DISTANCE EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER COMPETENCIES. A CASE STUDY OF THE TEACHING OF HISTORY ON THE BACHELOR OF EDUCATION EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMME.

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Abstract
The Bachelor of Education External Degree Programme of Makerere University was launched in 1991. It was meant to give diploma teachers opportunity to upgrade their knowledge and skills in their various fields of specialisation (Chick, 1990). This report is part of a study which is being carried out on Distance education and development of teacher competencies. The paper focuses on examining whether the B.Ed (External) helps the history teachers on the programme acquire key teacher competencies like in-depth subject matter content, mastery of relevant delivery methods plus acquisition of management and administrative skills. Using questionnaires, interview schedules, non standardised competence tests and lesson observations the study reached a total of 210 respondents drawn from different districts in the country – Gulu, Lira, Soroti, Mbale, Masindi, Mbarara, Kabale, Kampala, Entebbe, Wakiso, and Mpigi. The study reveals that, although the B.Ed (External) has helped teachers improve their knowledge and skills, it has not entirely helped teachers acquire key teacher competencies because of weakness in the structure of the curriculum. This is seen in the use of a chronological curriculum which does not favour in-depth study, poor teaching methods used by tutors, lack of demarcation on where the diploma stops and the degree starts, emphasis on traditional modes of assessment that only test knowledge and facts but disregarded school practice and school based activities.

1.0 Introduction
The Bachelor of Education (External) (B.Ed External) was launched in 1991 with the overall aim of preparing ‘the students for adequate professional competence in facilitating learning and to give the students in-depth knowledge of teaching subjects selected for specialization’ (CCE 1990:22). Since its launching, the B.Ed (External) has come a long way. It has grown from only 198 students admitted in 1991 to current total enrolment of 3,348. However, in spite of this growth, there have been fears that the programme is not as effective and efficient as it should be. One of the areas of concern is the programmes effectiveness in helping teachers acquire key teacher competencies. According to the Teachers’ Code of Conduct for Uganda’s teachers, ‘a teacher’s chief responsibility is towards child/learner… and the teacher shall guide each child/learner… in order to develop the child/learner in body, soul, character and personality (Ssekamwa 2001:82). Teacher education programmes in Uganda are therefore expected to
prepare teachers to fulfil this role so the competencies that teachers acquire during their training should be the kind that will enable them do so (Obwoya Kinyera, Auma-Okumu, et.al 2002:14).

History is one of the subjects being offered on the secondary school curriculum in Uganda both at ordinary level (lower secondary school) and advanced level (upper secondary school). It is a very popular subject which is done by majority of the students as much as it is not compulsory. The B.Ed programme is also offering history as one of her content subjects and many students have registered for it. On the B.Ed programme, history is combined with Geography, Religious studies, Political Education and local languages like Luganda and Kiswahili. The subject was chosen for this study because it has the largest number of students taking it on the programme. The researcher was interested in knowing the multiplier effect the programme could be making back in schools were these students are teaching in terms of acquisition of competency in teaching history subject.

1.2 Objectives of the study

1. To assess whether the B.Ed External Programme has increased the History teachers’ knowledge of the subject matter.
2. To explore whether the B.Ed External Programme has enhanced the history teachers’ delivery methods and skills.
3. To assess whether the B.Ed External Programme has equipped history teachers with skills of managing and administering educational activities.
4. To establish the different methods of assessment used history students on the B.Ed programme.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Has the B.Ed External Programme helped history teachers to improve on their knowledge of subject matter?
2. Has the B.Ed External Programme helped to enhance history teachers’ delivery methods?
3. Does the B.Ed External Programme provide its history student teachers with the managing and administering educational activities?
4. What are the different methods of assessment used on the B.Ed programme for History teachers?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

