from their lecturers. Where the Faculty is available to students both inside and outside of class, the tendency is for encouragement on the part of the student who would not be groaning without assistance. As noted by Lorenzetti (2004) a good relationship with academic staff members or advisors who also show a sense of caring and empathy is a plus to being positive about one's programme of study. Close personal relationship with staff assists in dealing with stress. Assistance with technology by faculty enhances motivation to learn, thus assists in dealing with stress (Morris & Miller (2010). Through advising, students feel they are cared for and develop a sense of connectedness to their institution, hence a positive feeling about their program of study (Tang, Tang and Tang, 2004; Lorenzetti, 2004; Morris and Miller 2010; Harris 1991; Department of Special Education University of South Florida, 2009).

Over and above the support students receive from their lecturers as a factor of perception towards any program, is the good relations amongst students themselves which lead them to realise that they need each other's shoulders to lean on. Positive role models and supportive group peers are seen as important components of any training for public sectors (Hargrove, Fox, & Goldman, 1991). Therefore institutions where students form learning communities by coming together to brainstorm and to be there for one another during trying academic times provides opportunities to deal with stress related to academic challenges. Harris (1991) shares the same sentiments by noting that students who take charge of their own learning through group problem solving make their learning realistic and flexible.

Programmes are pursued because learners are interested in them, because they want to grow professionally as well as to be self actualized (Kirk 2008). He pointed out that the affective domain also has influence on the learner's perception of any program of study. He argues that people learn because the program is very interesting to them, it will give them personal fulfillment. He also notes that Learning is also done to fulfill certain tangible rewards such as getting a lucrative job, getting promoted and being able to solve certain real life problems.

According to theories of learning, therefore, there are three areas which influence how people learn and therefore develop certain perceptions of their own learning programs. These areas are the 'internal world', 'the work environment' and 'other people' (Kirk, 2008). The factors that influence learning are by inference the same factors which would also influence one's perception of their program of study because it is the program that they would be learning from.

The 'internal world' is the inner part of the being which manifests itself as intrinsic motivation (Kirk, 2008) which can either influence or de-motivate one to learn. This emotional being could, for example, be translated as the desire for job satisfaction and actualisation. In this case learners may want to learn because they feel good about it and anticipate reward of job satisfaction in future and feeling good about having been developed professionally.

The 'work environment' as a factor influencing perception about a given program could manifest itself as a feeling that the courses offered, for example, relate very well with the job content that one would have been doing or will likely be doing after completing the program. Issues of promotional opportunities as offered by the program of study could also influence perceptions of a given program. Any facilities and resources offered to enhance achievement in relation to the future or current job in a program could be indicators of the state of the 'work environment area' and therefore could influence a learner's perceptions of such a program. In other words, the perceptions of how relevant the program is to the learner's job can influence their perceptions of it. The 'other people' factor relates to the relationships that a learner has with others such as peers, faculty and ancillary support. This relationship could enhance or discourage the conditions and provisions of the environment in any given program of study.

Studying at an institution of higher learning is usually a challenging and daunting task especially if this is done by learners who are adults. Acknowledging this challenge, Voorhees and Lingenfelter (2003) propose a need to remove harmful obstacles in order to facilitate deeper and wider participation in tertiary education by adult learners. According to O'Connor (2003), feeling good about one's learning assists one's motivation to learn. Learning by adult students therefore needs to be undergirded by motivation and removal of harmful obstacles as alluded to by Voorhees and Lingenfelter (2003) as this is a precursor to such learning.

If learning environmental factors are perceived to be positive by the learners, they may reflect a plus for the programme and if not then this may be a wake up call for the faculty to improve on that given program. Course evaluation by recipients assists institutions to understand the shortcomings as well as strengths of a given programme and therefore do the revisions as appropriate.

In an attempt to review the B.Ed. Education Management student's perceptions of their program of study, the three areas influencing learning and hence perceptions of a program of study were used as a theoretical framework. In this respect, the study aimed at establishing what students perceived to be the experiences they had during the time they studied for a BEd Educational Management degree at the University of Botswana from the point of view of their 'internal world', their 'work environment' and the 'other people' with regards a)Facilities to support the programme, b)Perceived usefulness of the programme of study for the individual's future career prospects, c)Perceived Quality of the Program and d) Perceived Support provided to students.

