

Strengthening Community and Sports Associations' Collaboration with Tertiary Institutions: Bachelor of Science Physical Education Students' Perceptions on their Experiences of Industrial Attachment in Masvingo Region -Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This research study undertook to find out the perceptions of Bachelor of Education in Physical Education students who are enrolled by the Zimbabwe Open University about their study programme in as far as it empowers them to become effective P.E. practitioners. Its intention was to investigate how these students viewed the ways in which these students can strengthen community and sporting associations in which they are involved. According to the University regulations for the programme, students enrolled on the programme are expected to go on Industrial Attachment for a period of 8 weeks in two successive years in local sports-related organizations or associations so that they get hands on type of sporting experience in that particular organization. The study investigated students' perceptions of their experiences during this period of industrial attachment as a way of assessing their impact strengthening community and sporting association. It used a descriptive research design through a questionnaire that was distributed to all the 15 Physical Education students in Masvingo Region who were on their industrial attachment and three who have already completed their attachment on the suitability of their programmes. The results revealed that most Zimbabwe Open University Bachelor of Science Physical Education students believe that their study programme needs to be strengthened if it has to meet the attachment needs of different sporting and community associations. In its present form, students feel that the study programme's time frame for industrial attachment was rather too short to enable them to learn adequately from their attachment, so that they would have loved the time on attachment to be increased for fruitful benefits. Students also believe the frequency of their practical coaching and guidance by their University tutors is inadequate as they would have wanted more visits from University tutors that thoroughly interrogated their expertise in the various sporting issues capacity to enhance their participation in various sporting and community attachments.

Key words: industrial attachment, sporting associations, sports related organizations, practical coaching, hands on

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) Bachelor of Science Physical Education students have a total of 26 taught Courses that include practicals in cricket, netball, volleyball, soccer, gymnastics, rugby, athletics, basketball, mass display as well as Industrial Attachment Level One and Level Two in consecutive years of their programme. During each level of their Industrial Attachment, they are expected to undergo an 8-week attachment to a sporting organization of their own choice that exposes them to practical sporting experiences. This practical attachment period is a way of affording Physical Education students the opportunity to have practical training in various sporting disciplines before they graduate. This ensures that Physical Education students from ZOU always get first hand work-place experience on what actually pertains in their field of physical education and sport. Thus, students are expected to gain work-related experience and requisite skills in physical education and sport that is job-related. This is because practical skills and sporting techniques expose these students to all kinds of issues to do with physical education and sport participation during the set period. All this time the University ensures that students are adequately seen by the lecturers who must certify that the attachment prepares students adequately for real life participation in sporting activities.

The majority of these ZOU students are school teachers who are already involved in the promotion of sports without the necessary training, and who therefore need to get that practical exposure to sporting organizations and implementation away from their schools in order for them to learn more about sports association administration and implementation of various sporting engagements. Glasgow (1997) observed that most sports curricular tend to focus on content coverage when there is need for students to engage in problem scenarios that are similar to authentic and real-world situations. Thus, ZOU Physical Education students go on industrial attachment to sports organizations and associations which gives them an insight of what obtains in the real world of sports. Tan (2004) contends that attachment empowers students with skills and knowledge to adapt effectively to the demands of the job so as to be able to confront the dynamic changes in today and tomorrow's world. It bridges the gap between theory and real world practice, so that learning physical education and sport can be developed in context (Sandberg 2000). This kind of approach to Physical Education training calls for the need to see an increased practical side of Physical Education training that has both the theory and the practice

where the learners can participate either administration, coaching or actual sporting performance in various sporting activities. This is the background against which this study was undertaken, to make an appraisal of the adequacy of the nature of Physical Education training by ZOU students on their attachment.

2. Historical background

Industrial attachment can be traced back to the colonial era till industrial revolution. Contemporary Internship began in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati in the USA (Weible, 2010). Internship is now a prerequisite for University and other Tertiary institutions. Arts et al (2006) observed that it was a challenge for graduates to enter job market and under perform during their first year of employment. ZOU physical education students engage in this industrial attachment so that they strengthen their employability opportunities.

3. The concept industrial attachment

Industrial attachment is provision of practical exposure, work experience and practical skills to undergraduate students so as to empower them for the job market. It is that learning where an intern or trainee is attached to industry or service organization so as to gain exposure in the application of the theory learnt. Orko (2007) sees internship as a carefully monitored work experience where a student has intended goals and activity which reflects their learning experiences. With the dynamic technologies at the work place and strengthening partnerships with industry will ensure that interns use state of the art equipment. Finch and Crunkilton (1999) observed that it was very difficult for most institutions to acquire specialized equipment for quality practical programs. This then creates pressure to incorporate workplace training into the curriculum hence the eight weeks attachment for ZOU BSc physical education.