1. The B.Ed Eternal Programme has not helped the history students to improve on knowledge of subject matter.
2. The B.Ed External Programme has not enhanced the history student’s teaching methods.
3. The B.Ed External Programme has not enhanced the history students’ management and administrative skills.
4. The B.Ed programme does not effective history assessment methods to measure acquisition of teacher competencies.
2.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. To gather the relevant data, the following instruments were used on the sample; questionnaires for students of B.Ed (External), tutors, and administrators of B.Ed (External); interview schedules for managers of the programme like the university administration, Head of Department of distance education, heads of of sections in the department, policy makers at the Ministry of Education and Sports, District Education offices, National teacher’s colleges, Makerere university and Kyambogo university employers like head teachers. Other methods of data collection were employed to included Lesson Observation - some students were sampled to be observed while they are actually teaching and in school. The observations were made with the help of a lesson observation guide / check list which was designed by the researcher using information as propounded by subject experts. The researcher sampled 25 students for lesson observation. Non – Standardised Competency tests, these were administered to first and third year B.Ed students who were sampled to participate in the study to assess their competencies at joining the programme and after being exposed to it. A variety of documents were consulted to get a deeper understanding of the contribution of DE in enhancing teacher competencies.

Using Purposive and Cluster sampling a total of 403 respondents participated in this study and were drawn from different districts in the country; Gulu, lira, Soroti, Mbale, Masindi, Mbarara,Kabale, Kampala, Entebbe, Wakiso, and Mpiigi. The data gathered was then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics; and presented descriptively, in tables and in graphs.

The pilot study was carried out to ascertain the reliability of the instruments. The different instruments were given to a sample of respondents who had been non randomly selected. For reasons of accessibility and costs in terms of both money and time, the researcher focused on respondents around Makerere University. One hundred and twenty (120) current students participated in the pilot study while on their face to face sessions. The number of students who participated in the study depended on their availability. This helped the researcher to improve on the research instruments after getting feedback. The supervisors also scrutinised the instruments with the researcher and advised accordingly.

4.0 RESULTS
To ascertain the teacher competencies the B.Ed programme has developed in the history students the researcher used the research questions.

4.1 Research Question One: Has the B.Ed External Programme helped history teachers to improve on their knowledge of subject matter. This question was answered by asking the history students both first and third to rate their level of subject matter content at joining and after joining the B.Ed programme.

Table 1 Students' rating of their level of content at joining and after joining the B.Ed programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of the subject matter content before joining the B.Ed programme</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of the subject matter content after joining the B.Ed programme</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table1, majority of both first and third year students reported that prior to joining the B.ed programme, their knowledge of the subject matter was generally good as shown by 75 (83%) and 144 (68.6%) respectively. Among the first years, no student rated his or her knowledge as being excellent but 9 (4.3%) third year students claimed that their knowledge of content was excellent before enrolling for the B.ed programme. To prove their case, the students who claimed that their content was good or excellent even before joining the B.Ed programme asserted that their students have been passing well national examinations and that the content was appropriate to the level they were teaching i.e. O’ level.

The results for third year students show that most of them indicated a great improvement in the content after joining the programme as shown from the table where many students 154 (73.3%) claimed that their level of content is now good while 56 (26.7%) averred that they have excellent knowledge of content. Indeed, a check-on whether the teachers had well prepared content notes showed that most of the teachers who were observed while teaching had well organized, clean notes that seemed to be up-to-date. However, there were a few whose lesson notes were in pathetic conditions, others quoting substandard notes from pamphlets with a lot of errors and omissions.

4.2 Verification of the first hypothesis
The null hypothesis stated that: “the B.Ed external Programme has not helped students to improve on knowledge of the subject matter”. This hypothesis was tested using a t-test for independent samples on whether there were significant mean differences in the ratings of
students in year one and three with regard to their knowledge of content before and after joining the B.Ed programme. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Average rating of the content before and after joining the B.Ed programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the subject matter content before joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the subject matter content after joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A look at the average rating of students on the first item reveals a moderately higher (2.83) rating of first year students on their knowledge of content before joining the B.Ed programme than that of their third year counterparts whose average was 2.77. The computed value of the t-statistic is equal to 1.032 with a p-value equal to .303. Thus, since the p-value is greater than the level of significance, the findings do suggest that the two categories of students’ rating on the knowledge of the content before joining the programme did not significantly differ which implies that first and third year students on the B.Ed programme rated their knowledge of content before joining the programme as being good.

