Learnership in South African Schools as a Community of Practice: An Open Distance Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT The appropriateness of Learnership Programs (LPs) that combine work-based experience for teacher training through an Open Distance Learning (ODL) Institution motivated this research. The specific aim of this paper was to investigate the experiences of student teachers participating in LPs and to empower them towards a career in teaching. A qualitative research approach was chosen as the research methodology. Interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questions were used to gather data from 35 participants. The theoretical framework focused on the situated learning theory by Lave and Wenger. It is evident from the findings that student teachers experienced their learnership appointments at schools as mostly a very valuable positive learning experience. These LPs could be a key influence in the success and/or failure of enticing and keeping student teachers in schools. The recommendations indicate LPs as the way forward to improve teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa has a very high unemployment rate, yet at the same time it has a shortage of qualified people to fill the many vacancies in various fields. In an effort to address both of these problems, the government looked for practical ways to educate the population and organize training systems for school leavers and unemployed adults. The introduction of learnerships has gone a long way towards achieving this (South Africa Learnership Programs 2016-2017, 2015). One of the greatest challenges facing the South African education system is the production of sufficient qualified, competent teachers, who can provide quality teaching for all school subjects and phases. Whether South Africa is able to meet this critical challenge is a question that motivated this paper, with specific reference to learnerships (Hofmeyr 2015).

"We are facing a drastic education disaster in our country. The poor education standards, so prevalent in a large majority of state schools, has very little to do with the curriculum, which has undergone numerous changes since 1994 but still produces a substandard outcome" (Sunday Times 2015). Fourie (2006) and Rademeyer (2006) both refer to qualified teachers leaving the teaching profession due to poor salaries as well as stress caused by, for example, too many administrative duties, continuous changes and problems with discipline due to overcrowded classrooms. Ncgukana (2013) reports on a case where there were nine teachers available for 800 learners. This lack of well-qualified teachers could have a ripple effect on the country as the growth potential of the economy and further job creation are ultimately affected. Education is all important both for teachers and learners, when competing within a global economy. Is it not time for the education leaders to admit that student success, the present curriculum, salary and socio-economic surroundings, are a direct reflection of teachers commitment to the students they teach. According to an article in the Mail and Guardian (Wilkinson 2015), "The education system is often described as being in crisis. A recent claim says eighty percent of schools could be "dysfunctional"." According to Taylor (Marais 2015), this poor quality of teaching is already embedded in the training of teachers.

The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in South Africa was established in 1999 to address shortages of expertise in teacher training. In 2003 their originally limited lifespan was increased to an indefinite duration despite the fact that the majority were completely inefficient. The SETAs are financed with a levy of

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one percent on the companies' salary accounts (SETA 2014). In 2004 the Minister of Labor announced that SETAs would be reconstructed, but nothing came of this announcement (Le Roux 2006: 21).

In the annual report of Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA): Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) (SETA: ETDP 2002: 1), its mission is spelled out as being "to promote and facilitate an increase in the skills profile of the sector's workforce to benefit employers and employees in the sector by encouraging a partnership between public and private organizations to assure the quality of provision of education, training and development". This mission has however fallen along the wayside as SETA: ETDP has experienced internal organizational problems and could not fulfill this promise. Since 2002 their role in the support of student teachers has decreased yearly and at present hardly features at all. Le Roux (2006), a well-known economist, stated that most SETAs turn out to be a waste of time and money, as they are not fulfilling their mission. As SETA: ETDP was established to offer financial support to student teachers by means of LPs, many schools have stepped in to support student teachers in their quest to become teachers by adapting and running their own LPs for student teachers, based on the original idea of the SETA LPs. All learnership contracts must still be registered with the Sector Education Training Authority (SETA) for that specific industry, which guarantees that the learnership is of a high standard.

An open distance learning (ODL) approach has been followed in this paper because a number of learnership student teachers study by means of ODL. ODL seeks to assist in the achievement of equivalence of educational opportunities and equality among students, in order to respond to the constantly increasing demand for education, among those whose circumstances do not permit them to enroll in traditional classroom-based learning (University of Saudi Arabia 2015). ODL entails offering training and education by ways other than face-to-face instruction. ODL instruction ('click' universities) is flexible and technology is used to teach, while residential ('brick') universities mostly depend on face-to-face tuition (Jegede 2009). ODL institutions interact with students by means of purposely-designed printed materials, online technology that provides tutorial matter, collabora-

tion, instant feedback and support for learning and teaching. Other communication tools include personal appointments with lecturers, telephone calls, email, faxes, SMSs, workshops, school visits by lecturers (that is, to students during their teaching practice sessions at schools), DVDs, video and group discussion classes and forums. Technology contributes to the globalization of higher education because it makes the transfer of knowledge borderless (Jegede 2009).