Industrial attachment is at ZOU is called Practicum in Social Sciences and in Physical Education we used to call it Internship and we changed to Industrial Attachment so these two words can sometimes be used interchangeably.

4. Aims of Industrial Attachment/Internship at ZOU

According to the ZOU module guidelines these are the aims of Industrial attachment;

- Serving the school and community in pursuing the benefits and values of physical education and sport.
- Strengthening the place of physical education and sport through integrating theory and practice
- Building a co-operative and collaborative partnership with key stakeholders for the purpose of professional growth and development in physical education and sport
- Creating unlimited opportunities in physical education and sport to individuals from all walks of life
- Producing highly qualified personnel to enhance various community and school based physical education and sport programmes
- Develop professional skills as they experience work setting that may create career opportunities

5. Procedure of Industrial Attachment at ZOU

ZOU Physical Education students identify the organizations they want to be attached to and arrange for their own placements according to their own convenience, but subject to the approval by the Physical Education Regional Programme Co-coordinator for the University before they proceed for the 8-week attachment. During the period of their attachment, they are then required to follow a routine of stipulated hours every day on issues to do with sports and should complete the attachment exercise before they write their final examinations. Thus, once the students get their attachment placement confirmed, they are expected to fill in an attachment placement form which should be signed by the host to acknowledge that the student indeed will be attached for 8 weeks. The Host is then given evaluation forms on which basis they can evaluate the student and send back to the University in a sealed. University lecturers are also expected to visit the student to evaluate how the student is performing when measured against the University's expectations. Both formative and summative kind of evaluative reports must be done and filed with the University using the guidelines from the University. Generally, the student is expected to pass the attachment programme on its own before being allowed to sit for the examinations.

6. Problem Statement

ZOU physical education students need to acquire, interact and share experiences with the industry so that they acquire new practical skills and sharpen the old ones. Most students work in a school environment and this industrial attachment must be done in a non-school environment so that students immensely benefit from the experience which is in that environment. These students have limited exposure in terms of sporting association and the attachment will increase their employability chances in sports industry when they qualify. This prompted the researcher to examine students' perceptions on their experience of industrial attachment at ZOU, Masvingo Region

7. Research questions

- What are students' perceptions on Industrial Attachment at Zimbabwe Open University?
- To what extent do students find their attachment programme beneficial for their normal engagement in national and international sporting participation?
- What are some of the views of the students on the suitability of their participation in community sporting attachments?
- Are there aspects of Zimbabwe Open University's Attachment schedule on the Bachelor of Science Programme which may need to be improved upon?

8. Theoretical framework

8.1 Experiential Theory

Experiential Theory draws from the work of other several prominent scholars who have acknowledged that experience is centred in the theories of human learning and development eg Dewey, Lewin, and Jung Rogers etc. Kolb (1984) developed a model of experiential learning process in co-operative education. Cooperative education is structured education strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive experiences in a field of related to a student's academic or career goals (National institution of or co-operative Education, 2004) This strategy involves developing partnerships between the student, education institution and the centre/workplace which can be referred to as the triad. Once this relationship is established students will then be prepared by developing specific skills and competencies that are useful to the employer. Several studies have been carried out on education and it has been found to be an essential component of qualifications in sport (Cuneen and Sidwell, 1994, Desensi et al, 1990, Pitts, 2001) Experience is the source of learning and development. (Rainsbury et al, 2002) Experiential learning Theory provides a framework for understanding and managing the way students learn from their experiences (Kolb 1984).

Kolb (1984) developed a four stage learning cycle whose elements are as follows;

- Concrete experience (CE)
- Reflective observation (RO)
- Abstract conceptualization (AC)
- Active experimentation (AE)