With regard to their rating on the knowledge of content after joining the programme, the findings show that the rating of third year students is higher (3.27) than that of those in year one whose average is given by 3.11 and indeed, looking at the p-value of the t-statistic, the findings show a statistically significant variation in the ratings. This is so because the p-value is less than the level of significance (i.e. .011<.05). This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that the B.Ed programme has had a significant positive effect on students’ knowledge of the subject matter content particularly those in their final year of study at the university. They reported that the programme has enabled them to gain more knowledge that has helped them to teach confidently in upper secondary and also have registered improved performance of their students. The students revealed that the main strategies that have been employed by the programme and helped to improve on their content include in-depth research through assignments and use of class and group discussions which provided for free sharing of ideas. Other students however, did not think the programme has helped them due to inadequate
study materials, poor students support services and poor teaching methods employed by the tutors.

**None standardised competency test**

Non standardised competency test were given to first and third year students of history (50) to assess their level of subject matter content after joining the programme. The tests showed the following variations.

The results show that third year students performed better than first year students with 70% having excellent scores, 20% good and 10% average against the first years who had 45% excellent scores, 50% scored good grades while 5% obtained average scores in history. These scores are an indication that the content offered at Diploma level is not the same as that one offered at the degree. This is evidenced by the results in figure 4.2.1 above where third year students who had been exposed to the course before were able to perform well compared to first years who used their diploma knowledge. This demonstrates that the B.Ed programme enhances teachers’ subject matter content. The tutors interviewed strengthened this further by saying that while developing the curriculum, there was a deliberate effort to synchronise what was given at the diploma level by first and foremost scheming through the NTC syllabus, looking at the themes on the course outlines and their past examination papers. This helped to establish how deep or shallow the diploma content was and therefore offering guidance on the starting point for the degree content. They further reported that topics, areas or regions that were found similar or covered at diploma were either not included or enriched in terms of content and interpretation depending on the significance of the topic to teachers.

The study however further revealed from the interviews that the Bed programme is using the chronological curriculum. It is an approach of teaching history using the chronological outline type of syllabus which follows events logically. It is the most popular curriculum used in universities (Steel, 1983) however it has been found out that students who use this curriculum work through at a very superficial level since its weak, wide shallow and much of the information taught is not necessary (Tamale,1998). This therefore means that the approach probably has a big effect on the level of content the students take in.
other areas of concern that the study highlighted as having affected the content enhancement poorly teaching methods used by tutors, lack of demarcation on where the diploma stops and the degree starts, emphasis on traditional modes of assessment that only test knowledge and facts but disregarded school practice and school based activities

In addition to the above the researcher also used Lesson Observations to get a clear picture of how the programme has helped students to enhance their content. This was seen in the confidence exhibited by the teachers while teaching who rich examples and illustrations given to the students. The researcher also analysed some records of students at school and saw a marked improvement of students’ performance in schools among the third years who had been exposed to the programme.

4.3 Research question 2: Has the B.Ed External Programme helped to enhance teachers’ delivery methods?

In this research question, the research sought to examine the impact of the B.Ed programme on teachers’ delivery methods. In the questionnaire, students were asked to rate their teaching methods before and after joining the B.Ed programme. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of their ratings in relation to their years of study. Subsequently, their ratings were then averaged to find out whether there were significant differences in the ratings of the two groups. These are summarized in table 3 which gives the means, the calculated value of the t-statistic and the p-value.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods before joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods after joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In table 3 majority of both first 65(72.2%) and third 122(58.1%) year students reported that their methods before joining the B.ed programme were good. However, an analysis of these results show that unlike third years, the highest percentage of those who indicated that the methods they used were good happened to be their counterparts in first year. In fact among those who gave themselves an average rating, the highest percentage was that of 3rd years (37.6%) whereas the 1st years comprised a percentage of only 16.7%. On the statement that required them to rate the methods after joining the programme, the trend changed in favour of 3rd years with a percentage of 68.6% who indicated that the methods were good while that of 1st years was 55.6%. Actually, after being exposed to different methods, 3rd year students acquired different methods of teaching and this explains why only a few of them 5 (2.4%) rated the methods with an average ranking while on the other hand 61(29%) stated that their methods were excellent.

4.3 Verification of the second hypothesis
The null hypothesis stated that: “The B.Ed External Programme has not enhanced teacher’s teaching methods.” The hypothesis was also tested using a t-test for independent samples to establish whether there were significant mean variations in the ratings of the two categories of students in year one and three regarding their delivery methods and skills before and after joining the B.ed programme. Thus, for the purpose of obtaining the overall view of how they rated themselves on the methods before and after joining the programme, average scores were computed and Table 4 presents a summary of the findings showing the mean, the value of the t-statistic and the p-value.

