

⑧ **An action research aimed at improving the quality of assignment marking of the Tutors in the PGDE Programme**

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Background

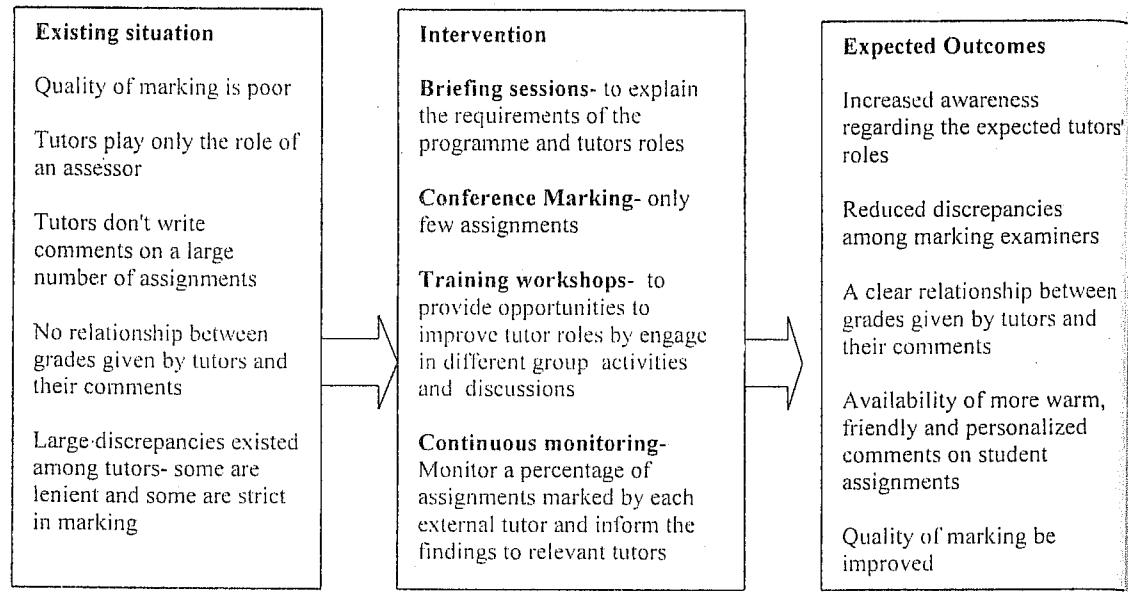
The Department of Education of the Open University of Sri Lanka conducts a PGDE programme aimed at providing professional training to teachers who are already in the service. The assignments of this programme are mainly designed to encourage student teachers to engage in practical activities. Therefore it is important that these student teachers get qualitative and sufficient feedback from their tutors in time.

The Department of Education of the OUSL has introduced several strategies to maintain the quality of marking of assignments. The appointment of qualified (M.Ed and M. Phil) and experienced external tutors from similar type of institutions (Universities, Colleges of Education and training colleges) and the conduct of briefing sessions to tutors to explain the marking schemes of the assignments are two of such strategies.

With a view to examine the existing situation of marking of assignments of the PGDE programme a study was conducted by Lekamge and Jayathilake (2002) using ten marking examiners and 500 assignments marked by those examiners. This study revealed that the quality of marking assignments of these tutors was very poor. These tutors performed their role as an "Assessor of learning outcomes" but they tend to forget the other important roles such as "Facilitator of Learning" and "Communicator of Knowledge". The main recommendations of the above study were, the preparation of an instructional booklet to guide tutors in marking of assignments, the conduct of training sessions by the Department to make the tutors accustomed to marking schemes and also to reduce large discrepancies among marking examiners, and the introduction of a monitoring system to check the marking of all external tutors. With a view to implement the last two recommendations made by the researchers and to study their impact on the system an action research was carried out.

The main objective of this action research is to improve the quality of marking of tutors in the PGDE programme. In order to achieve the above objective the following conceptual framework was designed.

The Conceptual Framework of the study



The first cage of the above diagram explains the existing situation with regard to marking of assignments of the tutors of the PGDE programme. The intervention strategies used in the first step of this action research are shown in the second cage. Third cage shows the expected outcomes of the study.

Sample of the study

45 tutors from the four main centres (three regional centres and one study centre) of the OUSL were called for the first training workshop. However, only 27 were attended the workshop so they were considered as the sample for the study. Out of 27, 12 were newly appointed for the task so they did not have any experience in marking of assignments. The rest had 5- 8 years of experience in marking of assignments in the PGDE Programme of the OUSL.