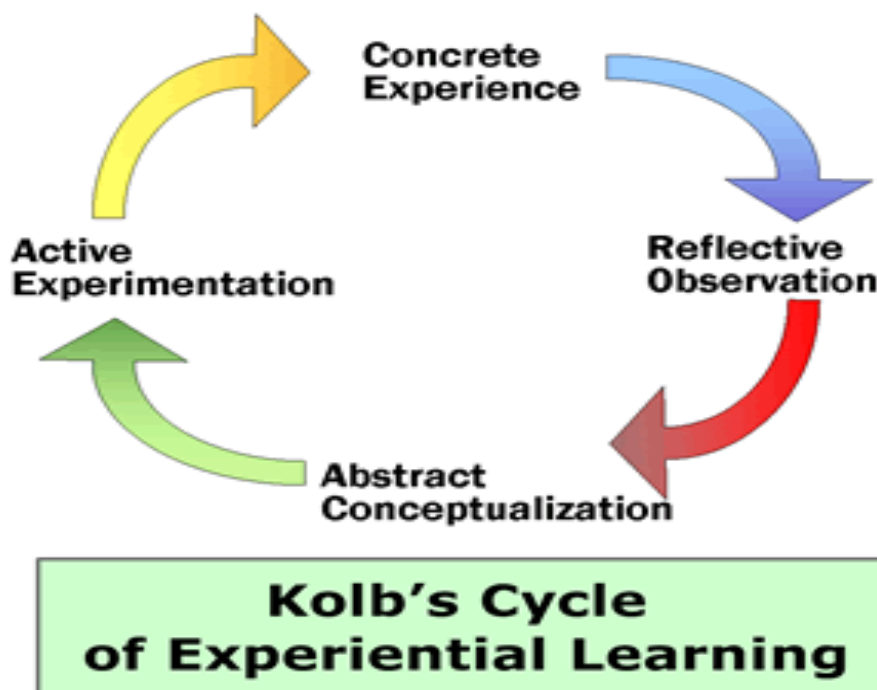


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Kolb's Experiential Theory (1984) defines experiential learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Opportunities for trial and error will be provided so that learners learn from the experience. Experiential Theory is learning that provides guidance in helping the

individual's learning and also helps to design better processes in education especially after evaluation. The theory provides a framework for understanding and managing the way students learn from their experiences (Kolb, 1984). The four steps in the Experiential learning cycle may occur in any order.

The theory is built on 6 propositions that have been noted by Kolb and Kolb (2005)

- Learning is a process
- All learning is Re-learning
- Learning requires a resolution of conflict between dialectically opposed modes of adapting to the world
- Learning is Holistic process of adaption to the world
- Learning results from synergistic transactions between the person and the environment
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge

Kolb(1984) postulates that this experiential theory helps learners understand at the deepest level. This view is also supported by Entwistle (1996) who observed that the experiential learning promotes deep learning, as opposed to surface or strategic learning. In order for truly experiential to occur students must be personally engaged. This is the case with ZOU students who undergo attachment and they must be personally engaged and write a report of their experiences. As for supervisors it is crucial for students to establish trust, respect and openness as well as concern for their well being so that they accrue benefits enhanced by that relationship that would have been established. ZOU students should be able to integrate prior knowledge with Industrial Attachment, test their PE skills as well as identify their needs. This can only do through strong linkages between the University and Industry and the collaboration of the triad for success to be achieved.

9. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used in this particular research. Babbie (1997:62) says a descriptive survey is 'a method of research that describes what we see over and beyond'. Thus, in this particular study the method that was used was meant enable the research study to see beyond industrial attachment of Physical Education students as it reflects on the University's own academic system and the reflections of society about sports training. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to 18 respondents, 15 current students on attachment and 3 post-qualification students. Open-ended questionnaires are said to give respondents the freedom to provide their own additional answers which they make the researcher able to get all views of the person being asked. These questionnaires also allow for respondents to add more detail on an issue that might be more than what the researcher actually conceived, as the respondents are free to express their genuine views about an issue. Fung and Carr (2000) contend that open-ended questions will allow for more detailed expression by respondents.

9.1 Population and sample

The population consisted of a total of 34 students had either done industrial attachment or were currently on industrial attachment. Purposive sample of students on industrial attachment was done and 18 respondents were selected for this particular study. Three respondents who had already done their industrial attachment and 15 of those who were on attachment were selected.

10. Benefits of Industrial Attachment

The major benefits involve among other things, industry having a direct input in the training of the cadre who may end up working for them after the completion of the course. The organization where the student is attached will have the opportunity to train students according to their own specifications. Again the organizations have an opportunity of increasing their pool of experts through this industrial attachment. Involvement of these students on attachment with the organizations will make them have an appreciation of how these students are trained in the various vast areas they will be involved with.

Industry will also have an additional outstanding way of fulfilling their social obligation through this activity with Physical education students on industrial attachment. While ZOU has the opportunity to be associated with these reputable sporting organizations and it will make the organization proud to be associated with the largest Open and Distance Tertiary institution which is only second to UNISA. This partnership will ensure that ZOU produces cadres who are relevant to industry. Participation in work tasks helps trainees to learn about workplace demands, processes and relationships. (Lin and Bond, 2011) at every organization there is a hierarchy and a system of reporting. Lin and Bond (ibid) add that immersion in the environment and involvement in work practices enables trainees to learn how to "read" situations and interpret the behaviours of others and respond accordingly. Learners will get to understand even the importance of relations at the actual workplace as well as work demands and expectations. As students they will be assigned work to do which may involve coaching a group of athletes in a particular organization..

