



Towards Quality Education in Tertiary Institutions: The Case for Communication Skills Learning and Teaching in Zimbabwe's Teacher Education Colleges

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Abstract

The paper outlines the need for meeting Quality Assurance benchmarks in education based on the contribution that Communication Skills can make in Teacher Training colleges in Zimbabwe. The importance of Communication Skills as part of quality control in education is examined through a study of nine Teacher Training colleges with data gathered through interviews of lecturers and students. The teaching of the course is optional, subject to availability of suitable personnel and there are no course outlines for the course in colleges the writers visited. The department of teacher education at the University of Zimbabwe has not approved course outlines for Communication Skills as they have done with other courses taught at teacher training colleges, an indicator of the department's lack of commitment to the course. Poor Communication Skills on the part of student teachers perpetuates mediocrity at the expense of quality education in schools. Academic and Professional Communication Skills should be taught separately as they are skills-based courses.

Key words: quality assurance, macro-skills, academic communication skills, academic writing.

Introduction

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Quality Assurance is the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained (<http://www.unesco.org/new/org/edu>). Quality Assurance can only be effective when all stakeholders understand and embrace its challenges and benefits.

It is therefore the writers' contention that one of the challenges stakeholders face in the Zimbabwean educational system is a clear understanding of the role and importance of Communication Skills as part of acceptable standards of education and scholarship particularly in Teacher Training colleges. This paper therefore discusses the role of Communication Skills within the context of Quality assurance as envisaged in the Zimbabwe Council For Higher Education Act [*Chapter 25:08*], published in the *Government Gazette*: 28th April, 2006 with the date of commencement of this Act fixed as 1st October 2006.

Part V of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education Act No. 1/2006 on Institutional Standards And Accreditation reads:

16 Publication of institutional quality assurance standards and evaluation of institutions

- (1) *The Minister may, on the recommendation of the Council, prescribe the institutional quality assurance standards that will govern the performance, operations and general conduct of all institutions of higher education.*
- (2) *The Council shall evaluate the performance of institutions regularly in the light of the institutional quality assurance standards prescribed in terms of subsection (1) and accredit the institutions.*

In view of this Act, it can be noted that universities in Zimbabwe such as the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) have complied and published their Quality Assurance Policy manuals outlining their approaches to Quality Assurance in a number of benchmarks, including teaching, that need to be met by every higher education institution.

Chinhoyi University (2012) defines 'quality' as 'fitness-for-purpose' with Daniel (1997) noting, "many countries are debating whether their tertiary education systems are indeed fit for use, in the sense of providing the education and training that students and society need." This paper contributes to that debate by arguing that Communication Skills as a course is 'fit-for-purpose' and provides the training that students and society need as no academic or professional system can function without effective communication.

Communication Skills should be regarded as part of Quality Assurance in education particularly in Teachers colleges as that is where the future of the country's education lies, that is, in student teachers training to teach the next generation. It is our argument that fluency/competence in any language does not constitute communication, as language is simply a tool for communication and not communication itself. We contend that a grade C pass at the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (Zimsec) Ordinary Level English examination does not equip one with the communication skills for academic as well as professional purposes. It is argued here that there is need to teach teachers how to teach, that is, to equip them with not only with the pedagogy but also with the communication skills in order to provide quality education. As stated by Khattak et al (2003), the prime purpose is to educate learners (that is, student teachers) to effectively use and interpret verbal and nonverbal communication and understand what communication styles and skills can be adopted for different persons so as to ensure effective communication, especially in the classroom.

Since Communication is a key element involved in the teaching process, it is imperative that trainee teachers be able to communicate effectively in any teaching/learning environment and therefore, it becomes necessary to re-examine aspects of the training student teachers receive in Teacher Training colleges.

