

CHAPTER SIX

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES RUN BY DISTANCE EDUCATION IN UGANDA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A number of In-service Teacher Education (INSET) programmes have been run by distance education in Uganda and those that have been running since 1990 were discussed in chapter three. This study focused on INSET distance education for secondary school teachers in Uganda. To do this, the participants in the study were asked to indicate, from the list provided, all the different programmes they have participated in and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes and to suggest ways of improving these programmes.

In particular, the respondents were also asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Bachelor of Education (External). The purpose of all this was so as to propose a framework that can be used to improve the provision of INSET distance education programmes for secondary school teachers in Uganda. The guidelines proposed in chapter eight were informed by the findings of this study.

This chapter therefore presents the findings of the study related to:

- The number of respondents that participated in the different teacher education programmes provided by distance education
- Strengths and weaknesses of teacher education programmes that have been provided by distance education in Uganda in general
- Strengths and weaknesses of the B.Ed (External) in particular
- How these teacher education programmes can be improved
- The different quality assurance mechanisms that should be put in place in these teacher education programmes in Uganda

In discussing the different categories of strengths and weaknesses identified, it should still be remembered that these are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated, sometimes with a weakness or strength in one area having a feeder effect in another area. So although each of the strengths and weaknesses identified will be briefly discussed separately, their interrelatedness should not be forgotten.

Also, since the focus of the study was on INSET by distance education for secondary school teachers, any reference to *teacher education programmes*, unless so indicated, is meant to apply to teacher education programmes that are provided by distance

education; and the Makerere University Bachelor of Education (External) shall be referred to as *the B.Ed (External)* unless otherwise indicated.

As already discussed in chapter four section 4.7.2, all qualitative data collected was grouped according to categories and numbers assigned to these categories and these numbers were used to code all the data. See appendix VII for the research questions, the categories that were used to group and code the qualitative data and the different sources of this data.

In handling the qualitative data received, frequencies and percentages given in this discussion are of the responses received to each question. This strategy was adopted because the questions were open-ended, and also because it was possible for a respondent to give more than one response on the same issue. For example, it was possible for a respondent to identify two or more strengths but all of which had to do with students support. It was therefore deemed inappropriate to use frequency and percentages of **respondents**. The same strategy was used when discussing the weaknesses of the programmes as well. All this therefore implies that wherever qualitative data is presented in frequencies and percentages, this refers to frequencies and percentages of **responses** rather than of **respondents**.

6.2 PARTICIPATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES RUN BY DISTANCE EDUCATION

All the respondents were asked to indicate whether they had participated in any teacher education programmes and in what capacity they participated in the said programmes. So teacher education programmes that have been run by distance education since 1990 were listed and the respondents had YES/NO answers to choose from. See items 11 and 12 of the tutors and managers'; and students' questionnaire, items 12 and 13 of the prospective students' questionnaire and items 11 and 12 of the interview schedule (appendices II – VI). The programmes listed include:

- Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project (MITEP)
- Northern Integrated Teacher Education project (NITEP)
- Teacher Development and Management Systems (TDMS) Headteacher Training Course
- Teacher Development and Management Systems (TDMS) Grade III Teachers' Course
- Teacher Development and Management Systems (TDMS) Outreach Tutor Training

- Kyambogo University Diploma in Primary Education (DEPE)
- Makerere University Bachelor of Education (External)
- Makerere University Bachelor of Science (External)

The questions also gave the respondents opportunity to indicate any other programmes the respondents may have participated in. Unfortunately, this latter question to the respondents did not have a time limit so a number of programmes including those that were run prior to 1990 were also listed, for example Basic Education in Rural Development (BEIRD) INSTEP, Upgrading of Grade II Teachers' Course. Also, there seem to be variety in the understanding of what constitutes DE. For example, a number of respondents indicated participation in the Diploma in Primary Education (DEP) run through the National Teachers' Colleges. However, this is a programme that depends entirely on residential sessions for the teachers during the school holidays. While the students are away, there are hardly any study activities and neither are students given any study materials. Nevertheless to many, this programme is being taken as a distance education programme. It was difficult to verify this because of failure to access the initial proposal for the establishment of this programme. The same applies to workshops run at the Teachers' Resource Centres. Some of these were **on** distance education but not **by** distance education. In addition a few non-teacher education programmes were also listed. Table 6.1 gives the frequency of those who have participated in various teacher education programmes provided through distance education. A total of 182 students, 5 prospective students, 3 tutors and managers and 31 policy makers responded to these questions. It should, however, be noted that, from the results, some of the respondents have participated in more than one programme.

Table: 6.1 Frequencies of participants in Teacher Education programmes

Course	Students	Prospective students	Tutors & managers	Policy makers
	f	f	f	f
B.Ed & Bsc (Ext) MUK	182	0	35	13
TDMS Headteacher	31	1	6	10
DEPE Kyambogo	23	0	6	8
TDMS Grade III	10	3	6	10
NITEP	7	2	1	4
TDMS Outreach	7	0	5	5
MITEP	2	0	2	4

The following is a list of the various other programmes in which respondents have participated.

- Bachelor of Education (External) - Mukono University
- Basic Education in Rural Development (BEIRD)

- Certificate in Distance Education - Kyambogo University
- Diploma in Primary Education - National Teachers' Colleges
- In-Service Teacher Education Programme (INSTEP)
- Dip Special Education Uganda National Institute of Special Education
- Upgrading of Grade II teachers
- Olympic Leadership Course
- Resource Centre workshop

As far as positions held in these programmes is concerned, majority of the students in the study have participated in these programmes as students, whereas the policy makers and the tutors and managers have participated in these programmes as tutors, trainers, writers, and reviewers; with the exception of three policy makers who have participated in the B.Ed (External) as students.

All the participants in this study were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes. The strengths identified will now be discussed.

6.3 STRENGTHS OF THE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN UGANDA

6.3.1 Introduction

Each of the teacher education programmes that have been delivered by distance education in the country has strengths and weaknesses. So respondents were asked to reflect on the programmes in which they may have participated and try to identify what to them were the strengths of these programmes. It is important to identify what is viewed as strength, or good in a programme, because then providers of distance education can work towards strengthening or providing for these elements. Also, the guidelines provided in chapter eight for the provision of INSET for secondary school teachers in Uganda have been informed by what has been identified here as strengths of programmes.

A total of 150 students, 4 prospective students, 23 policy makers and 30 tutors and managers responded to the question requiring them to identify strengths of the programmes in which they had participated. See items 13 in the interview schedule and questionnaire for tutors & managers' and item 14 in all the other questionnaires (appendices II –VI). The strengths of distance education teacher education programmes (in which the members of the study sample had participated) were grouped and categorised according to:

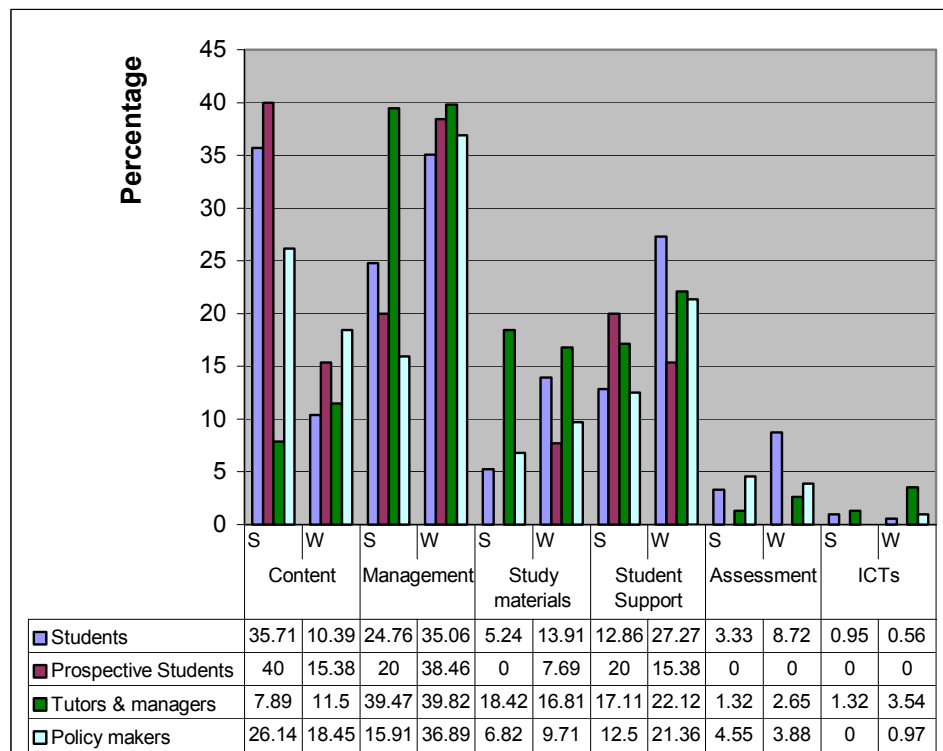
- *Content of the programmes.* The quality of any teacher education programme is partly dependant on its content.

