

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Plenary Session

Following Mr. Kinyanjui's presentation of his lead paper, discussion turned first to the matter of incentives to teachers to undertake in-service courses. It was suggested that threatening teachers with loss of their position if they did not become qualified would not be appropriate in some countries. However, it was agreed that the financial incentive was a very strong one and should be used to involve as many teachers as possible: offering an improved salary on the completion of a course was very effective too.

Discussion then turned to the problem of persuading governments to use distance teaching to improve the quality of both qualified and unqualified teachers. It was suggested that the problem should be tackled at the highest level and that it was essential to provide facts on cost¹, personnel, equipment and the infrastructure required. There were some 40 examples of distance teaching in Africa and these could be used to persuade decision makers of the possibilities. Specialists could be found to give advice and assist governments in drawing up detailed proposals. It would also be possible to arrange for officials to visit other countries to see how distance teaching was working to deal with the problems of teacher education.

It was noted that the implementation of distance teaching programmes for providing in-service education for teachers was of concern to the Commonwealth Secretariat. But participants who were convinced of the value of distance teaching should be thinking of strategies to make a good case to their governments.

In answer to a question on the feasibility of distance education for teaching practical subjects such as science, it was said that any subject which could be taught face-to-face could be taught at a distance. A science experiment could be prepared which included all the items needed. The student taught through distance education could be helped to realise that his surroundings were a large laboratory and he could be taught to improvise, using things readily available.

Doubt was expressed about a system which depended so heavily on an externally based technology. For example, there could be problems when donor assistance ended and machinery broke down, spare parts were not available, or foreign exchange could not be used to import what was required. As a result, well-planned projects could crumble. Zambia had had experience of this kind with radio, TV and correspondence education. If the required technology was not already available in the country on which the projects depended, then they

1 Distance Teaching for Formal Education (What projects tell us about costs and effects): World Bank 1978. Editor Hilary Perraton.

were likely to fail.

In reply, it was pointed out that foreign aid was often needed to set up a project in the first place and the projects need not fail if clear objectives for the projects were set by the local people. The failure of equipment in such a situation was then a minor problem.

In reply to a question on the problems connected with distance teaching, and its effectiveness, it was pointed out that distance teaching could be effective in many ways but it could not solve all problems. It should be used where an evaluation based on the facts showed that it was the most effective means of solving a problem.

Group Sessions

Participants at this stage divided into two groups and undertook assignments set by Mr Kinyanjui. The reports submitted by each group are presented below.

ASSIGNMENT 1 (for educational administrators' group)

List and discuss the critical decision points regarding administrative activities in the training of teachers by distance teaching methods.

ASSIGNMENT 2 (for teacher educators' group)

List and discuss the initial decision points regarding instructional activities in the training of teachers by distance teaching methods.

SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSION - ASSIGNMENT 1

The main conclusions of the educational administrators' group were as follows:

Project Planning:

Though Government teachers can take advantage of the facilities provided for training by distance teaching methods, more provision should be made for teachers in private schools to participate in these schemes.

Generally, teachers trained by distance teaching methods appear to be as good as teachers trained in colleges. Research has also shown that there is no appreciable difference. ('Teacher Education' 1977 - International Council on Education for Teaching).

Distance teaching methods are expensive, and careful financial planning is called for, especially as equipment such as machines for printing, tape recorders and radios may have to be bought, and technicians employed to maintain the machinery.

It is essential to decide how many teachers are to be trained before beginning distance training. There are financial problems in certificating all teachers, as a country may not be able to pay a teaching force where every single teacher is fully qualified and entitled to full teacher salary rates.

The advantages of distance teaching methods are:

- a) large number of teachers can be produced quickly;

- b) induction courses can be given to help untrained teachers on the job before they embark on their course of training.

The main disadvantage is that face to face contact is missing between tutor and student.

Countries with no experience of distance education should seek advice before setting up a project.

In conclusion, distance teaching can work effectively providing the will and the money is there; and there is careful decision making and planning.