Aim of the Study

The main aim of this paper was to investigate the experiences of ODL student teachers participating in LPs as a means of empowering students towards a career in teaching. To conduct this research the following research question was formulated:

How do student teachers experience LPs as a means to helping them to become well-qualified teachers?

In the next section relevant literature as well as the conceptual and theoretical framework are explained. The research design and data analysis are discussed, followed by a presentation of findings, the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

A learnership is a work-based learning (WBL) program. This means that classroom studies at a college or training center are combined with practical on-the-job experience. One learns better when one can practice what one has been taught in the classroom and in a workplace environment (South Africa Learnership Programs 2016-2017, 2015). WBL is a style of learning suited to the fast-changing world of today, where student teachers find themselves with a need for academic knowledge and practical experience. They learn about the real life in the social world (a community of practice) around them by listening, watching, absorbing and actively participating (Evans 1986; Anderson et al. 1996). WBL can be described as an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of student teachers and workplaces (the schools) (Engel-Hills et al. 2010). Furthermore, WBL can be used as an umbrella term that includes a variety of LPs, for example, apprenticeships, internships or learnerships.

WBL is supported by the situated learning theory by Lave and Wenger formulated in 1991. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (2000) argued that the success of organizations depends on their ability to design themselves as social learning systems, and also to participate in broader real life learning systems such as a school community. Wenger (2000) states that social learning systems consist of three constitutive elements, namely, (1) communities of practice (CoP), (2) mutual engagement, and (3) a shared repertoire of communal resources.

Student teachers as newcomers join a new community of practice (CoP), and the school as social 'container' of the teaching and learning competences (Wenger 2000). For these CoPs to function competently they must have a sense of joint or shared enterprise to understand what their community is about while they hold one another accountable for individual actions (Wenger 2000). It will be expected from student teachers to understand the school enterprise well enough to be able to contribute wisely to it. This promotes joint ownership by student teachers and mentors (Murthy 2011). Communities of Practices have already produced a shared repertoire of communal resources (Wenger 2000). These resources would include all the learning activities that the school engaged in, and for student teachers to be competent they must have access to this repertoire and be able to use it appropriately. These practical learning activities would further be strengthened by the academic work expected of the student teachers by the ODL institutions without removing the student teacher from the WBL situation.

Mutual engagement happens as the student teachers and mentor teachers interact to establish acceptable relationships of mutuality with other staff members as well as the norms within which the school functions (Lave and Wenger 1991). This will establish and encourage communication and teamwork. Through this interaction student teachers will eventually become competently able to teach well and be trusted as full-fledged partners in these teaching and learning interactions. As the reconfiguration of the relationship between competence of the mentors (as representatives of the community) and experiences of the student teachers is an important aspect of learning, a fine balance should be maintained. Expertise from the mentors depends on a *convergence* between experience and com-

petence while innovative learning requires their *divergence*. This implies that the mentors' competence must anchor the process but these competences also need to interact with what the student teachers have to offer for example, new innovations in teaching and learning. This means that the mentor and student teachers must listen, explain and exchange their knowledge. These elements, coupled with the schools' needs being borne in mind by ODL institutions, can only result in better-qualified teachers.

Furthermore, according to the situated learning theory, identities are shaped by connectedness through shared learning experiences, reciprocity, affection and mutual engagement. All participants have their own relationships in these communities that enable them to build their own knowledge system to "know". Learning is therefore defined as interplay between social competence and personal experience, a dynamic two-way relationship between mentors, student teachers and the social systems (Wenger 2000; Murthy 2011). According to Eckert (Wenger 2000), sharing knowledge is not abstract but a part of belonging. This principle is very applicable during LPs where mentors, student teachers and ODL institutions should work as a team, sharing knowledge and skills. While multi-membership of different communities of practice is an inherent aspect of everybody's identities, some crucial qualities must coexist to constitute a healthy social identity. A community identity will show effectiveness or functionality through action and participation, in order to socially empower all the participating members (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2000).

Schools, as Communities of Practices, offer an opportunity to negotiate competences for student teachers through direct participation in teaching activities. As a consequence, schools remain important social units of learning within larger communities, such as ODL institutions, as a system of constellations of interrelated communities of practice.