In Zimbabwe, there are fourteen (14) Teacher Training Colleges, which are all affiliated to and supervised by the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) under the Faculty of Education at the University of Zimbabwe. Of this number, eleven (11) are for primary school teacher training and only three (3) are for secondary school teacher training. The argument here is not whether the ratio does any justice to quality education in Zimbabwe, but that a lack of a structured and systematic exposure and approach to Communication Skills in teachers' colleges neither benefits the student teachers themselves, nor their own future students, when they are deployed as qualified teachers to various schools around the country and beyond the county's borders. Teachers who lack a clear definition and understanding of Communication Skills can neither benefit themselves academically and professionally neither can they benefit the teaching/learning of the subject in schools as evidenced by the confusion found in the teaching of A Level English Language and Communication Skills, (Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2013; Kahari, Takavarasha and Mutambwa, forthcoming publication). As Khattak et al (2003) note, in spite of the increasing importance placed on communication skills and subsequent awareness, many teachers continue to struggle with communicating their ideas effectively. This paper argues that this is as a result of the haphazard approach to Communication Skills in teachers' colleges. An attempt is therefore made here to address the core issues related to the teaching/learning of Communication Skills and enhance the communication skills of teachers.

In short, the teaching of Communication Skills in the teachers' colleges is not systematic. What happens in one college as regards Communication Skills teaching, is not necessarily what obtains in the next college and this leaves the writers with the assumption that there is no clear policy that the colleges are following.

Assumptions

When one observes the way Communication Skills is being handled in the Teachers' colleges, one is forced to make the following assumptions. These remain the writers' assumptions. Firstly, there might be the belief that Communication Skills can be taught through the teaching of other courses, yet it is not possible to teach the other courses through Communication Skills.

Secondly, the belief that since the students have passed English Language among the five subjects required for admission into college, they should manage to communicate. This is a dangerous assumption because passing English at that level simply means that one has an understanding of some of the rules of grammar for the language but this does not translate to effective communication.

That some students would have attempted the subject several times before passing it gives an idea of how they take time to grasp the rules of grammar not the rules of communication.

Conceptual Framework

According to Sushil, A. (2003), the term 'communication' originates from the Latin word *communicare*, which means to share or impart. When used as per its function, it means a common ground of understanding. Communication is therefore, a process of exchanging of facts, ideas and opinions and a means that individuals or organisations use for sharing meaning and understanding with one another. This applies in any context, academic, social or professional, given that one important characteristic of communication is that it is contextual (McGaan, L. 2003) and what may be appropriate in one context may be inappropriate in a different context. For example, what to say and how to say it differs when one is on a date with one's loved one; at a prayer meeting; a political rally or in a lecture. In any given context, shared meaning and mutual understanding is based on a complete grasp of the four language skills required in any context, with emphasis on academic and professional contexts in Higher Education and the general world of work. In many educational institutions, communication is more oriented towards semantics and therefore focusing on the linguistic aspect alone with concentration on the teaching of four language skills - namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills (EnglishClub.com).

Language is a tool for Communication (West, R. 2003) hence, the paper focuses on the teaching/learning of Communication Skills and not on the teaching of a specific language. Communication is a process, which involves organising, selecting and transmitting symbols in an appropriate way to ensure the listener/reader perceives and recreates in his/her own mind the intended meaning of the communicator (Sushil, A. 2000). This is essential for purposes of quality education for both the student teachers as well as their own future students (when the student teachers become qualified teachers). Any misunderstood concepts as a result of poor listening or reading skills will be perpetuated by those student teachers on their future students to the detriment of quality education in Zimbabwe, and indeed, anywhere else the graduate teachers may choose to work.

Communication Skills as a course therefore deals with grasping the four macro-skills, which are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Of the four language skills, two of them may be considered as receptive skills since learners receive information through listening and reading. The other two may be regarded as productive skills as learners are assessed through and expected to produce oral presentations (Speaking) and written assignments (Writing). Outlining these skills briefly, noting the importance of each in academic and other contexts, one notes the following:

Listening is usually taken for granted (www.njgroups.org) and misunderstood as hearing and not much attention is paid to it. Listening is defined by www.asbcentral.com as the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.