Media to be used:

A combination of suitable media appears to be the most effective approach for distance education. Different forms of utilization should be considered and the need for face to face contact should not be forgotten.

Some media may be more expensive in some countries, or more difficult to obtain. Thus countries should use what is immediately available, but maintenance costs should be closely considered.

Countries should examine all types of media to ascertain what best suits their needs. The main categories of media are:-

- a) Correspondence (books, worksheets etc.);
- b) Radio (including audio media such as tape recorders);
- c) Films (including transparencies and anything that can be projected);
- d) T.V. (including video tapes);
- e) Experiment kits and apparatus.

When choosing media, the following questions should be closely considered:

- a. How best can we utilize what we have?
- b. Can we provide the necessary feedback?
- c. What combination of media shall we use?
- d. What is the content that the media is expected to carry?
- e. How shall we train our personnel to use the media?
- f. Can we build sufficient motivation into the system?
- g. Can we support what is brought in from outside with what we already have?
- h. Can we put our existing buildings to fuller use?
- i. Do we know exactly what we will ask an outside agency for so that there is no duplication of equipment?

A national committee should be appointed to be in overall charge, to decide if the outside aid is leading the country along the lines it wishes to follow, and to make sure a project meets its objective.

In conclusion, we need to know our needs when choosing media; we need to know what media are immediately available; and we need to appoint a person to take charge of the whole project.

Motivation of the Learner:

The main incentive the teacher has for improving his qualification is of a better chance of promotion.

Various other ways of motivating the learner were cited. For example:

- (a) Nigeria gives teachers credits for courses accumulated, which lead to increments;
- (b) Zambia gives up to eight increments for a one year in-service course, and is intending to give credits for attendance at all courses and conferences;
- (c) Ghana is making proposals for national awards for hard working teachers; and
- (d) The Gambia makes unqualified teachers pay for in-service courses and this guarantees them employment if they successfully complete their training.

Minimising drop-out rates:

Materials should reach students on time and should be marked and returned promptly. This will encourage students and help them to feel they are not working completely independently. Every effort should be made to encourage students to meet from time to time to exchange ideas.

Expense:

Countries should note that distance teaching is not necessarily a cheaper way of training teachers.

The budget set aside for distance education must allow for dropping-out which is common in correspondence courses.

We cannot even be sure that distance teaching will work effectively for us; it is a case of 'suck it and see'. Funds must be available for experimentation.

Personnel:

As personnel are frequently initially recruited from outside, countries should be clear about what qualities they should look for.

There are problems involved in training local personnel to take over. For example, people starting a programme may not finish it because of transfer or promotion. Or people may be sent for training after a programme has started, so there is a time lag before they can run the programme. It should be noted also that teachers transferred to the programme from the classroom may already be set in their ways and that the psychological shock to someone if you make him change his job can be considerable. Every effort should be made to make the job attractive, so that people will stay in it.

Feedback and Evaluation:

Feedback and evaluation should be built into the programme. The feedback can be got by sending question sheets with materials as is done in Mauritius.

Good administrative machinery is essential to make a project effective.

Feedback should be carefully evaluated so that necessary changes can be made as required.

Flexibility:

It is essential that materials are relevant to the needs of the learner. If they are not they should be immediately changed.

The trainee:

Not all teachers do courses only for financial reward. If everyone wanted a higher salary and higher status, few would be left in teaching.

Most teachers are keen to improve themselves and more training gives more job satisfaction, so the feeling of self improvement is a reward other than financial, that these courses can give.

General points arising:

Be sure of objectives before asking outside agencies to help and see that they only run the show under guidance from the sponsoring authority.

Local personnel should work side by side with experts and receive on the job training.

Work out the budgetary implications of continuing the project after the donors have left.

Do not rush into projects. Rather, do a project piece-meal.

Try to ensure that personnel are allowed to complete a project before being transferred to other posts.

SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSION - ASSIGNMENT 2

The main conclusions of the teacher educators' group were as follows:

Instructional Materials

The following principles should be observed:

- (a) Instructional materials produced should be relevant to the various groups identified.
- (b) Instructional objectives should be clearly spelt out.
- (c) Instructional materials should have in-built feedback and evaluation devices for the benefit of both teacher trainees and tutors.
- (d) Instructional materials should serve the dual purpose of upgrading teacher-trainees as well as providing them with professional skills.

- (e) In view of rapid changes in educational reform, instructional activities should include familiarising the teacher-trainees with the curricular materials and new methodologies.

The Type of Media Used

It was suggested that a variety of media should be used. Their choice should depend on such factors as availability, ease of maintenance and the possibility of efficiency in the delivery system. It was revealed during the discussion that in many of the developing countries represented, radio reception was poor, notably in Botswana, the Gambia and parts of Swaziland. The group suggested that:

- (a) Correspondence, boosted by face-to-face teaching, is better for distance teaching if the lesson-writers, tutors, teacher-trainees and markers all play their parts effectively and promptly.
- (b) Cassette recorders and tapes could supplement the radio in poor reception areas. An example was given by Tanzania, where teacher-trainees who used this medium to complement other distance teaching media proved to be better informed than those trained by pre-service methods.
- (c) Where obtainable, video tapes should be used as an effective medium for the training of teachers in professional skills.

Motivation of Teacher Trainees

The group felt that a package to help teacher-trainees to be successful students - helping them learn how to learn - is a pre-requisite in distance teaching instruction.

Student involvement was also seen by the group as one of the key factors in motivation.

The following suggestions to ensure involvement were made:

- (a) Giving regular tests and exercises.
The exercises should require the student not only to remember what has been taught, but also to engage in activities with his pupils.
- (b) Making some of the teaching aids needed in the course.
- (c) Teachers centres can be utilized to bring teachers together to share ideas. Study groups can be formed by teacher trainees engaged in the same pursuit, in order to help one another; for instance, study groups have been used in Asia with a measure of success.
- (d) The teacher trainee's responsibilities in teaching, full-time caring for his family and contributing to the welfare of his community should be considered when deciding his study work-load. He should be

given learning materials that he can cope with comfortably, without sacrificing his other responsibilities.

- (e) The Headmaster should recognise successful efforts in mastering professional skills; for example, he could encourage successful teachers to demonstrate such skills to other staff members.

The Training of Personnel

The importance of training all personnel engaged in distance teaching-writers, tutors, radio personnel, markers and student counsellors was stressed if drop-out and failure rates were to be curbed. It was suggested that basic training should include the psychology of one adult learner, and the recognition of the fact that all teaching by distance teaching methods is intended ultimately for the benefit of the child, so this should be projected in all instructional activities.

Feedback and Evaluation

The group suggested that in addition to the feedback and evaluation that the teacher-trainee receives from his tutor, his Headmaster should also give supervision. For example in Ghana, the Headmaster sets aside fifteen periods per week for providing his staff with in-service training.

Trial Testing

It was urged that materials should be trial-tested before being produced and used on a large scale. It was further recommended that materials should be packaged in small units of information so that teacher-trainees might choose packages of their preference.

Face-to-Face Instruction

Face-to-face instruction as a supplement for distance teaching was considered to be vital in achieving what is difficult to do by distance teaching methods, such as the sensitization, motivation and face-to-face feedback on the performance of teacher-trainees. It was suggested that since tutors get the best chance of giving evaluation and feedback to the trainees through face-to-face instruction, it should be one of the determinants for weighing the success or otherwise of a teacher-trainee.

Conclusion

In order to encourage "continuing" teacher education by distance teaching methods, it was suggested that:

- (a) The materials supplied should help the teacher not only to upgrade his academic background but also to be a constant supply of ideas for himself and his learners.
- (b) A reference kit should be started by the teacher-trainee during his period of learning at a distance and continue beyond this period.

- (c) The timing and duration of in-service courses should take into account the fact that teachers need some break from work. For example, to persuade teachers to attend such courses, it should not be expected of them to use all their vacation time doing in-service work.