The Nature of a Learnership Program

A learnership can be defined as a mode of delivering a learning program that combines work-based experience with structured learning (Clark 2007: 20). In the past, the education given in schools and other education facilities did not really have much in common with the working

world. This meant that people entered the workplace with all the knowledge but no practical experience on how to do the job. In-house training given at companies did exactly the opposite, it taught the "how to" do certain tasks without the "why" they needed to be done. In order to do any job effectively one needs to know both (South Africa Learnership Programs 2016-2017, 2015). Learnerships teach both the "why" and the "how to" by creating a contract between the learner, the learning provider and the organization or business.

Poor employability of university graduates and their lack of industry readiness has been a cause for concern across the globe (Murthy 2011). While the skills gap in university graduates is one side of the malaise, it is apparent that learning approaches in academia are too unsynchronized with the lifestyle changes of the Millennial or Generation Y (present day students born after 1980) to be effective. Prensky in Murthy (2011: 289) opines, "today's students are no longer the people the educational system was designed to teach". Generation Y students, who are narcissistic and self-centered, expect to see immediate results and have a sense of entitlement in their learning activities.

They have mutated to adapt to an age of abundance and an environment characterized by high technology they interact with the whole day and will change jobs frequently, not willing to work for future benefits (Stein 2013; Booysen 2013). These students seem to learn more when they are active participants in their own learning activities, in contrast to listening to their professors' teaching (Scarboro 2012). Facing these facts may offer an important starting point when considering alternative routes to becoming a teacher. Teaching and teachers have to evolve in relation to developments in technology, knowledge growth as well as social opportunities and developments (Sykes et al. 2010). The question to address would be: *On what basis might teacher education be founded to encourage more students to join the profession?*

There are already several occupations that have compulsory apprenticeships, for example, artisans, or internships, such as lawyers and accountants, or workplace learning, such as health professions and engineering. Different terms are, however, used to denote these service or project-based learning (PBL) periods, for example, 'externship' (as a mini-internship or a one week job-shadowing), 'practicum', 'placement', 'internship' or 'learnership', depending on the occupation and the conditions of the LPs that connect students with communities, service partners, and academic experts (Engel-Hills et al. 2010). The workplace therefore serves both as a learning resource and as a benchmark of practice.

A LP for teacher training is based on an internship that assists student teachers to gain learning experience situated in a school environment (CoP). Participating in an internship is a great low-risk opportunity to build a résumé and explore career options (Clark 2007). Student teachers work as assistants with qualified mentor teachers, in classrooms while earning a basic salary to support themselves. An LP therefore combines practical work-integrated experience with theoretical knowledge gained from the modules presented by teacher training institutions. An LP is also strongly or weakly integrated into a formal learning program, depending on the service provider. The benefits for student teachers that accept a learnership would be the following:

- To acquire theory from the ODL institute and practical WBL experiences at the same time;
- To receive a nationally recognized qualification registered on the National Quality Framework (NQF);
- To address the skills shortages of the country;
- To become teachers who are well trained and qualified to contribute to the economic growth and development of the country (Gauteng Province 2014).

Although LPs differ from school to school they all have the following features in common: skills development, duration, financial support, needs and expectations of the school as well as the student teacher. As these LPs are mostly run and financially supported by the schools themselves, the schools and their governing bodies could determine the basis on which their internal LPs function. LPs do not require central planning and bureaucratic agencies, but could be run by individual schools while producing highly variable results (Sykes et al. 2010).

Innovating LPs should be encouraged and integrated with traditional teacher education, as a means of developing occupational competence in teachers. A solution for the current shortage

of skilled qualified teachers would be for LPs different schools to step into the shoes of SETA: ETDP. LPs could accommodate a large number of student teachers studying through ODL institutions. This could lead the way to vocational education for future teachers in a way that makes sense to them, namely as student teachers situated in a school, experiencing WBL. Against this background, the following methodology was deemed suitable for investigating the teaching and learning experiences of LP student teachers at two different schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In keeping with the qualitative research approach, a phenomenology as the qualitative research design was chosen as the method by which to obtain data. De Vos et al. (2011) make the point that a phenomenological research design allows the researcher to investigate the meaning of a research phenomenon (in this case, experiences of LP student teachers) as accurately as possible while remaining true to the facts found in the conscious experiences of everyday life and social action (in schools). An important reason for this approach is that it enables the researchers to focus on understanding the real life experiences of the participants, rather than explaining the problem under review.

