

## **EVALUATION OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES: OUTREACH AND EQUITY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education (STE) of the Faculty of Education at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has introduced two professional development programmes for teacher educators: Master of Arts in Teacher Education -MATE and Master of Arts in Teacher Education (International) - MATE(I). The general aim of both programmes is to enhance professional competencies of personnel engaged in teacher education.

As in any other OUSL Programme, in the case of these two programmes also equity and outreach remain as prominent issues. Gunawardena and De Zoysa (1995) revealed that transport problems had prevented nearly 15.5% students from attending day schools. Similarly, Wijeratne (1995) stated that about 42% students complained of difficulties in coming to the university. Gannaththige and Dissanayake (1999) found a significant relationship between geographical residence of students and completion of courses. The present study therefore, aims to evaluate the existing two MATE programmes to find out the extent to which the goals of outreach and equity have been achieved. The study would also identify the barriers that affect successful completion of programmes, so that suitable measures could be suggested to overcome these barriers.

The objectives of this research are as follows.

1. To identify the background characteristics of students enrolled in the two MATE programmes
2. To identify the institutional facilities available to reach the goals of outreach and equity.
3. To identify student factors affecting successful completion of MATE programmes
4. To make recommendations to extend the outreach and address issues of equity

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The mixed research approach was used in this study. In addition to survey design, case studies of eight students who had not completed or dropped out from the programmes and eight students who had completed the programme were conducted.

#### **Population and the Sample**

The target population consisted of 303 students enrolled in the MATE programme from 2001 to 2008 and 35 students enrolled in the MATE (I) from 2005 to 2008. Three hundred and fifteen students were included in the sample, out of which one hundred and ninety eight students included in the sample had successfully completed the programme.

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### **Instruments of Data Collection**

Two types of instruments were used for data collection: a questionnaire and an interview schedule. The questionnaire was of the structured type and focused on collecting data on four identified key areas, namely, the background characteristics of students, the learning environment including the institutional facilities, the factors related to students affecting successful completion as well as programme related information such as usefulness and relevance of the courses. Interview schedule was aimed at collecting more comprehensive data relevant to selected items of the questionnaire.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

There were 100 respondents and all of them were mature teacher educators, with a majority in the age range of 41-50 years. Fifty five of them had over 20 years of professional experience and except five, all the others had 11-20 years of experience. Fifty Sinhala medium, thirty four Tamil medium and sixteen English medium students had responded. Except eleven, all the others had successfully completed the programmes.

As targeted by the MATE programmes, the majority (53) of respondents were Teacher Educators in the Colleges of Education. The rest of them represented about five to six other categories of teacher educators. There were more males than females among the respondents.

When the geographical distribution of respondents was considered, thirty of them were residing within a distance of fifty kilometers from the Colombo Regional Centre which is the only centre for the academic activities of the two programmes. All the others (70) were residing more than fifty one kilometers away from the Colombo Regional Centre. Out of these 70 students, 28 were residing more than two hundred kilometers away from the Colombo Centre while nine students were residing more than three hundred kilometers away from the Colombo centre. However, except seven all the others had successfully completed the programme. It is observed that these students are drawn from all the provinces of the country.

Regarding institutional facilities, a majority of the students had expressed high satisfaction in respect of study guides, resource packs and course materials, academic guidance and counseling, day schools, orientation sessions and library facilities in the Colombo Centre in the same order of ranking. Only 9% were satisfied to some extent with library facilities in Regional Centres. Students' ratings for satisfaction towards feedback on assignments and opportunities for student-student interactions were 52% and 51% respectively. Even though the students were satisfied with the day schools they had mentioned difficulties in travelling as well as the time spent on travelling to participate in day schools in Colombo Centre as short comings. Students have pointed out weaknesses and limitations relevant to the facilities and had made valuable suggestions to improve the facilities available for learning and maintaining the equity within the programmes.

The distance to OUSL from home seems to be the predominant factor affecting student learning. Other factors, namely responsibilities at work places, leave problems, time constraints and family responsibilities also had greatly influenced their learning. The majority of the respondents had indicated that low familiarity with the distance learning mode and independent learning had not affected their studies very much. Limited English language competency and the limited number of reading materials in their mother tongue had affected learning of some students to some extent. Increase and improvement of hostel facilities, conducting day schools in Regional Centres were some of the suggestions made by the students to overcome these issues.

### CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The out-reach appears as significant in the sample. Students residing far away from the Colombo Centre were in the program and out of 70% of the respondents who resided more than 50 kilometers away from the Colombo Centre, except six, all the others had completed the programme. Officials from several occupational categories in the field of teacher education seem to have benefited from the programmes. Programmes have reached Sinhala, Tamil and English medium student groups and both male and female students had enrolled in the programmes.

Even though students' impressions on some aspects relevant to institutional facilities are positive to some extent, further improvements can be recommended to address the issues identified in the system as well as issues related to student learning. Such improvements would help to reach the goals of outreach and equity as well as to increase the completion rate further.

### REFERENCES

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