In the classroom, students must construct meaning from what the teachers/lecturers are saying and arrive at a shared understanding of the concepts the teachers/lecturers are making. That is communication and it begins with listening.

For one to listen there must be a speaker. In other words, people speak because there is an audience that listens. People listen for a number of reasons. People listen in order to get information, to understand and evaluate information.

People also listen for enjoyment as well as for learning purposes. It is important to emphasise that the audience to any talk listen and not merely hear! This is miscommunication that results in catastrophic academic consequences when students have poor listening skills.

Reading is the second way in which students receive information, particularly in an academic context. As Study Reading Skills makes clear, the reading demands of university study are not easy. Unfortunately, however, it is all too common for students to pay little attention to their own approaches to reading, that is, how they read, and how they can improve the effectiveness and speed of their reading (www.tlc.uoregon.edu).

It is argued that reading should be recognised first because people in the modern world learn through reading. Frank Jennings (cited in Ahuja and Ahuja, 1995) comments on reading as follows;

We read to learn. We read to live another way. We read to quench some blind and shocking fire. We read to weigh the worth of what we have done or dare to do. We read to share our awful secrets with someone we know will not refuse us. We read our way into the presence of great wisdom, vast and safe suffering, or into the untidy corners of another kind of life we fear to lead.

The quotation above emphasises the importance of reading in everyday life, particularly in the lives of the learner, and the purposes to which reading is put.

In academic communication, the purpose of reading is so that students not only search for information, but also have an overview of the text and master information, especially during the time of examinations. As noted by the University of Melbourne (2010) the reading demands of university study are not easy. One notes that students have to read many sources in order to gather information for their assignments, hence the existence of reading/writing interface skills. Reading /writing interface skills are used to gather information required for an assignment or project. Skills such as summarising, paraphrasing and synthesising and to some extent, the reading strategy known by the acronym, SQ3R need to be taught to and practised by tertiary students (University of Illinois website and Fraser, L.1996). These skills are used to deal with large amounts of text that students have to go through before writing an assignment.

In order to perform well academically, both critical thinking and critical reading skills are required just as much as any other communication skill. According to www.tlc.uoregon.edu, *critical reading* is a technique for discovering information and ideas within a text whereas *critical thinking* is a technique for evaluating information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe. Critical reading refers to a careful, active, reflective, analytic reading. On the other hand, critical thinking involves reflecting on the validity of what you have read in light of our prior knowledge and understanding of the world (www.tlc.uoregon.edu). Reading is therefore a critical communication skill that student teachers need to acquire and be taught in any Teacher Training college.

Writing, which is closely related to reading, was invented to enable people to communicate ideas in a more permanent form than in speech. People then simultaneously saw the need for interpreting written symbols through a process, which became known as reading. Ahuja and Ahuja (1995) observe that those who fail in school/ academic career usually have first failed in reading. Giordano Bruno, cited in Ahuja and Ahuja (1995:1), likens reading to the first button on a man's coat when he says, "If the first button on a man's coat is wrongly put, all the rest are bound to be crooked." Reading is that first button in the garment of education.

In academic writing, Bowker (2007) notes that whatever subjects a student is studying, the readers of the student's assignments who are usually the markers, need to be able to understand exactly what the student is trying to say. This therefore requires good communication skills on the part of the student in order to persuade and convince teachers/lecturers of his/her argument. The only way for the student to demonstrate his/her skill in communicating to the marker is through academic writing therefore, according to Bowker (2007) developing sound writing, as well as research skills, is an essential part of succeeding at university, or in this case, a Teacher Training college.

Speaking or Oral Communication is for when one wishes to inform, that is, the speaker has to speak to the audience and ensure that the listeners understand the concept(s) that one is proffering in the same way that the speaker understands it. Presentations are brief discussions of a focused topic delivered to a group of listeners in order to impart knowledge or to stimulate discussion. They are similar to short papers with an introduction, main body and conclusion. The ability to give brief presentations is a learned skill and one that is called on frequently in the workplace and any other aspect of life. This is communication. One speaks because one wishes to invite opinion from the audience and, lastly, one speaks in order to persuade/convince an audience of one's position.