Study Focus

Program reviews are critical in these changing economic, political and social landscapes. What could have been good quality at the inception of any program could have lost its value with the changes in the needs of the clientele. The perceived quality and success of any programme of study therefore depends on the extent to which it addresses the recurrent needs of the learners. Woody (1942) points out that institutions are set up to educate learners and meet their social political and economic aspirations. He therefore contends that it is imperative, when attempting to introduce new values in education, for the clients who are consumers to be provided an opportunity to give necessary input as they will be presenting views from inside, their experiential lives.

As a lecturer of these adult learners, and forever listening to the challenges they go through as well as having to counsel a number of them, one felt it important to find out how they feel about their programme of study. The Government of Botswana still sponsors management students to study across the border in South Africa as well as abroad in institutions such as Australian Universities. This practice has proved comparatively more expensive as compared to sponsoring students locally. One of the reasons for this action is that some Batswana adult learners do not trust that their own institution of higher learning, the University of Botswana can provide credible programmes. As those who experience the programme are better placed to evaluate it as they have lived experiences of it, it was found appropriate to use the BEd Education Management students to assess the value of this programme. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to establish the learners' perception of provision and conditions of studying for the degree in BEd Educational Management at the University of Botswana with the view to making appropriate recommendations to both the University staff and the policy makers and where possible recommend programme review.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to find out the BEd Management Students' perception of:

1. The facilities intended to support the programme of study.
2. Usefulness of the programme for their future career prospects
3. Quality of the programme of study
4. The support they receive during the course of the programme.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quality of any academic program is dependent upon the extent to which such a programme meets its objectives, addresses the mission and vision of its institution. In particular it is pertinent that such a program meets the needs and aspirations of the clients if it is to be considered to be of quality. Woody (1942) notes therefore that education innovations or program modifications should not be for lecturers or education managers but for the clients who are the consumers. He notes that lecturers and managers should be seen to create an understanding among the stakeholders, the clients concerning the new values in any program. If the Faculty of Education, for instance, would like to make any adjustments to any program, such as the BEd Educational Management in terms of its conditions and provisions, it is important to consult the consumers to give an assessment of it and make suggestions for improvement.

As the study intended finding out individual opinions about the conditions and provisions of the BEd Education Management programme, a survey research design was adopted. A survey "*is a method of collecting data in which a specifically defined group of individuals are asked to answer a number of identical questions*" (Baker, 1999: 201).

Therefore a set of identical questions were asked to all students. As noted by Creswell, (2005) it was found appropriate to use a survey because, surveys provide useful information to evaluate programmes in institutions without experimentally manipulating the conditions of research. As consumers of the programme, students were found to be appropriate to provide their perceptions.

The respondents were composed of the 2004 and 2005 cohorts, which groups completed in 2008 and 2009 respectively. The source of data for the study was the students themselves. Out of a total of 58 students, 37 completed the questionnaire. A number of factors were used as indicators of the programme provision and conditions. Some of these were assistance students received for their end of semester examinations, opportunities for out of class contacts with the lecturing staff, grading system in the course. Quality of course content, quality of lecturers, availability of technical equipment such as computers and provision of supervised practical work is also important in influencing perception of a program of study. Other factors which contribute to the learner's motivation may range from the quality of the programme, the perceived employability opportunities provided by the courses as well as the perceived utility of the course to students' prospective work life. Therefore, the questionnaire items were grouped into a) facilities to support the programme offering, b) perceived quality of the programme, c) support provided students, and d) usefulness of the programme of study for the individual's future work life.

FINDINGS

Findings of the study are presented according to the categories of the indicators of the Provision and Conditions of BEd Management Program. These are as grouped a) Facilities to support the programme offering, b) Perceived Quality of the Program, and c) Support provided to students and d) usefulness of the programme of study for the individual's future.

a) Facilities to support the programme

The indicators for facilities to support the programme offering were described by the following variables: Availability of technical equipment such as computer, quality of equipment of laboratories/workshops or classrooms, equipment and stocking of the library and the general infrastructure. With regards the availability of technical equipment such as a computer, while 14(35.1%) respondents expressed that equipment was not available and not good, 22(59.4%) of them felt the equipment was available and good to very good. The library is yet another resource centre which plays a very crucial role in supporting learning at higher institutions hence providing either conducive or poor environment for learning. With regards stocking of the library with books as well as the associated equipment, 26(70.3%) respondents were content while 10 (27%) felt that the library was poorly stocked and therefore did not support learning as expected. The respondents were also asked about their perceptions with regards the general university infrastructure as pertains to their own learning. Thirty four (92.8%) respondents were happy with the general infrastructure as support to their learning and stay at the University of Botswana,

b) Perceived usefulness of the programme of study for the individual's future career prospects