Table 4: Students’ rating of the methods before and after joining the B.Ed programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods before joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>4.026</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods after joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.247</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to table 4, the results show that first year students’ rating on the methods was significantly better than that of how third years rated themselves on the same statement. On average, 1\textsuperscript{st} years had a score of 2.94 while 3\textsuperscript{rd} years’ average was 2.67 and looking at the p-value of the t-statistic, the findings show that .000 being less than the level of significance (.05) at which the null hypothesis was tested, this led the researcher to conclude that the average rating of 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} years was different with respect to the methods before joining the B.ed programme with the former reporting the highest rating than the latter.

However, the trend changed for the average rating after joining the programme where 3\textsuperscript{rd} years average score of 3.27 was significantly (.025<.05) higher than that of 1\textsuperscript{st} years who had a mean of 3.11. This seems to suggest that compared to the situation before they entered, third year students are better teachers owing to the fact that they have been exposed to various methods of teaching for the three year period of study at the university under the B.ed programme. Going by the above results, it is right to state that the B.ed programme has had a significantly vital contribution in equipping B.ed students with diverse, appropriate and new methods of delivering the content to secondary school students.

The tutors interviewed said they expose students to different methodologies during face-to-face according to students which they believe are appropriate for teaching back in their schools. They contented that since they are being given new content, new skills are given too more so to enable them to teach in upper secondary. Tutors admitted to using various methods themselves when teaching the B.Ed students. Among the methods are brainstorming, discussion, demonstration, lecture, question and answer. The tutors interviewed however observed that skills development on the B.Ed programme is limited by lack of supervision since the students do not go for school practice. They suggested that in the absence of school practice, the students should be exposed to school base activities and use of mentors in the schools for follow up. They also pointed out that peer teaching would be helpful but it is time consuming since face to face sessions have limited time.

The researcher also used Lesson Observations to get a clear picture of how the programme has helped students to enhance their teaching methods. The guide sought information on the knowledge on formal preparation of the teacher in terms of content to be presented and teacher’s
methods and techniques to be used, students’ activities, class management, and general teacher involvement in school activities. The students records were also examined to find out how they are performing before the after the teacher joining the B.Ed programme. This helped give first hand information which is bias free and also substantiated what the researcher got from interviews and questionnaires. The observations found out that most of the B.Ed teachers had schemes of work but not lesson plans which they argued was a tedious. They however demonstrated confidence while teaching a sign that they knew the subject matter well and the class management was excellent. There was also marked improvement in the students’ performance as noted from the students school records consulted.

4.4 Research question 3: Does the B.Ed External Programme provide its student with skills of managing and administering educational activities?

**Competency in management and administration skills**  
Among the goals of the external program is to expose and equip students with up to date skills of managing and administering educational activities. In fact, one of the managers of the programme emphasized that the program encourages imparting skills related to management and administration and indeed, this is evidenced in the B.Ed curriculum that imparts those skills through a course unit in administration under professional subjects. Students are also encouraged to participate in leadership though these are quite few. Leadership skills are necessary since many of the trainees are leaders in their various schools.

In view of the above background, students were asked to rate their management skills before and after exposure to on the Bed programme using a four point likert scale and the results are presented in table 5.

**Table 5: Students’ rating of the management and administrative skills before and after joining the B.Ed programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management skills before joining the B.Ed programme</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management skills before joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In table 5, a considerable number of 1st years contended that their management skills prior to joining the B.ed programme were good as reported by 65 (72.2%) respondents. On the other hand, the highest percentage of 3rd years gave themselves an average rating (48.6%) on the same item. The fact that 1st year students gave themselves a more favourable rating seems to indicate that owing to the fact that they had not been exposed to a variety of management skills, they believed that the knowledge they obtained at diploma level made them better managers while on the other hand, the 3rd years having been exposed to various management skills came to a realization that what they acquired at diploma level were not enough and this perhaps explains why most of them rated their skills with an average. In fact, no first year student rated his/her management skills as being poor but 5.7% of the 3rd years did. This probably explains why on being asked to provide their rating of the management skills after joining the programme most of the 3rd years 143 (68.1%) reported that the programme enabled them to obtain good management skills that made them become good managers in their respective places of work. As for the first years 55.6% conceded that they were better managers than before while 27.8% claimed to have obtained excellent managerial skills after joining the programme.