B.Ed. (Intermediate and Senior Phase) and B.Ed. (Early Childhood Education) as well as PGCE student teachers, involved in two LPs, participated in this research and were approached for their personal opinions and experiences. These two LPs were under the auspices of two diverse schools, namely a former Model C government school in Gauteng, now called 'Section 21 Schools' (School A), and a private school in KwaZulu-Natal (School B) (Clark 2007; Hendrikse 2013).

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) provides a uniform system for organization, governance and funding of schools. Since the schools are subject to this act, the LPs had to operate within the act's parameters (Clark 2007). In both cases the participants were briefed about the school culture, rules, policies, ethics, code of conduct and discipline. Both schools assigned a mentor teacher to each student teacher on a one-to-one basis, under the auspices of the main mentor overseeing the LPs. To indicate how different or similar these two schools and their LPs are, a brief overview is in shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Quantitative profiling of school A and B

	School A Former Model C urban school (19 student teachers)	School B Private urban school(16 student teachers)
Gender		
Male	2	2
Female	17	14
Ages		
18-19		9
20-25	11	1
26-30	5	2
Over 30	3	4
Compensation for Student Teachers in the LP		
From the school	◆ competitive salary ◆ incentive bonuses for modules passed and distinctions ◆ 13th cheque when qualification is obtained ◆ access to interest free loans ◆ will mostly stay at this school	◆ lower salary than School A ◆ will not necessary stay at ◆ this school as student teachers are encouraged to move to different schools
From SETA	Occasional funded	No funds
Registered with a Professional Body		
South African Council of Education (SACE)	Provisionally registered	Not registered

Ethical measures were adhered to because participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained at all times. Moreover, participation was not compulsory. All participants were fully informed at a general meeting that their participation was voluntary and that their honest feedback about the LP would be invaluable for determining the benefits or not of the specific LP. The participants also had the option to withdraw at any stage of the research project. The requirement for trustworthiness was met to by subjecting the research to peer review by two lecturers who are also involved in LPs. The researchers also did their best to avoid bias by subjecting themselves to continuous self-monitoring.

Data was collected by means of 35 individual interviews (19 from school A and 16 from school B). Four questions were asked as follows.

1. *Why did you sign up for the LP?*
2. *How did the LP suit your personal and academic needs and expectations?*
3. *What was your best experience in the LP?*
4. *What was your worst experience in the LP?*

To ensure reliability, validity and trustworthiness, the data collected was analyzed and interpreted according to Lincoln and Guba's strategies as cited in De Vos et al. (2011), namely (1) assembling and organizing data, (2) method of data analysis, and (3) reporting the findings. The method of assembling and organizing data involved audiotaping and verbatim transcription of interviews. Data assembled in the field notes was organized into personal and analytical logs. A personal log is a descriptive report on the participants, their settings, field notes and methodological matters. An analytical log is a detailed investigation of the research questions and proposals emerging as the study progresses. Data analysis was conducted by clustering similar topics together in all the interviews. Data was compared to establish themes, trends and patterns. Analysis of the data led to the findings discussed below. Findings were reported on in a narrative discussion rather than a scientific report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed with reference to the theoretical framework, namely situated learning, as well as the literature. The questions posed to the participants were organized for discussion according to the following four themes: *(1) participants' reasons for signing up for the LP, (2) participants' perceptions of their academic needs and expectations through LP, (3) participants' positive experiences in the LP, and (4) challenges experienced by the participants.*

Participants' Reasons for Signing up for the LP

Findings

The first question intended to discover the reason why the participants signed up for the LP. The participants indicated that they wanted to become teachers while getting a salary and they made use of an opportunity that was available. Most of them stated that they would not otherwise have been able to study to become a teacher, as personal circumstances or financial constraints would have prevented them pursuing this option. The following illustrative comments were made:

* *I could not study without an income so this program suited all my needs.*
* *I would not have been able to study full time, as I am a mother and wife. And this has been the ideal way for me to juggle my career, my family responsibility and my desire to get my degree.*
* *It helped most definitely financially, educationally, inspirationally.*
* *It helped me to pay my studies off and get the experience and studying needed.*
* *I am now a young woman who is financially independent, mature professional and a teacher in the making.*
* *No loans were ever needed – I felt lucky.*
* *I could pay off another student loan.*
* *The ODL institution offers a more affordable alternative to me.*