Students were asked to comment on whether they think the programme can add value to their future professional development. Respondents were confident that not only will the programme lead to their future professional development (100%) but will also give them confidence in their jobs as they would have gained skills and knowledge from it (97.3%), and more informed about their jobs. Ninety one percent of these respondents also expressed that the programme would also lead to their personality development. Respondents pointed out that their programme of study has motivated in them a willingness to learn more (94.6%) ability to be reflective (94.6%) and move away from conventional thinking with the desire to perform even better (97.3%). To this extent, 77.1% of them said they would choose a higher degree in the same area if an opportunity availed itself.

Respondents were confident that they had developed capacity to improvise as appropriate, to be relied on, to be independent and to even work under pressure (97.3%). There was an overwhelming view by respondents that the programme has created a sense of responsibility, creativity, determination and economic reasoning in them (90%). Respondents saw in themselves, that after the experience of the BEd Educational Management, beings who are more persistent (97.1) in achieving goals, more cooperative and even able to assert themselves (97.3%). As leaders, they believe the programme has developed their ability to adapt to changing situations as well as to be empathetic to others.

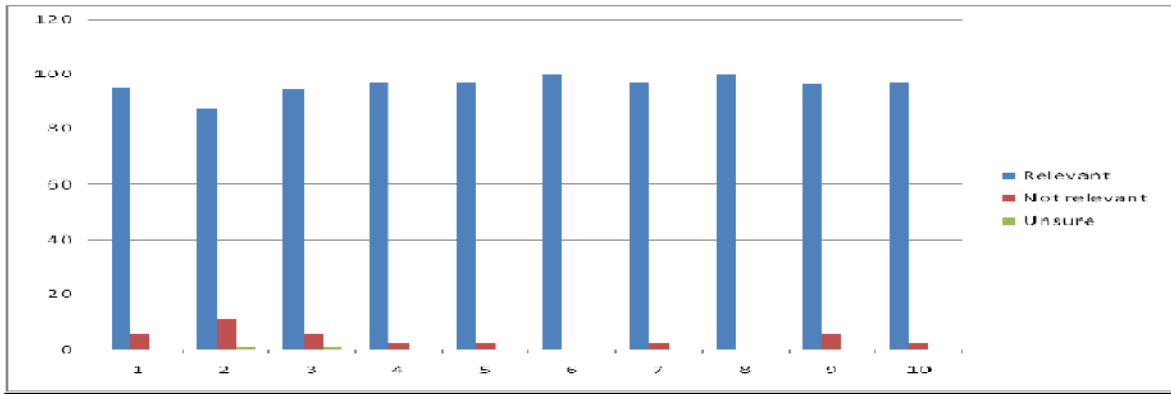


Figure 1: Perceived Programme Relevance for future Work Prospects (as a percentage)

Key: 1. Overall programme relevance to school management; 2. Fulfillment of present professional tasks; 3. Help secure challenging jobs; 4. Adequate preparation for any job; 5. Preparation for long term career prospects; 6. Ability to coordinate work situations; 7. Provision of opportunities for job security; 8. Usefulness of content in core and optional courses; 9. Provision of opportunities for promotion; 10. Research based approach to teaching.

Respondents were asked to comment on whether or not there was relevance between the programme and their future work. Ninety five percent of the respondent pointed out that the programme was very relevant to school management. They thought the programme would help them fulfill their present professional tasks (87.3%). There was a strong believe that the programme would also assist the respondents secure challenging jobs after they complete their studies (94.5). The research based approach to learning as provided by the programme is seen by the majority (97.2) as preparing respondents to be able to prepare for work situations and have long term career prospects (97.3). Respondents also felt that the programme has given them the skills to be able to coordinate (100%). They also expressed satisfaction with the depth and the high quality of courses offered in the programme, their engagement in their own learning hence preparing them for their own work experiences. It was expressed that the programme provided an opportunity for job security (97.2) as learners would be with it. As a result, 36 (96.3%) saw the program as providing opportunities for promotion in the respondents jobs.

c) Perceived Quality of the Program

Indicators used for quality were quality of lecturers, teaching quality, chances of students being allowed to participate in research activities or projects, practical emphasis of teaching and learning by staff, quality of course content (core and optional courses) and teaching methods used.