- *Management and administration of the programmes.* Distance education institutions perform a helping function and there are often many persons and activities to be managed, so management and administration of programmes is definitely important (Peters 1994:118).
- *Study materials development and provision.* No distance education programme can run without study materials regardless of the media used (Keegan 1996:130, Robinson 1996:7, Robertshaw 2000:2).
- *Students support services in the programmes.* Like study materials, these are also very central in any distance education programme. (Keegan 1996:130, Robertshaw 2000:2)
- *Assessment and examinations in the programmes.* Nearly all the teacher education programmes discussed are award-giving programmes and hence, assessment and examinations were important.
- *Integration of ICT in the programmes.* The growth and development of distance education has been closely associated with the technology of the time and technology is important for purposes of bridging the distance between the learners and the institutions (Amundsen 1996:67, Epper 2001:7, Garrison, 1996:17, Paul 1990:122, Tschang and Senta 2001:6).
- *Other strengths*

These categories were identified as a result of trends identified in the responses and also because these are the major sub-systems in distance education.

Figure 6.1 gives a distribution of the scores given to the responses on strengths and weaknesses of the teacher education programmes run by distance education. Each of the strengths identified will now be described in the next sub-sections. The weaknesses will then be discussed later in section 6.4

Figure 6.1: Strengths and weaknesses of Teacher Education programmes



S – Strengths

W – Weaknesses

6.3.2 Content of the programmes

According to Verduin and Clark (1991:125) the content of the subject is important in distance education because the nature of the content will determine the competencies that a learner will need to study the subject. Also, knowledge of subject matter for teachers is taken as one of the key competencies (Robinson and Latchem 2003a:10) so it is important to establish what the learners on teacher education programmes say about the content of the programmes that have been run. According to the results received on this question, a number of the respondents believe that the content of the teacher education programmes was one of the strengths. Out of the responses given on strengths and as illustrated in figure 6.1, these were 35.71% of those given by students, 40% of those by prospective students, 26.14% by policy makers, and 7.89% by tutors and managers. The specific areas of the content strength identified were to do with the content coverage of the programmes, relevance of the content and the fact that new programmes were introduced in the system.

The programmes enabled learners acquire a variety of knowledge and skills building on what was already known. For example, according to one of the students, ‘these

programmes build capacity for the work we are supposed to do'. One education officer also said, 'helped build up a culture of reading amongst the students in the programmes'; and another officer said, 'helped many acquire "life skills" like self control, time management and discipline'.

In view of some of the study participants, the teacher education programmes were relevant because these programmes gave the learners the knowledge and skills they needed to carry out their responsibilities. For example, while commenting on the Headteacher Training course, one education officer said, 'TDMS introduced a new managers' course providing useful managerial skills – bridged a gap, since there was no Headteacher Training Scheme before'.

These views reiterate one of the major functions of INSET, which is to improve the teachers' knowledge and skills in their teaching subjects and in pedagogy (Bagwandeem and Louw 1993:1, Dove 1986:224, Garden 1998:226, Iredale 1996:15, Robinson and Latchem 2003b:31). For example, MITEP and NITEP trained the untrained teachers, most of whom had had low secondary school education. Improving their subject knowledge was therefore vital.

In addition, new programmes that were not on offer before were introduced into the education system. For example, the Headteacher Training course, the recently introduced Diploma in Special Education.

From these responses, the study participants regarded the content of a programme as important and teacher educators therefore need to pay close attention to the content of the programmes that they offer. For as Fraser (2001:59) argues, low scores or grades in the subject matter '*...will almost certainly lead to poor teaching*'.

6.3.3 Management and administration of the programmes

Management and administration is one of the functions of a helping institution and in this study, the respondents identified this as one of the strengths of the teacher education programmes that have been run in Uganda by distance education. The scores registered in this case were 24.76% of the student responses, 20% of the prospective student responses, 15.9% of policy makers and 39.47% of tutors and managers. See figure 6.1. A variety of reasons were put forward to illustrate the strength in management and administration of the teacher education programmes.

The programmes reached many students, thus increasing access to education. Also, these programmes were flexible and allowed students to study as they work. For example, one education officer said, ‘...INSTEP, MITEP and NITEP did not take teachers away from the classroom’. This is in agreement with what Robinson (1996:6) says as one reason for the popularity of using distance education to train/retrain/upgrade teachers; a point reiterated by other authors like Moore (1996:29), Peters (1994:227, 1996:46), and Verduin and Clark (1991:4-5). Teachers are able to study as they work and schools are not depleted of teachers.

In addition and in relation to flexibility, it was pointed out that some of the programmes allowed students to work at their own pace. ‘B.Ed programme allowed students to work at their own pace when it was a four year programme’. Holmberg (2001:21) in his theory of Guided Didactic Conversation/Theory of Teaching-Learning Conversations emphasised the importance of learner autonomy and the need for the learner to be able to take control of his/her own learning and thereby learn at his/her own pace. This is the issue being raised here as a strength of some of the programmes that have been run, although none of the programmes run had absolute flexibility. Each of them had deadlines that Holmberg (2001:21) regarded as unacceptable.

Another reason for saying that the management and administration of the programmes was a strength is because some of the programmes had adequate funding. For example, one of the education officers said that MITEP had sufficient funding whilst another said ‘external funding helped DEPE take off faster’. Another respondent also said that NITEP was cheaper to government. It is, however, worth noting here that all the programmes cited as having had good funding relied on external funding. Programmes that depend on student fees are more likely to face financial challenges especially in poor countries where learners are unlikely to afford high fees. Nevertheless, it is vital that a programme have adequate funding.

6.3.4 Development and provision of study materials for Teacher Education programmes

Since in distance education students study most of the time on their own, study materials development and provision is a very important function of the providing institution. Study materials, regardless of the technology used to deliver the material, is therefore central to distance education, because study material is one way in which the distance between the learners and the institution/tutors is bridged (Keegan 1996:130, Robinson 1996:7, SAIDE 1996:21).

According to the responses given by those who answered this question and as illustrated in figure 6.1, (5.24 % of student responses, none by prospective students, 6.82% of policy makers', and 18.42% of the tutors' and managers' responses) study materials development and provision is one of the strengths of teacher education programmes.

Some of the reasons put forward for saying so are:

- Study materials were made available to students. For example, 'MITEP had study materials for all courses'. Also that, some of the study materials developed for distance education teacher trainees were used by other teacher trainees including those on internal programmes.
- Some of the programmes used workshops to train writers, to carry out writing, reviewing and editing study materials so '...as a result, high quality study materials were produced...' This seems to reflect the use of teams that Rowntree (1986:19 – 23) says is one option that can be used for the development of study materials so as to ensure high quality study materials.
- The language used in the study materials ensured user friendliness and readability of the materials (Holmberg 1986:108-111, 1995b:47, 2001:38-41, Rowntree 1986:58)

The respondents in this study therefore believe that study materials can be a strength in a programme if the study materials are available to the students, are relevant and reader friendly and are of high quality. Bridging the distance between students and the institution is critical in distance education programmes, and study materials are one way of doing so but the study material should be designed in a way that will promote interaction (Keegan 1996:130, Moore 1996:25, Rowntree 1986:11 –13). It is therefore not a question of making available anything but ensuring relevance and high quality of the study materials.

6.3.5 Student support services in the programmes

In distance education, the institution has a support role;(Holmberg 1986:110, Keegan 1996:118) therefore, student support is important for the success of any distance education programme. Keegan (1996:131) actually identifies student support as one of the key sub systems in distance education which every institution should have.