### 4.5 Verification of the third hypothesis

The null hypothesis stated that: **“The B.Ed External Programme has not enhanced the students’ management and administrative skills”**. This hypothesis was tested basing on the ratings of students in years one and three under the B.Ed programme and the statistical test employed was the t-test for independent samples that made it possible to make a comparison in the average ratings of the two groups to see whether there were any statistically significant differences in the ratings of students with regard to how they perceived the management and administrative skills they were exposed to during the course of their studies at the university. Accordingly, like in the previous sections, in order to obtain an overall view of how students in the two years rated themselves on the management skills before and after joining the programme,
mean scores were computed which provided the researcher with an overall picture of the effect of the B.ed programme on equipping students with management and administrative skills. The findings are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6: Students' rating of the management skills before and after joining the B.Ed programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management skills before joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>7.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management skills after joining the B.Ed programme</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As earlier seen in the descriptive statistics (see table 5), the results indicated in table 6 above show that on average, 1st year students gave themselves a higher rating of the management skills (2.94) which, if rounded off to the nearest whole number implies that they rated their management skills as good while 3rd years’ average score was 2.40 implying an average rating (if rounded off to the nearest whole number) and the difference in the two means is statistically different (.000<.05). This implies that students’ rating of the management skills before joining the programme depend on the year of study with 1st years reporting a more favourable rating than their counterparts in 3rd year.

The same table also gives a summary of the average rating on the management skills after joining the B.ed programme and according to the findings, although first years’ average score was relatively higher (3.11) than that of 3rd years (3.03), the p-value of .301 shows that the difference in the means are not statistically significant. This suggests that the opinions of 1st and 3rd years on management skills after joining the programme were the same. In other words, the two average scores if rounded to the nearest whole number reveal that the two groups reported that they obtained good management skills after joining the B.ed programme. According to the interviews, the management skills that the programme has enabled students to acquire include: skills of delegation, financial management, guidance and counselling, effective communication.
and listening, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, time management and planning of school activities. Some of these skills were reiterated in the questionnaire as depicted in Figure 4.2.16.

The tutors and managers said that the B.Ed programme equips students with management and administrative skills through the following strategies.

- The B.Ed curriculum has a course unit in education administration which is a general course for all the students.
- Students are encouraged to participate in leadership by taking up positions of responsibility right from subject level to the University Guild.
- Students attend faculty academic boards to represent their interests as such they are being exposed to decision making skills.
- Students participate in annual planning meetings for the department of distance education.
- Students are also exposed to communication skills through interactions with tutors and fellow students.
- Reporting skills are also passed on through courses taught in research methods.

On the other hand, 55% student respondents said they are not exposed to management skills because of the following reasons;

i) There is no deliberate effort by the programme managers to pass on skills in management and administration.

ii) The B.Ed students are not involved in decision making at the university neither are they consulted on anything as stakeholders.

iii) No effort to pass on communication skills through seminars, workshops, discussions etc.

iv) The department has failed to model management skills to the students because it is always disorganised and does not seem to plan for her activities.

v) Staffing and directing skills are exposed to students in a negative way for example; few tutors Vs large numbers of students, poorly behaved staff, apathy to students and poor service to students.
4.6 Research question 4: What assessment methods are used on the B.Ed programme to measure acquisition of teacher competencies?

The final research question sought to find out the assessment methods that tutors are used by tutors on the B.Ed programme to measure the acquisition of competencies of students on the B.ed Programme. To answer this question, both tutors and students were asked about the nature of assessment methods given to promote the acquisition of teaching competencies. The findings are graphically represented in the figure 2.

![Figure 2: Students’ responses on the nature of assessments given to promote acquisition of teaching competencies](image)

From figure 2, the percentage counts for students in year one and three show that the most popular forms of assessments given to students in order to promote acquisition of teaching competencies among B.ed students include: assignments, examinations and tests. Others include research reports, direct observation, school based activities and portfolios.