Communication is a part of everyday life, more so, in academic settings such as tertiary institutions. It is therefore imperative that Communication Skills be not only introduced, but understood and vigorously taught in tertiary institutions, more so, in Teacher Training Colleges where poorly trained teachers, especially as far as Communication Skills is concerned, can affect the quality of education in the country, and indeed, anywhere else where the graduate teachers may opt to practice their profession.

Methodology

The writers draw from their experiences as Communication Skills lecturers with the added advantage that one of them has been to several teacher-training colleges as an external assessor and therefore make the following observations from a very informed position. Observations were therefore made of two colleges in Harare, two in Mutare, three in Masvingo, one in Gweru and one in Bulawayo (a total of nine) as part of external assessment on behalf of the UZ DTE. Data was therefore gathered by means of questionnaires and informal discussions with a total of twenty (20) student teachers, two from each college except for the two colleges in Harare were three (3) students for each college were respondents. Nine (9) lecturers from the different colleges, one from each college were interviewed.

Findings and Discussion

From the nine (9) colleges that were visited, the findings are as follows:

- i) In all nine colleges, there are no stand-alone Communication Skills course outlines approved by the DTE even where there are attempts to teach the course. In the majority of cases, the course is embedded in Professional Studies B where only a few aspects of Communication Skills are taught. Even then, the few aspects are overshadowed by what are regarded as 'important issues' in Professional Studies B such as. In the end, Communication Skills is reduced to the teaching of citation and referencing skills and some attempt to teach research skills to students.
- ii) The colleges do not teach the course because of a shortage of qualified lecturers. The argument in these colleges is that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education does not consider Communication Skills when allocating staff to the colleges, yet the question that begs for an answer is whether College administrations have sent proposals with the intention to have Communication Skills as a stand-alone course whereas the others are more suitably qualified for teaching languages, that is, English, Shona or Ndebele.
- iii) Where there is an attempt to teach the course, it is taught by any lecturer who has to have his/her load increased to the same levels as their counterparts. Granted, every teacher is a language teacher, but Communication Skills need to be taught by lecturers from the languages, that is, English, Ndebele and Shona, for obvious reasons. In fact, in terms of qualifications of the lecturers, only one of them has a relevant Masters degree that qualifies her to teach Communication Skills. We argue here that allowing lecturers who are not qualified to teach Communication Skills at teacher training colleges has long-term implications not only on the student teachers themselves, but also on their future students as witnessed in the negative attitudes by first year students in tertiary institutions (Kahari and Takavarasha, 2013).

The Need for Communication Skills in Teacher Training Colleges Receptive Skills

Listening and Reading are the two ways in which students receive information therefore, students must be taught and learn the skills to identify and overcome barriers to effective reception of a message, whether they are listening or reading. This means that if a student allows him/herself to be distracted in a lecture or in his/her reading, there is no full comprehension of material, and this is reflected in their oral presentations and/or written assignments.

Listening

Of the twenty students interviewed, seventeen (17) that is, 85%, found it difficult to distinguish between listening and hearing confessing that many of their colleagues take listening for granted and more often than not, mistake it with hearing. Similarly of the nine lecturers interviewed, eight conceded they had no idea how to teach Listening as a skill and why it should be part of the curriculum.

According to www.abcentral.com, Listening is really where all good communication begins. Misunderstanding what another person is saying is one of the biggest obstacles to communication and progress. If a student teacher misunderstands a concept put forward by a lecturer due to poor listening skills, the problem does not end with that student teacher but will eventually be transmitted to his/her future students and so on perpetuating not only poor learning habits, but poor also comprehension of the world we live in.

As Nichols, R.G (1960) argues, most people are born with good hearing, but not good listening skills. Listening must be learned, it is a mental process requiring effort, and student teachers and indeed all of us can learn how to be good listeners.

