

Community Experience among Adult Education Students. A case of the Department of Adult Education and Extension Studies

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of community experience among Adult Education students in the department of adult education and extension studies at the University of Zambia. The main objectives of the study were to examine the benefits of community experience attachment to the students. Find out the challenges that students faced while on attachment and to examine the measures that can be taken to improve on the community experience programme.

The participants were fourth year students who had been on community experience during their third year of study. The study used a case study research design. In order to collect data from the respondents a questionnaire was used.

The findings of the research showed students benefited from community experience. Some of the benefits they have gain include gaining valuable work experience, networking with professionals, acquiring practical skills and knowledge and improved communication skills.

One of the recommendations of the study was that the department of adult education and extension studies must assist students to get attachment places.

Key words: Community, Experience, Student, Industrial, Attachment

I. INTRODUCTION

Industrial attachments are very important in higher learning institutions like colleges and universities. These attachments are meant to be practical learning for the students who are mostly in class learning the theoretical component of the course. The attachments provide the students with real life situations in the world of work where they can apply what they learn in the classroom. Industrial attachment in some university departments like the department of Adult education and Extension studies at the university of Zambia is known as community experience. These community experience attachments were started so as to given the third-year students a chance to practice the theory the learnt in real life situations. The students are expected to apply to organisations for a place to do their attachment from.

Industrial attachment provides the students with some work experience that prepares them for the work place. Davies (1990) states that, the origins of industrial attachment can be traced back to the Second World War. The main reason for the attachments was to bridge the gap between skills demands

by industry and the content of traditional undergraduate courses in the advent of technological advances.

Industrial attachment started to be established in institution of higher learning in the early 1900s in fields like medicine, engineering, social work and teaching. Later on, most of the universities and colleges began to incorporate industrial attachment into their curriculums. Industrial attachments in institutions of higher education are gaining popularity and faculties have recognized the potential value of preparing students for careers after graduation.

An Industrial Attachment is a well thought-out, credit-bearing employment experience in a professional work situation for the duration of which the learners relate theory to practice and get hold of knowledge and skills. It necessitates the appliance of academic skills in an organisation linked to the students' main areas of schoolwork. An Industrial Attachment ought to dare the student to scrutinize the ideals of the organization concerned in the experience and to evaluate the student's education as it relates to the industry (Directorate of Training, 2007).

Buor (2012) indicated that industrial attachment was a system on-the-job training for white collar and professional careers therefore; students are expected to practice the things they learned in school. It likewise develops the competencies and aptitudes of trainees, reinforce industrial/institution partnership, present a nation-wide mechanism to deal with key skill demand, make available a means for training institutions to act in response to acknowledged areas of national key skill needs (Ayakwa, Adinyira & Osei-Asibery, 2012).

Schneider (1910), Barbeau and Stull (1990) stated that there are aspects of every profession that cannot be learned in the classroom, but must be learned where the profession is practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of community experience among students in preparing them for the world of work.

Statement of the Problem

Community experience has become an important part of the students learning process in many tertiary institutions. The

community experience programme has been running for a while now, no investigation has been done to find out whether it is effective and its usefulness in preparing students for real work situations.

Objectives

- a. To examine the benefits of community experience attachment to the students.
- b. Find out the challenges that students faced while on attachment.
- c. To examine the measures that can be taken to improve on the community experience programme.

Research Questions

- a. What are the benefits of community experience to the students learning?
- b. What are some of the challenges that students face while on attachment?
- c. What are some of the measures that can be taken to improve on the industrial attachment programme?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Industrial Attachment

In the context of ever changing dynamic and highly competitive business environment the industry seeks for a competent and versatile graduate. In this context both academic and professional higher education institutes have to pay a very careful attention to the industrial internship programme. Student internship programme is widely used technique by many academics and professional bodies in order to blend students' theoretical knowledge with the real-life working experiences (Karunaratune and Perera, 2015).

Benefits of Industrial Attachment

Industrial attachment has many benefits that it offers both the students and the host organisation. One of the benefits to the students is that it allows the students to acquire skills and knowledge that is based on real life work experiences. According to Karunaratune and Perera (2015) who cited Binks, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Okay and Sahin, 2010, participation in internships is also regarded as increasing the marketability of the students when they graduate. The employment market now does not only demand graduates who have a high level of academic knowledge, but also graduates who can demonstrate core competencies essential to succeed in the work environment.