![Figure 3: Tutors’ responses on the nature of assessments given to promote acquisition of teaching competencies](image)
The percentages show that according to tutors of B.Ed external interviewed on the assessment of teaching methods examinations were cited as the most popular forms of assessing students (31%) followed by Assignments (30%) research reports (20%) and tests (19%). none of them (0%) talked about direct observation. Thus from their point of view, tutors contended that by nature of their study, the most practical way of assessing them is by using examinations, tests, research reports and assignments. They further pointed out that direct observation is the ideal because it would give tutors opportunity to evaluate students objectively however the programme does not provide them with the opportunity. Portfolios are not used at all as much as they are widely used in distance education.

School based activities
Tutors were asked whether they ever use school based activities to train and assess their teaching methods. About 60% agreed to using school based activities to train students and also assess their competencies as it was the only way to be sure that students had grasped the skills. The 40% who said were not using school / classroom based activities for teaching and assessing stated that they were not sure that the strategy would help since there was not opportunity to see what the students were doing. One tutor in his own words said:
“Even if you give them that activity how are we going to ensure that somebody else is not doing it for them?”

Need for School Practice

Students, tutors and managers of the B.Ed programme were asked to provide their independent opinions regarding the role of school practice in assessing students’ mastery of the subject matter content and the methods used to deliver the history content to secondary school students. In view of that, a question was put to students to indicate whether the B.Ed External students should be sent for school practice so that they can be assessed. Respondents were asked to respond to this statement by indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed.

Table 6: Opinions on the need for school practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>The BED students should go for teaching practice to improve on their content and teaching methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its expensive</td>
<td>5(1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They already have the skills</td>
<td>30(10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have already done it at diploma</td>
<td>90(30.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To perfect the methods they were not comfortable with</td>
<td>15(5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To consolidate new methodology that has been learnt</td>
<td>11(3.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most students expressed negative sentiments with regard to using school practice as a method of assessing students’ level of content and the methodology. This is because the number (or percentage) of those who agreed and strongly agreed was smaller than that of their counterparts who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and according to those who disagreed, besides having done it at diploma level, they claimed that they are well experienced fulltime teachers having taught for a long time so they have all the skills needed for teaching and
therefore teaching practice would be a wastage of time and resources. All they need is material, theoretical and professional methods of handling learners.

On the other hand, those who agreed said that since the content of the programme elevates the students to another level, their competences should be tested through teaching practice. A contrasting view came from a respondent who said that since the students are qualified and practicing teachers, there is no rationale of assessing the methodology, instead, they should be tested to see whether their knowledge of content has deepened which can be done through written examinations and not through school practice.

Some tutors interviewed however, emphasized that it is necessary to observe the trainees implement the content and methodologies as it helps them to ensure that they have grasped the required knowledge and concepts, to help them improve on their areas of weakness.

5.0 Discussion of findings

All the three above hypotheses tested rejected the null hypotheses that claimed that the B.Ed programme has helped the students to improve on their subject matter content, teaching methods and management skills. This was so because of the tested means of student’s views between first years and third years. The P value of the third years was higher than that of first years years implying that the B.Ed programme has enhanced the student’s teaching competencies in history.

This was also substantiated by the qualitative data provided. The qualitative data however brought out a lot of inadequacies in the curriculum structure as well as the general programme management which cannot be over looked. The Curriculum for B.Ed is a traditional teacher education curriculum. It comprises of Foundations of Education, Subject matter studies and Professional studies. B.Ed students take two teaching subjects each which they teach at secondary school levels. The amount of time given to each of the components and structuring varies from one institution to another (Aguti, 2004). On the B.Ed Programme it is 40:60 ratios, this means the professional courses take 40% of the time while content subjects including history take 60%. The students interviewed asserted that more time should be added on content coverage i.e. 20:80 since there is nothing new they learn in professional studies.
The history tutors interviewed revealed that the B.Ed students are offered the Chronological history curriculum. It is an approach of teaching history using the chronological outline type of syllabus which follows events logically. It is the most popular curriculum used in universities (Steel, 1983) however it has been found out that students who use this curriculum work through at a very superficial level since its weak, wide shallow and much of the information taught is not necessary (Tamale, 1998). This is probably the reason why there is poor performance at university level because the students cannot effectively grasp the entire content scope to be learnt. This is a worse situation for history students on the B.Ed programme who are subjected to this kind of curriculum and at the same do not have adequate study materials to mitigate the situation. Other scholars like (Bush, 1973 and Lloyd, 1974) however, think the chronological history curriculum is good for the preparation for the later study of history in depth. This may imply that this kind of curriculum is good for grade V or Diploma students such that when they enter the University they should be introduced to the Parch Curriculum uses a topic approach and directly addresses the needs of secondary schools. This however requires higher level of understanding and a greater range of resources like text books and teaching aids for successful teaching and learning.