Discussion

From the answers it was clear that LPs helped student teachers organize their studies and their personal lives. It also addressed most of their financial obstacles as they could study part time while working and at the same time manage, support and finance their personal life. Engel-Hills et al. (2010) confirm that LPs support student teachers to become teachers by allowing them to study and work in schools (CoP) while earn-

ing a basic salary. Furthermore, the situated learning theory sees knowledge as dependent on society and context. Education and training can be used to adjust and strengthen the desired culture needed to support the environment of a particular school (CoP) (Creth 1986). For these student teachers the abstract instruction of the ODL modules, coordinated with practical classroom activities, was an ideal way of mastering teaching and learning activities. When student teachers sign up for LPs they have to deal with everyday academic needs and expectations in different ways, with different accountabilities, as well as their personal and private environments where they have to face unique responsibilities. Some student teachers see the LP as the only way to become a teacher.

Participants' Perceptions of their Academic Needs and Expectations through LPs

Findings

The second question posed to the participants had the objective of identifying participants' academic needs and expectations during the LP. The student teachers expressed the following comments:

- *I would never have had so much experience once I qualified if it was not for this program.*
- *It is helping me gain the practical experience, knowledge and attitude needed to become a great teacher.*
- *I have been given the most incredible opportunity to do what I've always wanted (to study), and the bonus of all is that I get to be a teacher.*
- *It is wonderful to learn from and observe some of the most experienced and dedicated teachers.*
- *It was a hands-on experience.*
- *It was a valuable learning experience.*

Discussion

These comments demonstrated that their academic needs were addressed by ample opportunities for practical teaching experiences, which enabled them to acquire the requisite professional attitude, consciousness and knowledge. The importance of applied learning experiences was also pointed out by the participants. Furthermore, they appreciated the guidance and support from the mentor teachers. These advan-

tages of LPs are in accordance with the situated learning theory. Learning, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), occurs only if a student teacher (the learner) is placed in an authentic real world situation or context, and experiences interaction with other people. Wenger (2000) refers to these as "communities of practice". They have to acknowledge joint ownership between the student teachers and the mentor teachers (Murthy 2011). Furthermore, mutual engagement between student teachers and mentor teachers will result in sound relationships with other staff members, as well as adherence to the norms within which the school functions (Wenger 2000). This in turn promotes and inspires communication and teamwork. Through this collaboration student teachers will eventually become competent and able to engage with teaching staff in order to become full-fledged partners in these interactions. Student teachers will transform knowledge into achievement through WBL, experiential learning and simulated role-plays (Murthy 2011). In addition to participants' perceptions of their academic needs and expectations through LPs, the responses also bore witness to positive WBL experiences.

Participants' Positive Experiences in the LPs

Findings

The third question posed to the participants was intended to identify their positive LP experiences. The participants' answers reflect their own feelings as well as their observations of other members. They described their experiences as follows:

- *Some parents voiced concerns that were addressed after a few weeks when they were reassured.*
- *The practical experience assisted me with writing examinations.*
- *I draw on practical experiences to answer questions in the examinations when I got stuck.*
- *The mentor teacher helped me grow and reach my potential as a leader.*
- *I became more confident in trying out different teaching techniques and styles.*

Discussion

This section of the research reveals that the mutual engagement affected understanding between role players as a shared repertoire of com-

munal resources. Participants testified that they experienced sound relationships with parents after they learnt to understand parents' concerns. Student teachers agreed they could not learn it in any other context. Moreover, participants showed evidence of outcomes such as critical thinking and logical reasoning and mentioned that they were also able to apply their practical experiences in their written examination papers. They admitted that the mutual engagement in all the teaching activities promoted their professional development in terms of leadership skills, teaching methods, and teaching styles. This is confirmed by Clark (2007) who emphasizes that participating in an internship as a great low-risk opportunity to build one's résumé and explore career options. This also relates to Wenger's (1998:149) proposal that, "as newcomers participate, their identities develop according to how they experience themselves and the feedback and acceptance they receive from others". It seems that LPs have a significant and wide impact on the students' personal and professional development as well as supporting and strengthening the academic work expected of the student teachers by the ODL institutions.

This can only result in better-qualified teachers (if the needs of the schools are kept in mind by the ODL institutions involved with LPs). Members of CoP contribute their competence by participating in cross-functional projects and teams that combine the knowledge of multiple practices to enhance teacher training. Contrary to the above where specific positive aspects were identified, the participants also identified several challenges during the LPs at schools.