Students who are on Industrial Attachment benefit from specialized sporting organizations and experts with the relevant knowledge which is far much ahead of what they have and this will act an outreach and marketing strategy for ZOU as an organization. Students can only benefit where someone else is offering the expertise in

that particular selected area although in some instances students might have brilliant ideas which they may have learnt theoretically and want to try practically. Nevett (1985) say industrial attachment is a bridge between theory and the world of work. Students on attachment need to learn under someone else who can give them more guidance and knowledge that is beyond their own. Students on attachment also need to make themselves and subsequently ZOU visible in places other than their own work places. Neil and Mulholland (2003) observed that generally practical attachment enhances opportunities for employment. Thus, most students who are attached to these organizations are normally invited to take up posts where they would have been attached through this exposure. This attachment is also seen as a preparation platform for transition from University to the world of work. ZOU students who are mainly school teachers actually benefit from this platform and after qualifying they can diversify and work in a non-school environment. They learn to comprehend issues in the context of realities and develop both professional and managerial skills. Students learn to be self directed through experience as well as feedback from the organization.

11. Involvement of Different Stakeholders in the Training of Physical Education and Sport students.

The organizations where students are attached to are tasked with the mandate to give the students adequate guidance and support that will make them aware and competent in the field of sports. Lin and Bond (2011) comment that organizations to which student learners go to should be inclusive and invitational. This means that the organizations should not segregate them and should aim to create an environment for them that is conducive to their maximum learning capability. These organizations are meant to monitor the attachés on a day-to-day basis, ensuring that the students get an opportunity to try out new things. Where there are competence skills deficiencies that are observed, these should be corrected immediately as the student gets feedback from the mentors, to make sure the skills of the student eventually match the expectations of the societal sporting organizations on the appropriate assigned tasks. Billet (2001b) explains that in a real work environment, workers are required to undertake goal-directed activities that involve problem-solving situations. That way, students will improve their skills and competences through their work-related practices.

The organization where a student is attached to is expected by the University to monitor and evaluate the student's performance and abilities throughout the industrial attachment period. Paloniemi (2006) observed that all the experiences that are gained by student learners in authentic work practice situations are a pre-requisite for competence, construction and the development of expertise knowledge. It is therefore important that the organizations to which students are placed for their attachment is reputable, as this will ensure that students gain authentic practical experiences and knowledge on sports in a dynamic and inter-connected manner that acknowledges the role of sports stakeholders in encompass exposing students to all the aspects of an organization so that students benefit from the experience. Students need to have access to adequate support and guidance and this can be achieved if they are given space to utilize their knowledge and skills besides being given autonomy to make some practical decisions. Fuller and Unwin (2002) found that learning is a two-way process, with old timers guiding beginners and vice-versa. There is need to establish a mutual relationship between the organizations where learners could finally find employment after completing their studies and the students in training, so that as beginners students do not leave training with just the theoretical knowledge.

At ZOU, although the University, through its lecturers, is expected to supervise these Physical Education students on attachment, in some instances this has not been made possible through various constraints such as adequate numbers of lecturers and financial resources. This has meant that most of the times practical attachment assessment has been left to the host organizations, who write confidential reports on each student's performance in given areas are these are used for examination purposes. Recently, there have been some concerns on the need for the university to monitor more closely and improve the students' attachment. Neill and Mulholland (2003) observe that there is generally concern that institutions ought to improve on their roles of managing their industrial attachment programme in order to strengthen the industrial training programme from the academic and learning perspectives. In that respect, institutions cannot just delegate all the student supervision and mentorship to the host organizations. Afonja et al (2005) contend that students are often not well-supervised or assessed during their practical attachment by their academic institutions. In most cases this is caused by several constraints that include financial constraints. Afonja et al (2005) in their study also conclude that, generally though, placement of students for industrial attachment was problematic, even when we know that it is less serious in Zimbabwe as compared to Nigeria and Ghana.

The amount of feedback is dependent on the way the students are supervised. Supportive supervision is set to re-direct students' learning towards areas of more or better efficiency, as focusing the student on direct subsequent stages. That way, a student will immensely benefit fully from the industrial attachment programme. Aspects that are normally assessed in the students by their supervisors include student's attendance to expected sporting events. Here, the students are assessed on punctuality to those forums as well as their performance of all their duties assigned to them on time. Students on attachment should also display great commitment to the sport-related work that they are assigned to in the organization and show the zeal and expertise to perform those duties.