In relation to the some of the students’ respondents and mostly third years reported that they were not given enough time for the course to master the required content by the end of the semester. This is because the curriculum is heavy; they cited education foundation courses and professional subjects as an added burden since they already covered them at diploma level. In fact, 80% of the students said these courses are not necessary as they claimed there is nothing new they study. Most students said that the two face to face sessions in a semester are not enough to cover the course outline or all the required content. However some tutors and managers were positive that the time allocated for the course was sufficient given that most of the disciplines were taught in National Teacher’s Colleges (NTC) while they were pursuing their Diploma studies. At degree levels the tutors are simply enriching, broadening and deepening what the students already know. This could be an eye opener to the managers of the programme to consider more allocation to content subjects and a reduction on the professional ones since we are already dealing with professional teachers.
The B.Ed curriculum however is criticised for being irrelevant, theoretical i.e. there is little emphasis on skills needed in the field and lack of practical application of what is learnt (Aguti, 2006). The B.Ed Programme lacks the teaching and school practice component in its curriculum and therefore it is hard to establish whether students become better teacher after the programme. There is also inadequate coverage of all the relevant topics due inadequate study materials and limited time during face to face sessions. Good quality and well prepared study materials whether print based or employing a range of multimedia approaches are the “teacher “in distance education models they need to be made available to all the students undertaking distance education programmes (Wrightson and Otto, 2005).

The students interviewed confirmed that there no study materials in history on the B.Ed, they instead depend on handouts of photocopies from text books. These are helpful because they fill an existing gap. However, this material is not written in the distance education mode with the needs of the distance learner in mind. This is contrary to the accepted view that the needs of a distance learner are specific and therefore materials produced for them must be written with these in mind. According to (Sherry, 1996) as quoted by (Gudula, 2006), Distance education needs to follow sound instructional approaches to achieve its purpose. The theoretical basis on which instructional models are based affects not only the way in which information is communicated to the student, but also the way in which the student makes sense and constructs new knowledge from the information which is presented. Instructional approaches on the B.Ed programme take the form of print materials, face to face sessions, and students study groups and counselling.

Other factors that the students and other respondents raised that could have interfered with smooth acquisition of teacher competencies in history subject.

**Ineffectiveness of Student Support System**

A strong student support system will complement the Materials system, and will, in turn, be supplemented by a face-to-face component. This blended approach of delivery would ensure acquisition of teacher competencies. However as already indicated this is not the case on the B.Ed programme. Services like guidance and counselling, use of study centres, study groups,
ICTs, timely and effective feedback on student’s assignments and use of personal tutors or mentors are either non-existent or ineffective. According to (Tait, 2000) student services perform cognitive, affective and systematic functions. The affective support function seems to be lacking on the B.Ed programme because the student respondents said that they needed more contact with the tutors who also said they do not have much time to the students one on one.

**Poor Assessment procedures and inadequate Monitoring**

The issue of assessment is central to the understanding of competencies of students studying at a distance to become competent teachers. The traditional mode of assessment which measures skills and knowledge of distance teacher trainees is very narrow (Quan – Baffour, 2005). This is because it is examination based and summative in nature, emphasising pencil and paper tests and tends to rely on recall of content. However, for assessment to be inclusive and holistic, institutions offering teacher education through distance education should may need to apply multiple assessment strategies such as school based activities, portfolios, observations, projects in addition to examinations and assignments. The B.Ed programme uses the traditional methods to assess students even with skills which are meant to be practical. There is need for the programme to use a variety of methods to assess students especially when it comes to skills. If the students cannot go school practice the university should think of entering into partnerships with other institutions and schools where these students serve to assist in the supervision.