One of the strengths identified in the different distance education teacher education programmes that have been run in the past was their students support services. According to the results obtained on the strengths of these programmes, the scores were, 12.86% of student responses, 20% of prospective students responses, 17.11% tutors' and managers', and 12.5% policy makers'. See figure 6.1. To them, the evidence of this strength was in:

- The running of face to face sessions
- Student study group meetings that were held
- Access to library services
- Opportunities that students had to interact with other students and with their tutors.

A little will now be said about each of these.

The teacher education programmes run face-to-face sessions. These are important for addressing the problem of isolation often faced by distance education learners. In these sessions, students are supposed to have opportunity to discuss difficult concepts, receive feedback and interact with the tutors and other students. Face to face sessions are therefore important for reducing isolation, enabling learning and providing opportunity for social interactions (Department of Distance Education 2000:2, Holmberg 2001:39, Robinson 1996:10, Robertshaw 2000:2). These sessions should also be used to address student problems and helping them develop skills in interpretation and discussion of concepts (O'Shea and Downes 1997:64).

Some students in the study were also concerned about where the face-to-face sessions are held, for in the words of one student, 'regional centres reduce pressure and costs...' Face to face sessions held at the regional centres are less costly to students because the service will have been taken nearest the students.

Student support services, especially student group meetings, offered the learners opportunities to interact with one another. These self-help groups as Robertshaw (2000:3) argues, are important for '*peer tutoring*'. Students are able to support one another in these groups. In the words of one education officer while talking about NITEP, 'students were able to network and support each other'; and yet another, 'TDMS had peer group meetings.' In relation to this, one student confessed that the student group meetings and face-to-face sessions enabled him to make new friends.

Some of the respondents also reported that there is access to good library facilities in the programmes. Every institution of learning needs a good library and students in the institution should be able to access the library. Some of the programmes run in the country enabled students to access library facilities.

Student support services are therefore, according to the respondents in this study important because of their role in overcoming isolation. In their report on distance

education in South Africa, (SAIDE 1996:22) identified students support as one of the components of a well functioning distance education system.

6.3.6 Assessment and examinations in the programmes

Most of the teacher education programmes identified in the study were credit programmes where certificates were issued on successful completion of the programmes. Also, assignments give learners opportunity to reflect on their experiences (Manning 2001:61). In this study, a few students (with 3.33 % of their responses) and tutors and managers (with 1.32% of their responses) were of the view that assessment and examinations is one of the strengths of the programmes that have been run. Figure 6.1 graphically represents these strengths and weaknesses. The respondents put forward a number of reasons as evidence of this strength.

According to some of them, continuous assessment 'forced' students to study. Continuous assessment is in this respect serving a much greater role than only assessment; it is serving as a study tool, motivating students to study. Robinson (1996:11) argues that assignments can be used to link theory to practice and can also be used to encourage learners to reflect on their work. Besides this, the respondents also pointed out that the learners in the distance education teacher education programmes were '...more comprehensively assessed than those in internal programmes (as a result of continuous assessment)'.

In some of the programmes reviewed in chapter two and three, for example MITEP, NITEP and TDMS the distance learners sat the same examinations as internal programmes and this was viewed as strength. Since the students in both programmes sat the same examinations and obtained the same qualifications, the likelihood of discrimination against the distance learners is minimised. In a situation where the public has reservations on distance education graduates, a certificate that stipulates that the programme was studied by distance could lead to discrimination.

Ultimately, the confidence that the public is likely to have on a programme will partly emanate from how rigorous and comprehensive its assessment and examination system is.

6.3.7 Other strengths identified

Respondents also identified other strengths of the different distance education teacher education programmes and these are:

- The programmes opened up access to those who would perhaps have not gained the opportunity to do so. In the words of one respondent, 'the programme gave opportunity to many... for example many women with families'. This is particularly significant since distance education is believed to open up access to many, especially the disadvantaged (De Wolf 1994:1558, Holmberg 1986:30, 1995b:13, Rumble 1992:19).
- TDMS led to improvement in the management of schools as a result of the Headteacher Training Programme. This is related to what was raised about the content of this programme as discussed in section 6.3.2.
- The programmes gave teachers opportunity to upgrade. For example, 'B.Ed became a path for many to further education – many B.Ed graduates enrolled for Masters programmes'. Distance education has been used in a number of programmes to enable teachers upgrade (Perraton 2000:70, Robinson and Latchem 2003b:33) and this seems to have been the case in Uganda as well.
- The programmes also led to tutor enrichment because of the opportunities they give for tutors to meet other educators and to gain additional skills.

6.3.8 Conclusion

A number of teacher education programmes have been run by distance education in Uganda and in some areas these programmes have excelled and these areas of excellence have been identified. Providers of distance education programmes should therefore take careful note of these areas of excellence and advantages and strive to reinforce or incorporate them.

However, in spite of these areas of strength, there have been a number of weaknesses and the next sub sections will focus on this. See figure 6.1 for the distribution of responses given in relation to each of the weaknesses identified. Note also that, the same categories were maintained for strengths and weaknesses and this figure gives a graphic comparison of this distribution.

6.4 WEAKNESSES OF THE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN UGANDA

6.4.1 Introduction

Just as it is important to identify strengths so as to keep up with whatever is good, identifying weaknesses also helps because then plans can be made to improve. In this study, respondents were also asked to indicate how in their view improvements could be made and these will be discussed alongside each of the weaknesses identified. A total of 150 students, 4 prospective students, 23 policy makers and 30 tutors and managers

responded to the question requiring them to identify weaknesses of the programmes in which they had participated. See items 14 in the interview schedule and questionnaire for tutors & managers and item 15 in all the other questionnaires (appendices II – VI).

To discuss the weaknesses of the distance education teacher education programmes, the same categories used in discussing strengths were used and these are:

- Content of the programmes
- Management and administration of the programmes
- Study materials development and provision
- Students support services in the programmes
- Assessment and examinations in the programmes
- Integration of ICT in the programmes.
- Other weaknesses

6.4.2 Content of the programmes

The content of teacher education programmes has been criticised for being too theoretical, irrelevant in some instances and often overloaded (Dove 1986:244, Odaet 1985:45). Unfortunately these same criticisms were raised concerning the content of the different distance education teacher education programmes that have been run in Uganda. The responses received with regard to this and as illustrated in figure 6.1, (10.39 % of those by students, 15.38% of those by prospective students, 18.45% by policy makers, and 11.50% by tutors and managers) indicated that the content was often weak. The specific areas of weaknesses cited are:

- Irrelevant Curriculum
- Theoretical Programmes and
- Inadequate coverage

Each of these will now be discussed.

a) Irrelevant curriculum

According to the respondents, the content of the programmes is not always relevant. For example, one tutor while referring to the B.Ed (External) said, 'curriculum is not appropriate for primary school teachers' while one education officer said that primary school teachers specialise and '...yet they are expected to continue teaching all the subjects in the primary school'. Primary school teachers in Uganda are expected to teach all the subjects in the primary school curriculum. However, in the INSET diploma and B.Ed programmes, the students specialise in two subjects of their choice, yet the

schools still expect them to continue teaching all subjects. It is for this reason that this is identified here as a problem.

Related to irrelevance is the problem of theoretical programmes that have little emphasis on skills that teachers actually need in the field. For example, INSET does not seem to have met the country needs for science and language teachers; so as one officer said, 'distance education has not helped these areas get more teachers'.

b) Theoretical programmes

According to the respondents, the curricula of the distance education teacher education programmes 'lack practical application of what is learnt'. Teachers therefore learn a lot of theoretical knowledge but do not gain the much-needed skills. One education officer for instance said that the module on Financial Management in the Headteacher Training programme, did not equip the headteachers with skills. So some headteachers continued to manage their finances as they had done before. In addition, these programmes were accused of '...emphasising certification with very little application of skills'. These criticisms are related to what is raised by a number of writers on teacher education and distance education (Bates 1994:1577, Dove 1986:244, Garrison 1996:12, Henri and Kaye 1993:27-28, Holmberg 1993:331, Odaet 1985:45).

In section 6.6.8 the question of whether B.Ed (External) helps teachers acquire core competencies is discussed. The weaknesses identified here seem reflected in the views about B.Ed (External) and the teachers' competencies.

c) Inadequate coverage of the teacher education curriculum

Another problem raised with regard to these programmes is that the workload is heavy so, as a result, there is inadequate coverage – a 'surface scratching' as one student said and the course outlines are not fully covered. This is why as one education officer said 'many graduates of B.Ed have problems handling 'A' Level. Some have been rejected in schools'. In the words of another officer, 'teachers are inadequately trained and are being sent to schools to "survive"! Spirit of "survival" is killing the education system'.