Industrial training is also the training ground for students to learn the secret traits of their future occupations. When presented with the problem-solving tasks, students will summon their nexus of information and experiences in trying to overcome the work-based problems. This is what learning is all about. The process will enrich their understanding of the matter to a better level. This kind of exposure cannot be taught in the classroom. Yet, it is the kind that employers are looking for when hiring new workers. Students can utilize

internships to gain valuable real-world experiences that will strengthen their positions, allowing them to gain an edge during the job search (Neuman, 1999).

A study by Garavan and Murphy (2001) reported that work experience provides credible means for softening the reality shock of transition from the classroom to the world of work. student's placements indicated that development of their skills and exposure to the work environment is the main reasons for organizations to place students. They are also exposed to the responsibilities expected in their areas of interest. The same research also showed that some organizations take in trainees in order to beef up their workforce and to be able to identify potential employees from the students (Ayakwa, 2012)

Leslie (1991) outlines the following benefits of attachment to the students: an opportunity to examine theory through practice, and enhance possibilities of integration; a broader knowledge through increased awareness of the opportunities available, understanding the diversity of the industry sector; personal development, for example, communication skills, working with others, self-discipline, presentation of self and where applicable working away from home and learning to stand on one's feet; experience of working in a particular sector which will help them in deciding which sector to choose on completion of the course; the possibility of having been exposed to significant aspects of the company's training scheme; a reference likely to attract greater interest from potential employers than experience gained from other sources.

Challenges of Industrial Attachment

Carlson (2002) noted that, there are a number of challenges faced by students while on attachment. Firstly, stiff competitions for attachment places from students from other universities seeking placements. Secondly, the gender bias against female students for placement in some male dominated work environments. This was cited to be prevalent in engineering fields that were previously the domain for males. Thirdly, the lack of a clear policy on supplementary financial support for students on attachment to cover transport and related costs and lastly, high expectations on the part of organisations for students accepted on the attachment programmes.

The students also complain of being exploited by the industry who views them as cheap labour. Other issues of concern are the nature of work given to the students and length of the attachment period as well as the timing of the industrial attachment (Directorate of Industrial Training, 2007).

In their cross-country study of engineering education in three countries, Afonja et al. (2005) concluded that placement of students for industrial work experience is problematic, the situation being less serious in Zimbabwe than Nigeria and Ghana as employers are reluctant to take on students. Given the importance of employers in work-based learning, it is

difficult to imagine how any successful programme can function without the support of employers (coll et al., 2002)

Afonja et al. (2005) further contend that even when students are accepted by employers for industrial attachment, they are often not well supervised or assessed. To strengthen industrial attachment, they suggest faculty- employer involvement in the design and supervision, establishment of strong industrial placement units by faculties and a way of compensating employers for providing placement for students on industrial training.

In most cases the period that students are attached to organisations may be long. This could be very expensive for students who may have their attachment at places they do not have relatives to stay with.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Kothari (2004) Research design is making research as efficient as possible hence yielding maximum information with minimal expenditure of effort, time and money. It is a blue print that facilitates smooth function of all research operations. This research will use a case study research design.

Population

The population is an entire group about which some information is required to be ascertained (chaudhury, 2010). The population of this study will be all students who participated in community experience in 2017/2018 academic year.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample is a part of the population. Sampling is a process of selecting subjects or cases to be included in the study of the representative of the target population (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The sample size of this study will be 50 students who participated in the 2017/2018 community experience. Purposeful sampling will be used for selecting the sample. A purposive sample refers to selection of units based on personal judgment rather than randomization. This judgmental sampling is in some way representative of the population of interest without sampling at random. One of the commonest uses of purposive sampling is in studies based on very small numbers of areas or sites (Elder, 2009).

Data Collection

Data will be collected using questionnaires. The questionnaire will consist of both open and closed ended questions. The questionnaire is a well-established tool within social science research for acquiring information on participant social characteristics, present and past behaviour, standards of behaviour or attitudes and their beliefs and reasons for action with respect to the topic under investigation (Bulmer, 2004).

Marshall and Rossman (1999:150) describe data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the

mass of collected data. It is described as messy, ambiguous and time-consuming, but also as a creative and fascinating process

Data Analysis.