Reading

Of the twenty students interviewed, all of them were adamant that the purpose of reading was so that they could gain data for purposes of passing examinations. That there can be more than one reading purpose and one reading strategy was difficult for them to comprehend.

Fourteen (14), that is, 70% of the students equated reading to cramming of material as they did in high school believing in the quantity of time spent reading than the quality of material understood then explained in the student's own words. That summarising and paraphrasing were part of reading skills was not easily accepted by the students as they argued that these were part of writing skills.

Students are supposed to read many sources in order to gather data for their assignments, hence the existence of reading / writing interface skills which are used to deal with large amounts of text that students have to go through before writing an assignment. Reading/writing interface skills such as paragraphing, paraphrasing, and summarising were inadequately understood and believed to be specifically belonging to writing skills only displaying the student teachers' (18 out of 20 that is, 90%) inadequate grasp of the Reading/Writing interface. All 20 students conceded that Synthesising was the most difficult skill for them and they would require intensive coaching on this particular skill that interfaces reading and writing.

The lecturers on the other hand revealed that there is not much teaching of reading skills, as indeed there is not much teaching of any Communication Skills. The idea is to just refer students to reading material and expect them to work it out on their own. Their concern is for the product of the reading and writing process, that is, the completed assignment and not the process of how students arrive at the product (assignment).

Productive Skills

In most tertiary institutions, assessment of students is mainly done through written assignments and oral presentations, therefore, students need to PRACTICE the skills that help them to communicate effectively in Speech or in Writing.

Speaking

Just as in listening versus hearing, seventeen (17), that is, 85% of the student teachers were not confident distinguishing talking from speaking. Speaking is not the same as talking, just like listening is not the same as hearing therefore, it is important to emphasise that the student teacher speaks clearly, concisely and confidently whilst expecting his/her audience to listen and not merely hear.

Fifteen (15), that is, 75% of the students conceded that they were still not confident public speakers even though they had made oral presentations in class before. They worried about whether their colleagues were paying attention and whether they will be interrogated after the presentation. In other words, they were not confident of handling question and answer sessions fearing provocation from other students.

On the other hand, the lecturers expressed the expectation that students should be able to make an oral presentation without really knowing how to equip the students with the oral presentation skills.

Writing

All nine lecturers spoke of citation and referencing skills as part of academic writing in addition to the essay structure. All nine lecturers were unanimous in criticising the paragraphing skills of the students though they also conceded that they were not fully equipped to teach paragraphing.

As for the students, all twenty conceded that besides citation and referencing skills, they were not fully familiar with all the characteristics of academic writing including hedging. Furthermore, 16 out of the 20, that is, 80% of the students, admitted that they had problems with argumentation skills. Students pointed out that presenting an argument according to the Toulmin (1958) model was a challenge, as they tended to seemingly contradict themselves in trying to argue and counter argue a point. Argumentation skills are therefore needed by students in order for them to effectively communicate their ideas in writing to their lecturers.

Suggested ways of handling Communication Skills

Up to this point, the paper has argued for the formal and systematic teaching of Communication Skills in our teachers' colleges. The paper also argues for a systematic way of doing so, so that the content is uniform throughout the colleges. It has also been established that Communication Skills is a set of skills that has to be taught. Communication Skills can be likened to a tools box that a motorist takes with him/her on a journey. The reason for taking the tools box along is because the car can develop a fault that will need different spanner sizes or screw drivers. There is no "one size fits all" tool to use when fixing a car. Similarly, a student needs several skills to manage through college, not one skill. A student needs skills for gathering material for assignments, skills for oral presentation, for participation in meaningful disputation; the list is endless. de Carvalho (2005) notes that for any educational innovation or proposal to be effective, the teachers need to have the skills that facilitate the fulfilment of the teaching proposal. This drives home, the point made earlier on, that teachers have to be taught Communication Skills.

Admittedly, Communication Skills is such a wide subject that it is not possible to teach all the skills if they are not arranged into meaningful bodies of knowledge. To this end, Communication Skills is best taught in two phases or courses, which are Academic Communication Skills and Professional Communication Skills. Alternatively, the two courses can also be called Language for Academic Purposes and Language for Professional Purposes. The first course would be Academic Communication Skills because this is of immediate relevance to the student teacher, while Professional Communication Skills will be of use later in the students' lives.