These criticisms are very troubling because one of the major reasons for INSET is to help strengthen and refresh the teachers' knowledge and skills (Bagwandeen and Louw 1993:1, Dove 1986:224, Iredale 1996:15). But if now these INSET programmes are not accomplishing this, then there must be a re-examination of the syllabi and methods

being used in INSET. Promoting a spirit of “survival” as one officer said will certainly destroy the school system and the programmes themselves.

d) Improvement of the content of Teacher Education programmes

The study participants were unfortunately not specifically asked to show how they think the content of the programmes can be improved. However, in response to a question on how distance education programmes can meet teachers and school needs, the responses given are indicative of what was believed as ways of improving the content of the programmes. According to those who responded to this question, it was suggested among other things that it is imperative to:

- ‘Design programmes according to identified needs’.
- ‘Identify gaps and design programmes that fill these gaps’.
- Ensure ‘programmes designed related to the needs of the school’.

To improve content therefore, it is critical that needs and knowledge/skill gaps are identified and programmes designed should meet these needs. Society and schools are in constant state of flux and so the needs of the teachers are also likely to change and these should therefore be met (Aspland and Brown 1993:6). In so doing, the programmes would then be relevant and less theoretical.

6.4.3 Management and administration of the programmes

As a weakness, management and administration of programmes recorded the highest number of responses 35.06 % by students, 38.46% by prospective students, 36.89 % by policy makers, and 39.82% by tutors and managers. See figure 6.1. Management and administration of any programme is critical for its success, so if these programmes have problems in their management and administration, how effective then are they in meeting their objectives?

Some of the criticisms raised are that:

- Inadequate funding and/or dependence on donor funding
- Centralised administration
- Huge enrolments
- Poor planning and coordination of programme activities

Each of these criticisms will now be discussed.

a) Inadequate funding and/or dependence on donor funding

Distance education is believed to be more cost effective but there are other factors that ought to be taken into account (Rumble 2001a:73). Funding is vital so as to develop study materials, and set up effective student support services and as Perraton (2000:137) says, where student numbers are very low, and a high level of student support provided, distance education can be more costly. So funding is vital and can be a challenge.

In this study, the respondents were of the view that one of the weaknesses of some of the teacher education programmes that have been run is that there is inadequate funding for some of them, for example the B.Ed (External) and dependence on donor funding and expatriate staff in the case of TDMS. As a result, staff are inadequately remunerated and inadequate services provided; one student for example said there was 'lack of funding for tutorials at the TDMS centres...'

Also, some of the students were of the view that the programmes were costly. One student said, 'costly in terms of fees, resources and energy'. Makerere is very costly financially and other unnecessary fee called late registration fee charged on the students'.

So clearly, funding is one of the problems facing teacher education programmes that are running in Uganda. As Bates (2000:122) says, some of the distance education activities are often under-budgeted or not budgeted for at all. Whilst the high costs of the programmes could easily become a barrier to enrolments – cutting off the very people distance education is meant to help.

b) Centralised management and administration

Most distance education programmes have student populations scattered across wide areas and in circumstances where the students are expected to study on their own for most of the time, services must therefore be provided nearest to them. For as Levine (1993:4) as quoted by Rumble (2000:1) says, students want universities of convenience. This cannot be achieved through highly centralised and bureaucratic administrative structures and systems. Unfortunately this is one of the weaknesses of some of the teacher education programmes in the country. According to some students because of bureaucracy students do not receive prompt and proper support. Manning (2001:61) says that this is one of the challenges that the Open University UK also faces.

c) Huge enrolments in the programmes

Distance education is supposed to be popular because of the potential that it has to serve larger numbers than is normally the case in internal programmes (Holmberg 2001:17). However, in Uganda, it seems the programmes are registering high student numbers without commensurate staff and facilities to efficiently serve the students. For example, it was pointed out that the B.Ed (External) admits too many students and yet the staff handling students is inadequate in both numbers and abilities. As one student put it, 'huge enrolment numbers that have overwhelmed the existing facilities'. Another said that because of huge numbers of students and inadequate staff, 'students are subjected to very long and humiliating queues during registration...'

So the very issue that is supposed to be used to justify distance education is becoming a source of disrepute of distance education. Numbers admitted should not be for the sake of it but student numbers must be admitted in accordance with the institutions' capacity to manage the numbers. Institutions should not as, Perraton (2000:194) says, take students money in advance but later spend less of this money on tuition. When this happens then institutions will be guilty of taking students' money but investing little on ensuring quality teaching/learning environment.

d) Poor planning and coordination of programme activities

Peters (1994:113) says that rationalisation is vital in distance education and this is achieved through planning, organisation and division of labour. The various teaching functions are split up and various individuals or groups for example write, edit, review, produce and distribute study materials. For this to run smoothly, there must be careful planning and coordination.

However, in this study, some of the respondents expressed a fear that these programmes were poorly planned and poorly coordinated, resulting in confusion and frustration for both students and staff. One of the students for instance said, 'sometimes these programmes interfere with normal school programmes'. Another said, 'poor coordination, some lecturers are timetabled without their knowledge especially at the beginning'.

Closely related to this is the problem of inadequate follow-up of students. According to one education officer, some of the teacher education programmes had 'weak monitoring and follow-up of students'.

To run the TDMS programmes, a cross section of education staff from the Ministry of Education and Sports, Teachers' Colleges and from the districts were all involved.

However, this was seen as a problem because:

- 'In TDMS, the local community leaders who are meant to work with teachers are themselves of low education'.
- 'TDMS had a parallel management system that involved the PTCs but did not actively involve the district education offices'.
- 'District Inspectors who were expected to inspect and supervise the headteachers were not trained' in the areas the headteachers were trained in.

So, TDMS seems to have attempted to involve other stakeholders in the management of the programme but this unfortunately created problems because of poor planning and poor coordination.

e) How to improve the management and administration of Teacher Education programmes

Respondents were asked to identify strategies that could be used to improve management and administration of teacher education programmes (Interview schedule and questionnaire for tutors & managers' item 15a and all the other questionnaires item 16a – appendices II –VI). See also appendix VII. A number of strategies were recommended and out of all the responses given to this question, the following strategies had the highest scores:

- Restructuring and reorganising institutions and programmes with 29.12% of the responses by students, 36.36% by prospective students, 40.35% by policy makers and 25% by tutors and managers.
- Recruiting quality staff, training and retraining with 25.96% of the responses by students, 18.18% by prospective students, 26.32% by policy makers and 35% by tutors and managers.
- Funding and resource allocation with 7.02% of student responses, 27.27% of prospective students', 15.79% of policy makers' and 13.33% of tutors' and managers'.
- Public relations with 4.91% of the responses by students, 9.09% by prospective students, 1.75% by policy makers and 10% by tutors and managers.
- Communication and information flow with 4.91% of the responses by students, none by prospective students, 1.75% by policy makers and 5% by tutors and managers.

Each of these strategies will now be briefly discussed.

Restructuring and reorganising institutions and programmes

To deal with some of the problems faced in the management and administration of teacher education programmes, it was recommended that the institutions providing these programmes and the programmes themselves should be restructured and reorganised to fully cater for the needs of the students and the demands of distance education. When SAIDE (1996:92) carried out a national audit of teacher education offered at a distance in South Africa, one of their findings was that most of the institutions were dissatisfied with their programmes and saw the need for restructuring of institutions and programmes so as to offer quality distance education.

This seems to be the recommendation of the respondents in this study. Some of the recommended strategies for restructuring and reorganising institutions and programmes are now briefly discussed here.

First that there should be 'decentralisation of '...all services and their management e.g. registration, face-to-face, examinations'. This would ensure that the services are taken nearest the students and it would also reduce congestion at the institutions' main campuses. There should also be more 'bottom-up approach to management' involving various stakeholders in the decision making processes.

Next that there should be 'division of labour because some staff in the Department seem overloaded'. According to Peters (1994:109) division of labour as a form of rationalisation can lead to higher outputs which is crucial in all enterprises. Related to this, one tutor recommended that there should be more 'streamlined staff establishment...'