Table I. Background Characteristics of tutors

Experience as tutors	Male	Female	Total
No experience	4	8	12
1-5 years	2	1	03
More than five years	7	5	12
Total	13	14	27

Actions undertaken

This report is based only on three actions undertaken from November 2001- March 2002. Those actions were:

1. Two training workshops for tutors- one before marking of assignments and one after marking
2. Conference marking using a few assignments submitted by students
3. A mechanism to monitor marking of tutors

Presentation of data and findings

Training workshop I was conducted to reveal the findings of the previous study and to introduce the expected roles to tutors. Findings are shown in Table 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2- Tutor Roles- Educational Psychology

Tutor's role	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
1. Facilitator	12.5%	83.3%	4.2%	24%
2. Communicator of Knowledge	00%	90%	10%	20%
3 Assessor	00%	87.5%	12.5	56%

Table 3- Tutor Roles- Educational Technology

Tutor's role	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
1. Facilitator	00%	95%	05%	20.8%
2. Communicator of Knowledge	00%	80%	20%	25%
3 Assessor	00%	92.3%	7.7%	54.2%

Table 4- Tutor Roles- Foundations of Education

Tutor's role	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
1. Facilitator	14.2%	71.4%%	14.4%	11.6%
2. Communicator of Knowledge	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%	35%
3 Assessor	6.25%	78.1%	15.6%	54%

The requirements of the newly enrolled tutors were also taken into consideration in this workshop. Further, the discrepancies among marking examiners were identified and necessary steps were taken to reduce such discrepancies. Planned group discussions based on different activities relating to marking of assignments were used as the strategy to provide feed back to tutors.

Monitoring process conducted with regard to the second assignment of all three modules revealed that some tutors were doing their duties up to a satisfactory standard. However, some tutors had problems with performing required roles and using the newly introduced overall comment sheet. It seemed to be that some did not have a clear idea about the concepts involved in assignments so they had given high marks to wrong answers. Therefore, several other intervention strategies had to be implemented to improve the quality of marking of the rest.

Findings of the monitoring process

Table 10- Findings of the monitoring process (n=131)

Aspects observed	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Marked assignments according to the marking scheme provided		32 (24.4%)	74 (56.5%)	17 (12.9%)	08 (6.1%)	131
Highlighted strengths and weaknesses in the assignments		48 (36.6%)	32 (24.4%)	24 (18.3%)	27 (20.6%)	131
Tried to encourage and motivate students by giving advice		27 (20.6%)	60 (45.8%)	32 (24.4%)	12 (9.2%)	131
Stated the important points which had to be included in the answer		35 (26.7%)	39 (29.8%)	47 (35.9%)	10 (7.6%)	131
Completed the overall comment sheet to give a clear and meaningful idea to students		27 (20.6%)	37 (28.2%)	66 (50.4%)	01 (.76%)	131
The relationship between the grade and the comments given in the assignments		41 (31.3%)	30 (22.9%)	50 (38.2%)	10 (7.6%)	131
Total		210 (26.8%)	272 (34.7%)	236 (30.0%)	68 (8.5%)	786

The second workshop was conducted to reveal the findings of the monitoring process to tutors and also to introduce new intervention strategies such as group discussions

on marking schemes and open discussions on the limitations of tutors marking. During the discussions tutors were asked to express their views on the problems they had faced while marking assignments. Many acknowledged the fact that the marking schemes provided by the department were not detailed enough to reduce discrepancies. Some expressed the difficulty in producing two copies of the overall comment sheet whereas some others pointed out the problem in copying with their heavy workload. An open discussion took place at the end to find out solutions to the problems mentioned by the tutors. For instance, tutors were requested not to take a large number of assignments when they were heavily loaded with other activities. Another solution discussed was to distribute assignments among a large number of tutors to reduce pressure. Further, the tutors were informed that soon after the second step of the monitoring has taken place, those who are unable to perform the expected roles in a satisfactory manner would be removed from marking of assignments. The problems relating to marking schemes were informed to the internal members of staff at a staff meeting and a request was made to prepare detailed marking schemes. The second step of the monitoring process will follow soon after these students start the second semester of the programme and it is expected that marking of tutors of the PGDE programme would be further improved.

As explained by Cohen and Manion (p 192) action research is a step-by-step process which is constantly monitored over varying periods of time by a variety of mechanisms so that the ensuring feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustments, directional changes to bring about lasting benefits to the ongoing process. Therefore, the three actions and results highlighted in this report are related to only one step of an on-going study. Looking at the findings of this first step, the need for introducing modifications and adjustments will be considered.