**Feedback on assignments.**

Assignments are a teaching tool in distance education. One of the most effective feedbacks to students on their academic progress is through assignments. According to (Black and William, 1998), the provision of feedback on learners’ assignments helps students to get a better sense of what content they have mastered and what areas they are weak in, allowing them to focus their efforts were they are weakest and feel more positive about the learning process because they feel as though someone is interested in their progress. Feedback on assignments is generally not being used as a support mechanism for providing meaningful and effective feedback to students on the B.Ed programme. Although, assignments are being given regularly to students marking is minimal in its provision of comments, summaries of key problem areas and solutions associated with the assignments are never circulated to students or dealt with during face-to-face sessions.
Assignment marking is either quite delayed or, in some cases, they are not returned at all. The department currently has not developed any quality assurance systems for assignments which benchmarks turnaround time or provides guidelines on the nature of comment-feedback to be provided on marked scripts. The assignments given to the students are too academic and abstract and therefore not helpful to enhance learning especially of practical skills. The programme as well as tutors does not give students opportunity to relate theory to practice. It would be meaningful to give these students classroom based activities since they not get opportunity to go for school practice. This would help the tutors to truck the students’ progress outside class.

Lack of Study Skills in Distance Education.

The lack of study skills by the students has affected the way they learn, since they do not know what and how to do it. Teachers in distance education have less contact with students so students’ progress is much more dependent on their own efforts. COL (2004) contends that for successful acquisition of intended objectives of teaching and learning in distance education, students should be exposed to the following study skills; planning, active learning, self assessment and note taking.

Inadequate tutor training in handling distance learners.

Most of the tutors however confessed that they had not been trained to teach other than the course outline which was given to them. This scenario means that most of the tutors are teaching but not facilitating which affects the quality of the service being offered and consequently the acquisition of teacher competencies. According to Sherry (1990) a distance education tutor has to know a little more in addition to being certified to teach, or being knowledgeable in the subject area.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The B.Ed programme at Makerere University is fulfilling its purpose of upgrading the academic and professional competence of a large number of teachers in Uganda. The results of this study reveal that whereas the B.Ed (External) has helped teachers acquire some key competencies; this is not wholly achieved because of inadequate study materials, poor management of students support services and inadequacies in the curriculum, poor methods of teaching by the tutors due
to inadequate of training, and because of the inadequate opportunities for integration of theory and practice. The challenge therefore is for the programme to address these deficiencies and inadequacies so as to ensure that the teachers graduating from the programme are competent enough to handle the tasks expected of them.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The University should change the history curriculum from the chronological history syllabus which seems too wide, shallow and superficial and therefore does not address the needs of an upgrading teacher to a Parch curriculum which follows relevant topics which addresses needs of the secondary school syllabus.

The structure of the curriculum for the B.Ed should be changed from 40: 60 to 20:80 such that 80% of the contact hours is relegated to content and 20% to professional studies. The argument is that these are already qualified teachers and what they need at degree level is to upgrade their content knowledge and skills. Related to this is the heavy workload of students. This should be realistic so that students can balance their studies with other obligations.

The B.Ed curriculum however is criticised for being irrelevant, theoretical i.e. there is little emphasis on skills needed in the field and lack of practical application of what is learnt. The B.Ed Programme managers should endeavour provide for hands on activities in its curriculum so that theory and practice are integrated.

Since this a distance education programme, effort should be made by the managers of the programme to train the tutors on how to facilitate learning in DE. The tutors use participatory methods of teaching to encourage interactivity other than the use of traditional lecture methods which does not allow students to develop skills like critical thinking or problem solving. Ideally distance education mode o study is a student centred learning approach not teacher centred.

The programme should also consider moving away from the traditional assessment methods that test only knowledge and facts to incorporate other methods outside the classroom which are authentic for assessing skills. The curriculum should also consider incorporation of school
practice in the B.Ed curriculum since these students are being exposed to new knowledge and skills which need to be assessed. Continuous assessment should take the form of not only tests and assignments but also school based activities so that theory and practice are integrated.

Independent self-directed learning does not take place automatically (Brindley, 1995). Without independence and self direction, distance learners cannot successfully achieve their goal of learning. The B.Ed managers therefore should seriously incorporate study skills in the curriculum and also inculcates these skills into the students. This will empower students to own their learning and to assume more responsibility for their own success.

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