This implies that the 'programme should operate on its own' as a distance education programme without conforming to internal programme policies. This illustrates the problem that Bottomley and Calvert (2003:1) identify when they say, 'in most dual mode institutions policy is based on the needs of on-campus students...' The distance education programmes being run in dual mode institutions are handicapped by policies and structures that were initially set up for internal programmes. To effectively and efficiently run the distance education programmes, such institutions need to be reorganised to accommodate the needs of the distance education students and programmes.

As far as restructuring programmes is concerned, it was suggested that:

- Institutions should 'run school based INSET programmes so that these programmes are more relevant'
- 'Introduce bridging courses for the weak students before starting the teacher education programmes'
- 'Distance education programmes should take longer than the internal programmes to ensure enough time for coverage of curriculum'

Student needs, demands and requirements of distance education programmes require structures that can appropriately serve these demands thus the need for restructuring and reorganisation of institutions and programmes.

Recruiting quality staff, training and retraining

To ensure efficient information flow and dissemination and for division of labour to lead to higher outputs, there must be high quality staff. So in the view of the respondents in this study, it is vital that:

- Institutions 'recruit personnel with relevant qualifications and background in mounting distance education programmes. Specialised and committed staff.'
- There should also be 'training and retraining of all staff in the programme' and 'close supervision of staff so that they can understand students and deliver better services'. According to one student this can be done by organising 'refresher courses, seminars/workshops'.
- 'Only persons with strong academic background should be facilitators and moderators of the programme'.

It is clearly important to recruit staff that have relevant academic and professional qualifications, but there must also be deliberate effort to provide training on distance education so that the staff appreciates what is required of them in distance education programmes (Bottomley and Calvert 2003:3). For example, a lecturer recruited to serve as a tutor in distance education programmes must be given orientation on what is expected of him/her in distance education programmes. In addition, according to a small group of students and to one tutor, the staff should be motivated and paid in time for work done.

Funding and resource allocation

In the view of the respondents, the programmes are not well resourced and therefore need improved funding. This finding concurs with Robinson's (1996:15) conclusion that there is lack of understanding of the cost needs in distance education and so often this

'...affects the resourcing and quality of the distance education programmes'. In addition, the programmes need:

- Additional equipment and facilities
- Expansion of infrastructure
- To 'plan programmes in affordable terms' and in the words of another official, avoid donor-driven projects for these end when external funding is withdrawn or comes to an end'.
- For 'government subsidies for teachers' to ensure that their fees and other costs are met. In relation to this in particular, some students recommended that programmes revisit fees that students are charged.

Although the respondents recommended that the programmes revisit fees to ensure affordability and that programmes have more resources and facilities, and apart from suggesting that government increase subsidies, they did not suggest additional sources of funding.

Inadequate funding and resources for the distance education programmes is a problem that is likely to lead to poor provision of services (Robinson 1996:16-17) and therefore low quality programmes.

Communication and information flow

One of the problems earlier identified is poor information flow and so to address this, it was recommended that deliberate effort should be put towards improving information flow. For example, according to one student, the institutions should 'give students clear information on administrative structures and officers in the department and university'. In this way confusion would be minimised. One education officer suggested that programmes be mounted to provide information that will help to change attitudes on distance education.

Public relations

Some of the tutors suggested that it is necessary to improve public relations because some of the staff on B.Ed (External) are poor in this. To do so, it was suggested that the young administrators especially be given orientation and skills in handling the public and adult students in particular.

Besides these suggestions to improving management and administration of teacher education programmes, the following strategies were also recommended albeit by smaller proportions of the respondents.

- Coordination of programme activities with 2.46% of the responses by students, 3.33% by tutors and managers. Distance education activities are wide and involve a wide cross section of people and with student populations often scattered across wide areas, to ensure smooth running of all these activities, there is need for careful coordination.
- Monitoring and follow-up of programme activities with 3.86% of the responses given by students and 7.02% by the policy makers.
- More flexible programming with only 1.05% of the responses by students, 9.09% by prospective students, 1.75% by policy makers and 1.65% by tutors and managers. Flexible programming would help cater for the needs of the learners of the tutors.

Management and administration of the teacher education programmes that have been provided through distance education in Uganda has not been entirely efficient and effective and therefore needs to be reviewed. Some strategies have been suggested in this study and these need to be carefully considered.

6.4.4 Development and provision of study materials for Teacher Education programmes

In section 6.3.4 the importance of study materials was discussed. However, the respondents also raised weaknesses with study materials development and provision in the teacher education programmes that have been run in the country. From the responses received on this, tutors and managers had the highest scores with 16.81% of all their responses; students with 13.91 % of their responses, then policy makers with 9.71%, and finally prospective students with 7.69%. See also figure 6.1. The major weaknesses cited with regard to study materials development were:

- The slow pace of study materials development and poor provision.
- Poor quality of the study materials

Each of these will now be briefly discussed.

a) Slow Pace of study materials development and poor provision

Study materials are central to teaching and learning in distance education programmes and ought therefore to be provided in time. According to Robinson (1996:10), one of the criteria for a successful distance education system is that all learners should be

provided '*with especially designed learning materials (whatever the media) in time for learners to make use of them*'. However, according to the respondents in this study, this is not always the case. Sometimes the study materials are delivered late or not at all. This is inappropriate because it is likely to inhibit student participation and performance in the programmes.

Related to this is the problem of inadequate reference material to 'supplement modules given'. According to Rowntree (1986:11 –13), the study materials given should serve all the teaching functions. However, even with this, there ought to be supplementary reading materials and this has not been well done in the teacher education programmes that have been run. This is likely to lead to surface learning that distance education has been accused of (Bates 1994:1577, Garrison 1996:12, Henri and Kaye 1993:27-28, Holmberg 1993:331, Paul 1990:85, Perraton 2000:12).

b) Poor quality of the study material in the teacher education programmes

The quality of the study materials that were used has been queried. For example, there are fears that there may be plagiarism in the materials being developed. As one official said, '...it is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether there is no plagiarism by the course writers'. This is a critical issue because it strikes at the very heart of academic integrity of both the individual writers and the institutions of learning. Study materials developed for any distance education programme ought to meet all the requirements of academic rigour and excellence. It should not be an excuse for writers to plagiarise other works.

c) Improving study materials development and provision in teacher education programmes

Having identified weaknesses in the development and provision of study materials in the teacher education programmes that have been run in the country, respondents were asked to suggest strategies for improvement. These questions appeared in items 15b in the interview schedule and questionnaire for tutors & managers' and as item 16b in all the other questionnaires (appendices II –VI). See also appendix VII. To deal with the weaknesses identified, it was recommended that:

- Programmes ensure delivery, availability and access to study materials with 46.94% of the responses by students, 75% by prospective students, 31.91% by policy makers and 16.07% by tutors and managers.
- Programmes improve on the production and acquisition of study materials with 29.80% of the responses by students, none by prospective students, 21.28% by policy makers and 19.64% by tutors and managers.

- More funding should be put aside for the production and provision of study materials. This was the view of some of the students with 6.53% of their responses, no responses on this by prospective students, 4.26% policy makers' responses and 19.64% tutors' and managers'.
- There is integration of technology and diversification of study materials. This was the view of some of the students with 6.94% of their responses, 12.50% of prospective students' responses, 12.77% policy makers' responses and 8.93% tutors' and managers'.
- Programmes ensure quality control of study materials being provided to students with 5.31% of the responses by students, none by prospective students, 12.77% by policy makers and none by tutors and managers.
- Staff involved in the production and distribution of study materials is trained/retrained and motivated with only 0.82% of the responses by students, none by prospective students, 6.38% by policy makers and 19.64% by tutors and managers.

In addition, the respondents were also concerned with the readability of the study materials. One tutor, for example said, 'study materials should reflect more of the distance learning style'; and one education officer said that there is need to 'review and simplify modules so as to make the modules more readable'.

Each of the suggestions for improving study materials development and provision will now be briefly discussed.

Delivery, availability and access to study materials

The concern here was with how easily accessible study materials are to the students. As already raised in section 6.4.4a study material is not easily accessible to address this anomaly, it was proposed that:

- Where the book bank system operates as in the case of Makerere University, the book bank should be well stocked. The book bank system of Makerere University is a system where departments through the library acquire core textbooks and these are then lent to students. In the Department of Distance Education, this collection includes study materials that have been especially produced for distance learners. See also section 6.6.5f for a further discussion of this. Also, the 'borrowing system should be revised to suit the students' interest. Reduce the rigidities involved in borrowing books' and 'closely monitor storage and lending system'.
- Institutions should decentralise the distribution of study materials and library services. According to the respondents, study materials should be distributed through centres

nearest the students; and district libraries/resource centres established through which students could access reference material.