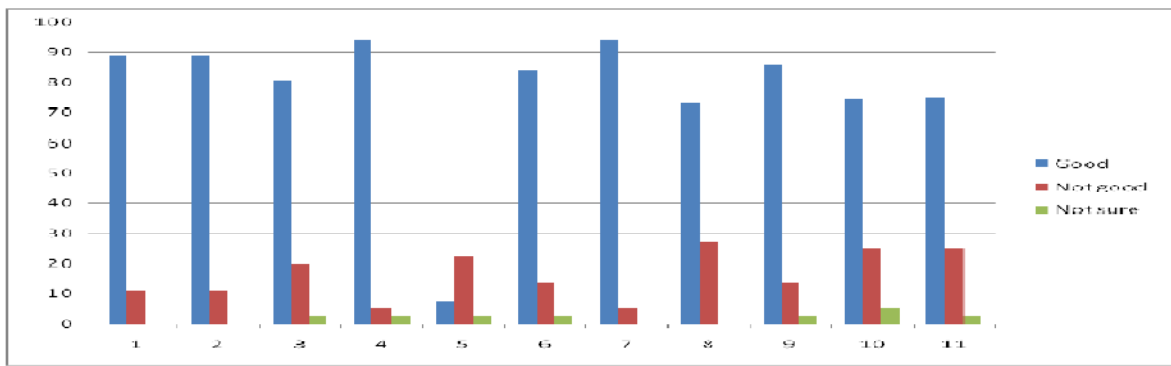


Figure 2: Perceived Quality of the programme (as a percentage).

Key: 1. Quality of lecturers; 2. Quality of teaching; 3. Quality of course content for both core and optional courses; 4. Student participation in research projects; 5. Quality of grading system; 6. Methods of teaching; 7. Variation in course offerings; 8. Students' ability to structure their own programme. 9. Students' involvement in departmental decision making; 10. Possibility of individualised study; 11. Practical emphasis on teaching and learning

With regards quality of lecturers as an indicator of programme provision, 33(89.1%) respondents stated that the BEd Educational Management lecturers were good. The same number (33[89.1%]) of respondents indicated that the quality of teaching from these lecturers was perceived as good while only four said it was bad. As a follow up to the quality of lecturers as well as their teaching, 100% respondents pointed out that the course content for both core and optional courses offered by these lecturers was very relevant and useful to them and their future work situations as school managers. They said that what was interesting was that both the learning and teaching were practically inclined and research based (94%) as students were given assignments in the form of projects demanding some research. That is, assignments were mostly application to their real work situations, through critiques in line with the learnt materials. Participating in research activities is one way through which students are encouraged to acquire research or needs assessment skills. Therefore students were asked to give their opinions on their being allowed opportunities to participate in research projects. Out of 37 students, 34(91.8%) indicated that they got involved and this involvement is very good for them especially when they rejoin their work assignments.

Students would normally complain that the faculty members are strict, or may be biased when it comes to grading their academic work. On being asked about this area, 28 (75.6%) of them were happy with the way lecturers graded their work. A good percentage of respondents (83.7%) believed that the methods of teaching used which were said to also be practically oriented were very useful for their learning.

One of the ways to ascertain acceptability and therefore quality of the programme provision was the programme structure itself. Students were asked to comment on their views of the structure whether or not they think it suits their own needs by offering a variety of courses, a possibility of individualized structuring of studies and provision of supervised practical work experience.

With regards students' view on whether or not they are happy with the variation that is offered in terms of courses, 35 (94.6) said the variation was good and useful to them. A good programme can be characterized by the ability for students to structure their own programme as per their needs. Twenty six (70.2%) students thought that the program is such that they can structure their own individualized studies within the overall programme. They saw that as useful as it helps address their individualized needs. Thirty one (83.7%) students were happy that they are involved in departmental decision making through student representation in various departmental committees.

d) Perceived Support provided to students.

As a way of ascertaining students' perceptions of the conditions and provision of their programme, they were asked to evaluate the extent to which they were supported by various stakeholders. Support provided to students' was inferred from their views on assistance or advice they get for end of semester examinations, opportunity for out of class contact with teaching staff, academic advising, contact with fellow students and supply of teaching materials.