Academic Communication Skills

Academic Communication Skills, revolving around Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills, are a set of study habits, learning strategies and time management tools that help students learn and absorb information in an academic context (Bowker, 2007). These skills do not just benefit students while they are still at college but even long after they have left college. The starting point in Academic Communication Skills is to bridge the gap between high school and college. The college environment is different from the school where students as pupils were given notes and were, generally, 'spoon-fed'.

The college demands independent workers/learners with independent working/learning habits. Therefore, in the Academic Communication Skills course, students are taught skills such as time management between the academic activities that the student is supposed to be involved in such as library research, reading, tests and examinations, lectures, tutorials, assignments and extra-curricular activities such as sport and other social activities that take time from academic pursuits. Furthermore, students are also directed to master the skills of note-taking and note-making in order for them to benefit from lectures. They should learn reading/writing interface skills so that they can research and gather information for their assignment(s). Having mastered these skills, the students are now ready for academic writing.

Academic writing has to be taught practically because it is skills-based. Students are learning how to write an academic piece of work by writing one, and not theorising about it. Students tend to benefit more if the lecturer/ student ratio is kept low. This is the time students are taught that writing can be a process and/or a product and that writing as a process, benefits the students more than pursuing writing as a product. Included in academic writing besides style, are argumentation skills, as well as use of strong academic language which takes note of hedging skills, and precise vocabulary. These skills and others such as question analysis and interpretation of questions need to be taught before students are given the first assignment in order for them to produce quality academic work.

The Academic Communication Skills course is best when it is mainstreamed, that is, it should be a part of every learning situation. In other words, it is the responsibility of every lecturer not to allow grammatical errors to slip through because he/she is teaching Psychology or Philosophy of Education and not Communication Skills.

Professional Communication Skills

Having equipped students with Academic Communication Skills, attention should be turned to Professional Communication Skills. To be included under this course are the communication theory, communication models, levels of communication and types of communication, barriers to communication and how to overcome them, as well as nonverbal communication with particular emphasis on Impression Management. This course should include intercultural communication, conflict and stress management, meetings management, as well as written and oral presentation skills. It

should be noted that these topics are given as a broad outline but each of them can be broken down into fine details during the actual teaching.

Implementing the Teaching of Communication Skills in Teachers' College

Up to this point, the paper has established that teaching Communication Skills in teachers' colleges can be part of the solution to the deteriorating standard of written and spoken English among student teachers. There have also been suggestions that the course be split into two, that is, academic and professional communication skills. There, however, is the observation that the course is not being uniformly taught in the colleges (where attempts to teach it have been made) or that the teaching of the course is not mandatory. It is against this background that the following suggestions on how to implement the teaching of the course are made. The success of the implementation will depend on the cooperation between DTE (UZ) and its associate colleges, for each has a role to play.

The Role of the UZ Department of Teacher Education

The department, as the overseer of teacher training curricula, needs to design a Communication Skills course outline for distribution to the colleges. The rationale behind this is that the communication needs and problems that students have are almost uniform since colleges admit students with more or less the same entry qualifications. The knowledge and skills the students have to acquire are the same irrespective of the college attended. Therefore a single course outline for the course for all colleges would be ideal. In other words, a single course outline for Academic Communication Skills for all fourteen colleges and the same applies for the Professional Communication Skills course. After the crafting of the course outlines, there is need for DTE to avail resource persons to initiate personnel in the colleges in the teaching of communication skills. Preferably these could come from the Communication Skills Centre in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Zimbabwe.