- Sufficient study materials should be available in the institution libraries and through the public libraries.
- Study materials should be distributed before the beginning of each semester.

The recommendations for improvement here concern prompt delivery, easy access and sufficient numbers of study materials. Failure to achieve this implies that one of the criteria for a quality distance education system is not fulfilled (Robinson 1996:10).

Production and acquisition of study materials

Production of study materials is a lengthy and tedious process which demands a lot of creativity and patience (Murphy 2000:1) and if not well handled could jeopardise the entire materials provision process. The concern is that study materials are not promptly produced so, to address this, it was recommended that:

- There should be more vigilance and reinforcement of the materials production departments
- Proper planning and time management so as to produce all the required study materials.
- Institutions provide favourable conditions for the writers to write the required study materials
- 'Editors should be fast and rigidly work according to schedules' and there should be 'speedy processing of authors' manuscripts'. Deadlines can be difficult to enforce and to keep but if the entire process is to be well managed, deadlines need to be drawn and should be adhered to (Murphy 2000:3).
- 'Produce all modules for each subject'
- Stock the libraries with relevant books.

The challenge being raised here is for institutions to ensure that whatever study material is required should be produced or acquired in time for each semester and in quantities that are sufficient for the student numbers in the programmes.

More funding

According to a number of authors (Bates 2000:128, Berge 2001b:19, Orivel 1994:1572, Robinson 1996:20-27), distance education requires high initial investment for the production of study materials; unfortunately the programmes that have been run in Uganda have faced the challenge of adequate funding. As a result, some of them have not been able to produce all the required study materials. Also, where the study

materials have been produced, they have been too costly for the students. To address this, it was suggested that:

- The price of the study materials should be reduced and or subsidised. One student, however, suggested that the Ministry of Education and Sports should pay for all the study materials which should then be distributed free of charge.
- Institutions should solicit funds from donor organisations to construct structures and purchase books.
- With specific reference to the B.Ed (External), it was suggested that 25% of fees collected should be put aside for the purchase of textbooks.

A close examination of the recommendations reveals that the students, prospective students and policy makers gave the highest number of responses to improving delivery, availability and access to study materials. The tutors and managers on the other hand were more concerned about the production and acquisition of study materials. I think the difference here is a result of the students and prospective students and to some degree the policy makers looking at this issue as 'consumers' and are therefore more concerned with how they can access the study materials. On the other hand, the tutors and managers are looking at it from the perspective of 'provider' so are more concerned with the production of the study materials.

The institution should, nevertheless be concerned with both elements, meeting the needs of the tutors and managers as 'providers', and the students as 'consumers'.

6.4.5 Student support in Teacher Education programmes

Student support is central to the life of any distance learner (Keegan 1996:131, Robertshaw 2000:1, SAIDE 1996:115). Unfortunately, from the responses received on this question, a number of students, prospective students, policy makers, tutors and managers all believe that this was a weakness in the teacher education programmes. A number of reasons were given as evidence of this weakness; and as illustrated in figure 6.1, the scores were 27.27% of student responses, 15.38% of prospective student responses, 21.36% of policy makers' and 22.12% of tutors' and managers'.

The weaknesses of student support that were highlighted are now discussed in the next sub sections.

a) Poor face-to-face sessions

Face to face sessions are important but should be seen as support to students who should not be totally dependant on the sessions. Unfortunately, there seems to be a

culture of dependence on the face-to-face sessions that are in addition expensive yet poorly organised and run. Dependency to face-to-face sessions is a danger that Robertshaw (2000:4) identifies. Also, Robinson (1996:10) says that in a number of distance education programmes, face-to-face sessions are not always used effectively; because sometimes more and more face-to-face sessions are organised to cover up weaknesses in the system leading to higher costs per capita.

Another weakness identified was that in some cases the programmes did not have competent staff to provide support to students during the regional/centre face-to-face sessions. Therefore according to the respondents, the face-to-face sessions were:

- Brief and did not give students sufficient time to cover the course outlines. This complaint presupposes that without the face-to-face sessions the course outlines cannot be fully covered. This may be a reflection of weakness in the programmes and a dependence on face-to-face sessions.
- ‘Face to face sessions are too packed and so students have little time to interact with tutors at individual levels’.
- ‘Expensive because students have to support themselves during face to face sessions...’
- In TDMS programmes, ‘coordinating staff does not have the capacity to offer academic support in all areas of the programme.’
- ‘Dependence on face to face sessions reinforces lack of reading culture’. This criticism confirms what Robertshaw (2000:4) identifies in his writings.

b) Inadequate guidance and counselling

All the INSET programmes admit adults who are already working. Therefore in addition to the roles and responsibilities that they already have as adults (sometimes with families), and teachers, they now take on new roles and responsibilities as students. This is likely to create tension and therefore the need for guidance and counselling. Counselling should be integrated into the teaching/learning process and should not be reserved for students with problems only. Counselling should be part of the student support system (SAIDE 1996:74). Unfortunately, according to the results of this study, this is often inadequate and is poorly organised. For example, according to one education officer, some students suffer ‘...inferiority complex’. Such a student would require a lot of counselling to help boost morale and develop a higher self-esteem and self-confidence.

c) Poor communication, information flow and dissemination

Information flow and dissemination is an important element of student support.

However, according to this study, this is not well done and as a result,

- 'It is difficult to communicate with lecturers in case of problems.
- There is 'poor, inadequate and inefficient communication'. As one tutor said, there are 'communication bottlenecks. Poor communication between students, tutors and the administration.'
- 'There is no adequate interaction between the lecturers and the students'.
- 'No opportunity to help students individually'.

If the communications space between the learners and the institutions is to be crossed, then teacher educators must work on improving communication, information flow and dissemination in the programme (Moore 1996:22).

To deal with weaknesses identified in student support, the respondents suggest a number of strategies as discussed in the next sub section.

d) Improving student support in teacher education programmes

According to the respondents who answered this question, the major strategies suggested for improving student support were:

- Better face-to-face sessions. There were 22.69% of the responses given by students on this, 9.23% of the policy makers' responses and 22.03% tutors' and managers'.
- More efficient library services with 21.92% of student responses, 22.22% prospective students', 10.77% policy makers' and 13.56% tutors' and managers' responses.
- Better communication and information flow with 10.38% of student responses, 11.11% prospective students', 12.31% policy makers' and 13.56% tutors' and managers' responses.
- Provision of guidance and counselling services and this received 7.69% of student responses, none of prospective students', 12.31% policy makers' and 11.86% tutors' and managers' responses.
- Better access to student support services with 10.38% of student responses, no responses on this by prospective students, 16.92% of policy makers' and 18.64% tutors' and managers' responses.

In addition to these strategies, a smaller proportion of respondents were also of the view that better student support services could be achieved if student group meetings were

improved, other technologies utilised for service provision and if staffing is improved through more and more committed tutors and support staff.

Each of these main strategies suggested will be briefly explained.

Better face-to-face sessions

As discussed in chapter two section 2.7.5 and chapter three section 3.6 all the teacher education programmes used face-to-face sessions as part of the study package.

Section 6.3.5 also discussed face-to-face sessions as one of the strengths of the programmes. According to the respondents in this study, these sessions can be made better through:

- More careful planning and management of the sessions. This could be achieved by conducting all sessions during school and university holidays. This is unfortunately very difficult to achieve because schools and universities/colleges do not have common holidays. Universities for instance run on a semester system, while schools run on a term system. To hold face-to-face sessions during common holidays is likely to be extremely difficult if not impossible. A lot more thought would be required to restructure the sessions in such a way as to achieve this.
- Decentralised face-to-face sessions. In other words, the sessions should be held in regional or district venues and not centralised at the universities/colleges.
- More and regular face-to-face sessions. The problem though with this recommendation is that it could easily lead to higher costs since the more the face to face sessions '*...the higher the cost per capita, and the more it approximates to the costs of conventional teaching*' Robinson (1996:15).
- Secure and more permanent venues for face-to-face sessions. This seems to have been more applicable to the B.Ed (External) and according to one student, 'abrupt change of venues for face to face disrupts those from upcountry avoid this'.