They are expected to show interest in the sporting involvement and participation in the activities that they will be assigned to. Coll et al (2007) have identified personal attributes such as, dedication, hard work, punctuality, attitude and sense of responsibility as some of the personal qualities that an individual should display during attachment.

Students on attachment must show good conduct themselves in a manner that will also promote the name of the University so that a mutual relationship exists that will allow for future students to be automatically invited for attachment at the organization year in and year out and that collaboration is enhanced. The assessment also specifies duties that have been assigned to the student on attachment. Student's strong points are identified as well as suggestions for improvement. This will forge relations so that in future this collaboration maintains a mutual relationship and students end up being invited for attachment because of their deportment and conduct while on attachment. The student is assigned to a mentor and the mentor level in the organization should be specified in the evaluation.

12. The Results

Students were asked three open ended questions and these were put into themes.

What were your experiences of the Industrial attachment?

Respondents agreed that they all got the exposure of working in a sporting environment which gave them a sense that they can perform well when called upon to do so. Since most of the respondents were teachers, the attachment to sports organization was welcomed by the respondents as beneficial in building up their confidence in the running of sporting activities. In this respect, 16 respondents (89%) saw their industrial attachment as very important in serving as an eye opener which gave them a lot of exposure on what actually happens in sporting associations. Then 2 students (11%) were not sure because of the organization they went to which had limited practical exposure. Southall et al (2003) asserts that academics and practitioners have identified the melding of theory and practice through attachment experiences as a critical precursor to a future career. This was seen by respondents as they engaged in their practical work. Attachment also helped them to establish essential linkages with the sporting communities that matter, making it possible for them to continuously work with these organizations after qualifying. This would mean that they were able to market themselves well to those organizations. In some instances, respondents failed to get attachment placing where they had initially wanted to go such as Cricket in Masvingo, where they would have been able to be exposed to a game that they hardly know about. For them the attachment was not as rewarding as they would have wanted.

What were the benefits of embarking on Industrial Attachment?

Respondents were asked to explain what benefits they got from the industrial attachment and most of them pointed at the establishment of relationships with these sports associations as the biggest benefit. Respondents said the University supervisor acted as a liaison between the centre and the University. In other words, students saw the value of attachment in terms of its ability to become involved in future sporting engagements, especially with the same organization through this collaboration. They felt attachment improved their relationships with the community and made it possible for them to continuously work together even after qualifying. In this case the programme can be seen as creating employability opportunities for learners after qualifying. Respondents also mentioned that they got a lot of assistance from their immediate supervisors during their period of attachment who were more than willing to assist them all the time. Respondents said that attachment to non-school environment helped them to develop into proper sporting practitioners by empowering them with practical skills which they did not have and greatly needed in order to operate effectively in their practice. It also helped in the development of these practicals by empowering them with practical skills which they much need in order to operate effectively. Attachment also improved their general learning of their scope of the various practical activities that are undertaken in these sports associations.

How do you think the current industrial attachment should be improved?

Students, as respondents, were also asked about how the attachment could be improved upon in the future. Issues raised by students here included the issue of more creating more visibility on the part of University lecturers to the organizations themselves during the time that students are on attachment. A total of 17 respondents (94%) of the respondents expressed their views that they wanted more visits by University personnel so as to make the attachment more beneficial for them. One respondent (6%) thought with the given time for attachment the visit was adequate. Flemming and Ferkins (2005) also agreed that monitoring of student progress is critical to the success of the co-operative process. Eighty three percent (83%) of the respondents felt that the time for attachment was rather too short for them to gainfully benefit from their Industrial attachment. Only 3 respondents (16%) thought the time they get for attachment was adequate.

13. Recommendations

- The relationship between the University and Industry should be strengthened further so as to benefit

students more since collaboration ensures trainees are assisted by experts during attachment.

- Frequency of visits by University should be increased so as to cement theory with practice.
- The time for industrial attachment may also be re-considered since the majority of students felt it was rather too short.
- More surveys can be extended to a wider scale

14. Conclusion

It seems the period of industrial attachment for ZOU Physical Education students is greatly appreciated by the students and the organizations they are placed during that time. They are an integral part of the necessary training of sporting personnel in the country which ensures that students are exposed to hands-on-experiences under the tutelage of specialists in those areas. It gives students an opportunity to put into practice what they would have learnt at the University theoretically. However the programme can still be improved upon to make it even more relevant by increasing lecturer supervision during the period of industrial attachment. It will improve the quality of the products as it builds new relationships with would be employers. The quality of the product also improves making the graduate employable after qualifying.

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