The Department of Teacher Education has to make Communication Skills an examinable course, just like any of the courses on the college curriculum. This way, the students apply themselves seriously. Failure to do so results in poor implementation of the curricula as evidenced by the case of the Zimsec English Language and Communication Skills course at Advanced Level. The general observation is that the teaching of the subject has been chaotic, characterized by inadequate planning or none at all, no time slots on the time table, inadequate work given, teachers providing feedback much later than they should in schools were it was taught amongst other contributory ill factors (Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2013). It is the our contention that the poor implementation of the course is caused by, amongst other reasons, the fact that the teachers in schools would not have been exposed to the course themselves as student teachers hence they do not really know what it is, what to teach and how to teach it. As a result, the effects of this arrangement are experienced at university when the same high school students register as first year students. Their written assignments and basic verbal and nonverbal communication is generally unsatisfactory and requires improvement. Making the course compulsory and examinable will ensure that students work hard knowing there will be an examination at the end that determines their qualifying for college.

Benefits of teaching Communication Skills in Teachers' Colleges

The proper teaching of Communication Skills is of benefit to the nation and other countries willing to recruit Zimbabwean teachers. By "proper", the writers are focusing on factors such as the lecturer/student ratio, the written exercises used to test students and the quality of the examination at the end of the teaching session. To start with, students will benefit while still at college in that their level of operation increases, their analytical skills are sharpened, comprehension improves and all reading/writing interface skills are mastered. The students produce written assignments of improved quality as well as better quality of oral and self- presentation skills. In short, the students are more focused than those who have not done Communication Skills.

Some of the benefits of teaching Communication Skills accrue to the lecturers and the colleges. The lecturer is now dealing with focused students who can produce a good academic argument, both oral and written. Students produce well argued and properly referenced assignments. Lecturers are now left to pay attention to matters of content rather than language and structure and the assessment of students' work is focused on how well they have presented their argument rather than being clouded by language matters. In the end, the lecturers and the colleges are proud to be associated with graduates of high quality as manifested by the good grades they obtain, self presentation skills, written and oral language and even deportment. By extension, the nation benefits from the quality graduates from the teachers' colleges in that the nation's quality of education will continue to improve as informed, professional classroom practitioners are deployed to staff our schools.

Conclusion

The paper has described the situation that obtains in the teachers' colleges regarding the teaching of Communication Skills. A grim picture of the quality of graduates that the colleges are producing as highlighted by stake holders and consumers of the colleges' products has been noted. The paper has argued for the teaching of Communication Skills in the colleges as part of the solution to the problem of poor quality graduates from these institutions and outlined how this can be done. With regard to the first assumption noted in the Introduction, it is important to note that Communication Skills should be taught in order to facilitate the learning of other courses, not the other way round. Communication Skills is a repertoire of skills that will help the students to navigate through the other courses with minimal difficulty.

Communication Skills is now a permanent reality as it has gained currency in the last decade or so, the world over. Institutions of Higher Education, particularly teachers' colleges, cannot afford to 'sweep it under the carpet' or to wish it

away, moreso, in the face of sharp criticism that comes from stakeholders that the quality of written documentation from our teachers needs to improve. Part of the solution to this lies in the teaching of Communication Skills as a course throughout the students' entire stay in college.

Finally, the paper has discussed the benefits that will accrue because of teaching communication skills. The success of this will depend on the cooperation between DTE, teachers' colleges and ministry.

Recommendations

The colleges are where the implementation should take place and should therefore create an enabling environment. Firstly, colleges need to liaise with the relevant ministry, to communicate their intention to have Communication Skills as a 'stand-alone' course so that they are allocated suitable lecturers to enable them to launch the course meaningfully. At present colleges, cite work force constraints as militating against the teaching of the course. Ministry should respond positively by deploying more personnel to colleges thereby making the implementation of the teaching of Communication Skills possible.

Colleges need to recruit suitably qualified personnel to staff their Communication Skills units. Whilst it is argued that every lecturer is a language teacher, Communication Skills requires people who have a flair for language. A cursory survey of universities in the region will show that the majority of lecturing staff in the Communication Skills units have qualifications in Language education or language arts. In the case of Zimbabwe, teachers' colleges could employ those specialising in English, Ndebele or Shona.

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