More efficient library services

This suggestion is also related to what has already been raised and discussed in section 6.4.4c. The respondents in this study were of the view that library services should be more efficient and could be achieved through:

- Establishing regional/district libraries so as to ensure that this service is more easily accessible to the students.
- Equipping regional/district centres with relevant and up-to-date study materials.

- Utilise all the public libraries in the country and make available all the required study materials and reference materials through these libraries.

Better communication and information flow

In section 6.4.3 under management and administration of programmes, the problem of poor communication and poor information flow was raised and discussed. The same is true in the provision of student support services; students and staff need clear and prompt information. It was, for example, suggested that there should be improved publicity through ‘...newsletters, brochures, prospectus.’ Also that other media is used. For example, one student suggested that, ‘information to students upcountry should be passed through both the radio and mail system’.

Provision of guidance and counselling services

To address the problem of inadequate guidance and counselling, the respondents in this study were of the view that,

- Each institution establishes a counselling office. Makerere University for example has a counselling unit attached to the hospital and I believe this is why this service is not well utilised. There may be stigma attached to a counselling service linked to a hospital. A counselling unit attached to an academic department may be more ‘acceptable’.
- Counsellors are identified and these should be available always to provide guidance and counselling to students.
- Students should be encouraged ‘...to open up’. One tutor also said, ‘encourage students to consult their tutors before they sit exams’

e) Better access to student support services

This suggestion embraces all the others raised because it is concerned with overall access to all the services provided; and according to the respondents, this can be achieved through:

- Decentralising ‘...services to students [programmes, library services, face to face sessions etc] to reduce students travel costs’.
- Decentralising ‘...services to the regions and give the centres some degree of autonomy...’
- Opening up more centres and strengthening existing ones.
- Enriching ‘...resource centres, public libraries, TDMS centres, etc with relevant study materials’.

A close examination of the responses reveals that students, tutors and managers had higher scores for improved face to face sessions, the prospective students for availability of tutors and support staff while the policy makers had higher scores for better organisation and management of the students services. As mentioned in chapter two section 2.7.5, most of the teacher education programmes depend fairly heavily on face-to-face sessions and this I believe explains why more students, tutors and managers recorded the highest scores for face to face sessions.

6.4.6 Assessment and examinations in Teacher Education programmes

a) Weaknesses

Assignments are important because they can give learners opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences (Manning 2001:61). However, in this study, a small proportion of the study participants said that assessment and examinations was a weakness in the programmes and the scores were 8.72% of responses given by students, none by prospective students, 3.88% of those by policy makers and 2.65% by tutors and managers. See figure 6.1.

According to them, the take home assignments that students are given are open to cheating because it is difficult to ascertain that assignments are done by the distance education student himself/herself. One student for example said, 'assignments open to cheating. Some students give other people to write their assignments'. It is, however, worth noting that it is not only distance education students who do take home assignments. Many higher institutions of learning give students take home assignments and the same criticism could be raised for them as well. For how can a lecturer in an internal programme ascertain that each of the students in his/her class has not cheated in the take home assignment? I believe this is the challenge facing all higher institutions of learning. For example, according to Manning (2001:62), some tutors at the Open University UK are reported to have '*...frequently identified plagiarism as a problem*' among the continental western European students in their programmes.

In relation to assignments, there was also dissatisfaction with assignment turn around. According to some students, marking is not done promptly and so scripts are returned late; and even then the records are not well maintained.

The other problem with assessment and examination is the high failure rate, particularly with MITEP. High failure and dropout rate is a concern raised by many authors for, according to them, high failure and dropout rates reduce the efficiency of distance

education (Holmberg 2001:73, Keegan and Rumble 1982:228, Paul 1990:79, Perraton 2000:12).

b) How to improve assessment and examinations in Teacher Education programmes

To address the weaknesses that were identified in assignments and assessment, the respondents identified a number of strategies that could be used and these shall now be briefly discussed.

Ensuring standards, and promoting equivalence of standards

The scores on this were 41.89% of students' responses, 42.86% of the prospective students' responses 54.55% of policy makers' and 27.08% of the tutors and managers'. Assignments and examinations should be handled as part of the learning process and they should be set in a manner that will help the teachers acquire knowledge, skills and competencies that they need in the school setting. Assignments and examinations should not be for the sake of assigning grades only (SAIDE 1996:73). It is therefore important that assignments and examinations set for the distance education programmes are of high standard and that they meet the required standards. It is also important that these assignments and examinations are of comparable standards to equivalent internal programmes. This is critical for acceptance and validity of certificates given. To achieve this, a variety of options were suggested.

Assignments questions encourage creativity and originality. Also that the 'assessment should include practical application of knowledge and skills in the day to day activities of the school'. While discussing problems identified in the content of teacher education programmes in section 6.4.2, one of the weaknesses identified was that the programmes are theoretical. The suggestion of promoting creativity, originality and practical application of knowledge and skills would be one way of dealing with this problem and making training much more relevant and practical. Robinson (1996:11) for example argues that assignments can be used to link theory and practice and in so doing eliminate the problem of theoretical programmes and encourage students to apply knowledge and skills learnt.

Conduct more timed tests than the take home assignments since the take home assignments are open to cheating. In addition to this, it was also suggested that assessment methods used are diversified to include group assessment, oral examinations, take home examinations, and self-assessment. One official, however,

suggested that only timed tests be utilised. But, if assignments motivate students to study (see section 6.3.6) then eliminating take home assignments completely would ruin the opportunity assignments offer as a study tool.

To ensure same standards of assessment for internal and distance education students, these students should all '...sit the same examination.' However, whereas this is likely to lead to identical standards, it would raise the problem of rigidity in terms of deadlines and programming (Holmberg 2001:21). Equivalence of standards should instead be the objective rather than aiming at identical examinations.

Related to this, one student suggested, the 'pass mark be reduced (to 40%) for distance education students as they have little time for face to face'; and according to one prospective student, the 'marking scheme shouldn't be so tight since most of those are committed and may not have the time to research'. In spite of the assertion that assignments are open to cheating, one student suggested that the 'coursework marks should constitute 50% of final mark'. I find these suggestions very troubling because it seems to imply that because these are distance education programmes, standards should be lower. This approach would only reinforce the view that distance education is a second rate and poor option of providing education. If distance education is to be accepted in Uganda it should not compromise standards in any way.

As another way of ensuring standards, it was recommended that moderation of examination should continue to play a very central role.

Moderation of examination

According to responses given on this, only a small proportion of the respondents raised this as a strategy that can be adopted. In their view, assignments should be moderated before they are given to students; as one tutor said, 'must moderate examinations – this would be good for quality assurance'. This issue of quality assurance is discussed in further detail in section 6.4.8. The scores of those who answered this question were 0.45% of students' responses, none from the prospective students, 9.09% of policy makers' and 6.25% of the tutors and managers'.

Improved management and administration of assignments and examinations

From the responses received, the scores were 30.63% of students' responses, 42.86% of the prospective students' responses 41.67% of policy makers' and 9.09% of the tutors and managers'. General management and administrative weaknesses and how to

address them have already been discussed in section 6.4.3 and what was raised there is applicable to all administrative and management issues in the programmes however, here the respondents were concerned with the specific administration and management of assignments and examinations. And according to them, the following need to be done to ensure improvement:

- Focused and careful planning of assignments and examinations. According to one tutor, there should be 'advance preparation for examinations' and one student adds that examinations should only be conducted when the 'administration has ensured the course is completed by the concerned'. Focused and careful planning includes providing the year planner to students, tutors and managers with clear dates and venues.
- Continuous monitoring of assignments and examination activities. As one officer said, introduce 'checks and balances. Monitor assignments to ensure students present authentic work and not cheat'.
- Venues for examinations should therefore not be changed '...at the 11th hour because some students miss exams as a result.'
- Retake examinations should be arranged soon after results have been released and not the next time the same course is on offer which often implies waiting for a whole academic year.
- 'Time for some examinations should be longer e.g. educational psychology in B.Ed should be longer by 40 minutes'.
- Deadlines for assignment should be set and should be strictly adhered to. However, examinations should be done only at the end of the academic year and not at the end of every semester.
- Decentralised examinations. In the words of one student, 'examinations also be sat in upcountry centres'