Quantitative data was analysed using frequencies tables, while Qualitative data was analysed by categorising responses given into themes.

IV. FINDINGS

Did the community experience meet your expectations?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	31	63
No	18	37
Total	49	100

The table showed that 63% of the respondents agreed that community experience met their expectation, while 37% of the respondents said no community experience did not meet their needs.

Were you satisfied with taking part in community experience?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
satisfied	33	67
Very satisfied	13	27
Unsatisfied	3	6
Total	49	100

The table showed that 67% of the respondents were satisfied with taking part in community experience, 27% said that they were very satisfied in taking part in community experience and 6% of the respondents were unsatisfied with taking part in community experience.

Has participating in community experience prepared you for the world of work

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	80
No	10	20
Total	49	100

The table showed that, 80% of the respondents said yes community experience prepared them for the world of work, while 20% of the respondents said no it did not prepare them for the world of work.

Benefits of Community Experience

The majority of the respondents stated that they have benefit from participating in community experience. Some of the benefits they have gain include gaining valuable work experience, networking with professionals, acquiring practical skills and knowledge and improved communication skills.

Constraints encountered during Community Experience

The respondents indicated that they had encountered some constraints during the community experience. These constraints indicated were inadequate transports from their various organisations. Most of the organisation did not have vehicles to use during fields work and those organisations that had vehicles did not have fuel for these vehicles. Other respondents stated that they were given a heavy work load during their community experience. Meaning they did more work than that which was requires. They were assigned too many tasks without proper orientation. Some respondents explained that relating to other members of staff was not easy as they were treated as outsiders and not part of the members of staff of the organisation.

Measures that can be put in place to overcome the constraints

The respondents stated that some of the measure that should be put in place to overcome the constraints should be that; organisation must make an effort to provide transport allowance for work that is conducted in the field. The students should be properly oriented on the job and the work load should be reduced.

V. DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the finding based on the objectives of the research which were;(a)To examine the benefits of community experience to the students, (b) To Find out the challenges that students faced while on attachment and, (c) To examine the measures that can be taken to improve on the community experience program.

Benefits of Community Experience Attachment to the students

The first objective was to exam the benefits of community experience to students. The majority of the respondents stated that they have benefitted from participating in community experience. Some of the benefits they have gain include gaining valuable work experience, networking with professionals, acquiring practical skills and knowledge and improved communication skills. Leslie (1991) also outlines the similar benefits of attachment to the students: an opportunity to examine theory through practice, and enhance possibilities of integration; a broader knowledge through increased awareness of the opportunities available, understanding the diversity of the industry sector; personal development, for example, communication skills, working with others, self- discipline, presentation of self and where applicable working away from home and learning to stand on one's feet; experience of working in a particular sector which will help them in deciding which sector to choose on completion of the course.

Challenges that students faced while on community experience attachment

The second objective was to find out the challenges that students faced while on attachment. The respondents indicated that they had encountered some constraints during the community experience. These constraints indicated were

inadequate transports from their various organisations. Most of the organisation did not have vehicles to use during fields work and those organisations that had vehicles did not have fuel for these vehicles. Other respondents stated that they were given a heavy work load during their community experience. Meaning they did more work than that which was requires. They were assigned too many tasks without proper orientation. Some respondents explained that relating to other members of staff was not easy as they were treated as outsiders and not part of the members of staff of the organisation.

According to the Directorate of Industrial Training (2007) students complain of being exploited by the industry who views them as cheap labour. Other issues of concern are the nature of work given to the students and length of the attachment period as well as the timing of the industrial attachment.

Measures that can be taken to improve on the community experience program.

The last objective was to examine the measures that can be taken to improve on the community experience program. The respondents stated that some of the measure that should be put in place to overcome the constraints should be that, organisation must make an effort to provide transport allowance for work that is conducted in the field. The students should be properly oriented on the job and the work should be reduced.

VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to establish the effectiveness of community experience (attachment) offered by the University of Zambia, department of Adult Education and Extension studies. Community experience has been a very important aspect to learning. Most students benefit a lot from the experience that they acquire.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The department of Adult Education and Extension Studies must assist all students to get attachment places.
2. The department should establish good links with companies in order to secure attachment places.

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