With regards whether or not students received assistance or advice for end of semester examinations, 33(89.1%) noted that they are happy with such assistance while 31(83.9%) also said they get an opportunity for out of class contact with their teaching staff to engage in academic assistance of any kind. The same number 31 (83.9%) of students also expressed a view that they were happy with the general academic advising they receive from the academic staff members in the B.Ed. Education management programme. Not only did students receive academic support from staff, they also appreciated the support they received from their fellow students as 23 (62.1%) of them said such contact is good. It is noted however, that a significant number of 14, (37.8%) students was not happy at contacts with fellow students. While this number may be below half the respondents, one feels it is significant as it accounts for more than a third of the respondents. Students to students contact and support is important especially for adult learners. With regards provision of teaching materials by their lecturers, 28 (75.7%) respondents were content with the materials they received to support their learning.

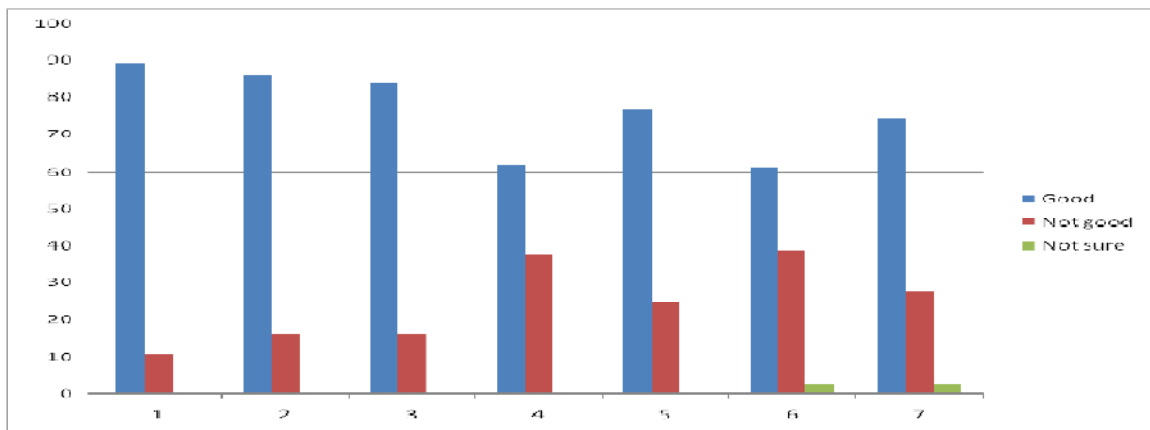


Figure 3: Perceived Support Provided Students (as percentage)

Key: 1. End of year examination; 2. Out of class contact with staff; 3. General academic advising; 4. Support from fellow students; 5. Provision of teaching materials by staff; 6. Availability of technical equipment; 7. Equipment and stocking of the library

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was an attempt to establish the B.Ed. Education Management Students' perception of their own programme with the view of making recommendations for modifications and improvements as appropriate as well as making recommendations to policy makers. The theoretical frame work used to undergird the study or the perceptions was as per the theories of learning which point out that there are three areas which influence how people learn and therefore develop certain perceptions of their own learning programmes (Kirk, 2008). These areas are the 'internal world', 'the work environment' and 'other people'. These same factors were deduced from responses made by students per given perception indicator. With regards the 'internal world' as a factor of motivation about a particular programme, one could assume that it plays a key role as one must first feel good about an issue for them to appreciate its extraneous variables such as the 'external world'. According to O'Connor (2003: 54) *motivation must come from the learner....with more students and .. diminishing resources, learner motivation is even more crucial ...* From the study, it can be concluded that the internal world of the students influenced their perception of the programme positively as, for instance; the majority valued the programme as they believed it would add to their future professional development as well as enhancing their confidence and their reflective capacity. Indeed the results also showed an overwhelming feeling that the programme created in students, a sense of responsibility, determination as well as economic reasoning. These personal emotional attributes tend to reflect the internal world of the students as positive. Students experiencing such internal conditions are more likely to find studying in a given programme a challenging but endurable task. Many students, especially adult learners or in-service students are challenged when it comes to the use of modern technology. For instance, searching for information from the library and through the internet can be a daunting task such that without the desire, the drive and a positive feeling about a programme, walking this rough technological terrain can be very frustrating to them. However if they are intrinsically motivated, seeing in a programme some emotional satisfaction, they are likely to study hard and overcome whatever challenges the programme offering brings to them as adult learners. By implication therefore, it means that the programme is viewed positively and therefore likely to have students' perform better in it.