Challenges Experienced by the Participants

Findings

In answering the last question the participants had to reflect on the challenges they had experienced during their LPs. The following were statements by the participants in this regard:
- *Some mentor teachers are totally against the program and it can sometimes get uncomfortably tense.*
- *Sometimes the learnerships are looked down upon by other teachers. I believe it was jealousy at times.*
- *Sometimes it is difficult to do assignments and have the duties of a fulltime teacher.*

Discussion

Participants experienced challenges regarding relationships with other teachers and also with regard to workload. They also felt that they could not cope with a heavy workload due to study responsibilities and having to teach fulltime.

It would appear that not all teaching staff supported the student teachers in LPs. Some participants experienced a negative attitude from the mentor teachers. Implications such as a lack of trust, feeling pressured and having to deal with a sense of inferiority contributed to the participants' negative experiences. Participant responses that focus on support from mentor teachers are supported by the situation learning theory. As the reconfiguration of the relationship between competence of the mentors (as representatives of the school community) and the experiences of the student teachers is an important aspect of learning, a fine balance should be maintained in the learning process. Expertise from the mentors depends on a convergence between experience and competence while innovative learning requires their divergence.

To address the challenges experienced by the participants, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest ongoing interaction between student teachers and mentor teachers and other staff members as well as the norms within which the school functions. This will create and inspire communication and teamwork through supportive cooperation. Through this interaction student teachers will eventually become competently able to teach well and be trusted as full-fledged partners in these teaching and learning interactions.

This not only implies that the mentors' competence must anchor the process but that the competences need to interact with that which student teachers have to offer, for example, new innovations in teaching and learning. This is attained when mentor teachers and student teachers through negotiation listen to each other, while explaining and exchanging knowledge (Wenger 2000). It is therefore sensible to enable multiple practices, such as LPs and ODL institutions, to negotiate their relationships and connect their perspectives with a shared repertoire of communal resources.

CONCLUSION

It was stated at the beginning of this paper that the aim of this research project was to investigate the experiences of student teachers in

LPs as a means to empower student teachers for a career in teaching. Learnership students appreciated the opportunity to be involved in teaching and to gain practical experience with the support of mentor teachers. Direct encounters between these players resulted in knowledge building, and learnership students agreed that they would not have been able to learn teaching skills before graduating without this LP.

Furthermore, the LPs have a significant and wide impact on the student teachers' personal and professional development. Learnership students admitted that taking part in all the teaching activities promoted their professional development in so far as leadership skills, teaching methods and teaching styles were concerned.

Their personal and professional development could further be strengthened by the academic work that ODL institutions expect of student teachers. ODL can be used very successfully, as learnership students can easily teach in schools and study at the same time. While learnership students are involved in everyday teaching activities ODL institutions interact with them by means of purposely designed printed and online materials as well as all available communication technologies. Technology contributes to the globalization of higher education because it makes the transfer of knowledge borderless. From the findings of the research it can be concluded that schools that can afford LPs should be encouraged to implement such programs as they will be investing in the future of the teaching profession and will simultaneously entice more students towards the teaching profession. LPs can be seen as the way forward in teacher training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mutual engagement, continuous collaboration and communication would be an essential feature of successfully implementing LPs and to make LPs work. The mission of ODL institutions with regard to teacher training is to enhance student success and retention through LPs.

Teacher training cannot be successful without practical on-the-job experience. Training institutions must structure their training programs to focus on the teaching practice component and LPs must be designed through input from all the role players, that is, from the Department of Basic Education down to mentor teachers in the classrooms who must take up their responsibility to guide and support student teachers all the way till they enter the teaching profession. These role players include the Department of Basic Education, ODL institutions, universities, schools and mentor teachers. They must form partnerships to implement LPs successfully.

Mentor teachers must help student teachers understand the school enterprise well enough to be able to contribute wisely to it. Mutual trust promotes the relationship between student teachers and mentors. Student teachers must be included in all the learning activities that the school engages in. These include, teaching in overcrowded classrooms, participation in extramural activities and partnership with parents. These practical learning activities can and must further be strengthened by the theoretical background presented in an academic environment.

Furthermore, LPs can be used to address the shortage of teachers. Mentor teachers do contribute towards the training of student teachers through LPs to a great extent by accepting learnership students into their classrooms. Through a LP both the school and the student teacher should benefit.

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