With regards the 'work environment' as a factor that can influence learning and therefore perception of a given programme, respondents were positive in this respect. For instance, students saw close relationship between their programme and their previous work experiences as well as anticipated work for those who would be going to work for the first time. They believed that the programme well prepared them to be able to secure any challenging management jobs. Anybody who sees a value add in their programme of study with regards their job is likely to do well. Learners in the BED Educational Management Programme as future managers expressed satisfaction with the fact that they had a say in the departmental policies and therefore as future managers, that was perceived as preparing them for their future managerial roles in the schools. That the programme was perceived as having a positive impact on their future jobs as well as their internal

being, the intrinsic motivation is seen as a plus to their learning because when students or learners attach value to their programme with regards the attainment of a good place in the job market, they are more likely to perform well academically and professionally.

The 'other people' as a factor that influences learning in any given programme and therefore perception of such a program can be said to have been positive. This is because, for instance, they valued their lecturers as good and using appropriate teaching methodologies. They also experienced in their lecturers a caring environment, empathy and the fact that these lecturers were always available in class and outside for any consultations. As noted by Sanders, (1998), a major factor that affects students' academic growth and therefore a positive view of their program of study is the effectiveness and variations with which faculty members present their courses. These 'other people' had a positive impact on the learners and therefore a positive perception of their programme of study. The other key stakeholder, who according to the respondents provided the necessary support, was their own peers.

Peer advising is pertinent as students feel more comfortable to work with their own kind (peer teaching concept), a sense of taking charge of one's own learning as they clearly know what their peers are made of and this gives them confidence and satisfaction. Indeed working with other students usually takes place outside a formal classroom context thus making the atmosphere less tense, more relaxed, collegial, giving a sense of autonomy, a sense of belonging and thus releasing creative thoughts.

Whilst negative perceptions of a given programme can indeed be a barrier to learning the implications of positive perceptions can be an enhancement of it. The positive perceptions of the programme by the BEd Educational Management Programme can be a result of their own professional experiences as in service learners. It can be argued that experiences of some of them as former managers could have been the reason for their ability to see what is good about the programme as they compare with their previous work experiences. For instance, the positive perception could be influenced by comparing their previous training or work institutions with their current one in terms of for instance, facilities such as the library and its stocking and computer and its related facilities. The positive perceptions need therefore to be enhanced by upholding the perceived good standards by the programme providers. By implication, such positive perceptions could encourage learning by this cohort which learning could send a positive ripple effect to improved educational management practice at school level where the respondents would be going to after completion of the programme.

Yet another implication could be related to the Ministry of Education Skills and Development (MoESD) of Botswana. The MoESD's training policy is such that while some educational management students are locally sponsored to pursue their studies at the University of Botswana, the majority are sponsored to pursue educational management programmes abroad. The external placement has indeed proved costly for the MoESD. One of the reasons for external placement was that students themselves did not have confidence in their local programme and therefore had to opt for external placement. Therefore, if a local programme is proving to be rated highly by its consumers, then it makes economic sense for the MoESD to consider sponsoring the bulk of the students locally. Cognizance has, of course, to be taken that while costs could be a deciding factor for sponsoring students locally, the MoESD should not lose sight of the need to cross breed the education system through external experiences. It is important to internationalize academic and professional education especially in this era of the world as a global village.

By implication this means that, a cross breed of our local education system and the external systems is still very key as one must compliment the other. While it is clear that, in developing programmes such as the BEd Educational management, international perspectives were taken into consideration, the actual implementation of programmes and practices may be different hence a need to have a cross section of school staff educated in various international systems.

Recommendations

1. As the study provides as insight into the acceptance of the BEd Management programme, it may be advisable for the government to sponsor more students to the local university and less to external universities. While the bulk of these students may be trained in the local institution, a significant percent should be externally trained for purposes of international flavour.
2. The Faculty to uphold the good work that is perceived by students in offering BEd Educational Management Programme
3. A further study to be conducted looking into the perceptions by industry of the products of the BEd Educational Management particularly in terms of their actual work performance.
4. More needs to be done in terms of enhancing peer interactions by students as this is pertinent when they go out into the world of work which demands collaborative and team work. This is because peer interaction was found to be wanting in this study.

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