Improving assignment turn around and providing prompt feedback

Assignments are one way in which interaction can take place between the tutors and the students. But this can only take place if there is correspondence tuition through these assignments and that this tuition is prompt, relevant and provides constructive criticism and guidance. For as Holmberg (1986:35) argues, '*feedback is important not only for discussion, explanation and enrichment, but also to show the student if he or she is on the right path ...*' It was also the view of the respondents in this study that this is important and the speed with which the feedback on assignments is given should be improved (19.36% of students' responses, none from the prospective students, 20.46%

of policy makers' responses and 16.67% of the tutors and managers'). According to them,

- Assignments should be carefully marked and should also 'ensure tutors provide comprehensive comments/feedback on assignments. Provide guidance through assignments'. This is important since assignments are taken as a study tool, tutors should provide correspondence tuition, guiding and supporting the students through their comments (O'Shea and Downes 1997:64)
- Tutors should provide prompt feedback on assignments and examinations and release results soon after examinations. This feedback and results should also be '...quickly and easily accessible to the students', for example, through the district offices. According to another student, 'promptly release examination results and give students information through the district offices'.
- Assignments 'scripts should be returned (some lecturers do not return scripts)'

Closely related to providing feedback is the need for proper records management.

Proper records management

Records management is important in these programmes, particularly since assignments are used for assessment purposes. The records of assignment marks should therefore be carefully recorded and managed. According to responses given on this, the scores were 7.66% of students' responses, 14.29% of the prospective students' responses 8.33% of policy makers' and 2.27% of the tutors and managers'. The views were:

- 'Improve record management of students' progressive assessment and examinations'.
- Better administration of results because missing results is a common occurrence'.

Also that to reduce the problems of records management, the whole process should be computerised.

6.4.7 Other weaknesses in the Teacher Education programmes

In addition to weaknesses already discussed in sections 6.4.2 –6.4.6, the participants in this study also raised other weaknesses. Some of these are:

- Inadequate integration of ICTs in the programmes
- The 'Ministry of Education and Sports is not registering students who do not have two teaching subjects. Ministry is avoiding reality'. In addition, the District Service Commission does not recognise the Headteacher Training Scheme certificate so holders of this certificate do not necessarily have an advantage over those without the certificate.

- 'Poor attitude towards distance education graduates.' As already discussed in section 5.5.5, attitude towards distance education is one of the factors that is impacting distance education in the country. Distance education is viewed as a second rate option and the degrees awarded as second rate too. This is a problem that Paul (1990:59) also highlights.
- Some programmes like TDMS recruited weak students.
- Running face-to-face sessions during the school holidays implies teachers in these programmes do not rest at all. According to one education officer it is 'possible therefore for them to reach burn-out'.

Suggestions of how to address the major weaknesses identified have also been discussed. However, the next section will now focus on quality assurance mechanisms as a specific strategy of ensuring that teacher education programmes run by distance in the country are of high quality.

6.4.8 Quality assurance mechanisms

Quality is a concern of all who offer goods or services because this is likely to have impact on the choices that the consumers of these goods and services make. In distance education as well, quality has been the concern of a number of institutions offering distance education programmes. For, as Tait (1997:2) argues, quality assurance is paramount if distance education institutions are to reduce dropout rates. He also adds that quality assurance systems should not be transplanted from one institution to another. Instead, each institution should develop its own system taking into account the context in which the institution operates. For example, the Open University of Hong Kong imported standards and quality assurance systems when it was launched. However, this led to problems because of lack of a sense of ownership amongst its staff (Robertshaw 1997:67). It is for this reason that in this study, policy makers, tutors and managers were asked to suggest quality assurance mechanisms that should be put in place in teacher education programmes in Uganda to ensure that programmes run are of high quality (see item 18 in the interview schedule and in the tutors and managers' questionnaire - appendices II and VI). A total of 8 tutors and managers and 10 policy makers answered this question. See table 6.2 for the details of the distribution of the responses. From the different responses that were received, a number of suggestions were put forward.

a) Curricula

Sections 6.3.2 and 6.4.2 focused on the content of teacher education programmes and as already mentioned, teacher education programmes have been accused of running irrelevant, theoretical and heavily loaded curricula (Odaet 1985:45, Dove 1986:244).

The challenge therefore is to ensure relevant, practical and balanced programmes that are of high quality as a strategy of ensuring quality. From the responses received (16.95% of those by policy makers, and 6.38% of those by tutors and managers) teacher education institutions need:

- To 'run programmes that are recognised by the accrediting institutions – programmes that have been through the rigours of approval in the institution'. This involves the 'vetting of all courses mounted'. This is already being done in Makerere University. All courses run in all the university programmes have to be approved by the host Department, Faculty/Institute Board, Humanities/Science Senate Committee, and the Senate. Other Universities like the Open University, UK, and Open University of Hong Kong also have committees meant to approve, review and vet courses (O'Shea and Downes 1997:60, Robertshaw 1997:71)
- To mount programmes that are balanced and that '...take into consideration the academic, professional and moral issues'. Courses must therefore be relevant.
- 'Consult all the stakeholders while developing curricula and determining standards to be achieved'.
- Clear objectives, rules and regulations of the programmes and these should be enforced.

b) Monitoring and evaluation

According to the policy makers, tutors and managers, monitoring and evaluation are important for quality assurance (%14.41of policy makers' responses, 13.83% of tutors' and managers' responses). So in their view, all programme activities should be monitored and evaluated continuously and regularly. This is in agreement with Seaborne (1997:85), who says that monitoring helps establish whether the standards set in the programme are being met. Evaluation should be by all the stakeholders and there should also be external evaluation of programmes and the 'Education Service Agency (ESA) could play this role. This ensures internal weaknesses are not overlooked'. Also in relation to this, one tutor recommended that Makerere 'carry out a tracer study to provide empirical information on the programme'.

This should also include close monitoring of all students and staff; and 'non-performers' weeded out. Monitoring of tutors could be achieved through student assessment of tutors and staff.

c) Study materials development and provision

Study materials are very central in distance education because students in these programmes study for the most part on their own and therefore need the study materials to do so. So according to the policy makers (12.71% of their responses) and the tutors and managers (15.96% of their responses), the teacher education programmes should aim at developing and providing high quality study materials; and to achieve this demands training for writers, rigour in the process and commitment by all players. The entire study materials production and distribution process must therefore be closely monitored and supervised. A number of distance education institutions have well laid out procedures of ensuring that the study materials developed are of high quality. Some of the procedures include training of writers, reviewing and vetting of study materials, use of writing teams and evaluation of these study materials (Robertshaw 1997:71, Rowntree 1986:19 –23).

d) Assessment and examinations

The strengths and weaknesses of assessment and examinations have already been discussed in sections 6.3.6 and 6.4.6. In this discussion, it was pointed out that assessment and examinations are important for maintenance of standards. From the responses received, it was the view of policy makers (11.86% of their responses) and the tutors and managers (14.89% of their responses) that:

- 'Assessment and examinations are up to standard'.
- Assessment strategies should change so as to eliminate cheating in assignments. Cheating compromises standards'.
- 'Distance education students should sit the same examinations as internal students of same courses.'
- 'External moderation of all examinations'.
- 'Strict regulations and requirements for continuous assessment and examinations. Students must pass before proceeding to the next level'.
- 'Assessment should be done at several levels e.g. at university, exams, the school practice, and then the employers too should make their own quality assurance'.

e) Quality staff and staff development

Quality staff is vital for all levels of operation in the teacher education programmes and this has already been reflected in the discussions on strengths and weaknesses (see sections 6.3 and 6.4). At each of these levels, it was recommended that quality staff should be recruited and that there should be continuous training and retraining of staff. In examining the question of quality assurance, it was once again highlighted that recruiting quality staff and training is one way of achieving this (11.02% of the policy makers' responses and 18.09% of the tutors' responses). In particular, the training should be in '...skills that are tailored for distance education.'

f) Student support services

Just as with study materials, student support services are very central in distance education and it was the view of the respondents to this question that 'efficient student support services' is one way of ensuring quality in the programmes. Sections 6.3.5 and 6.4.5 focused on student support services. Altogether in 9.32% of the policy makers' responses and in 7.45% of the tutors' and managers' responses it was indicated that student support is one way of ensuring quality.

All the mechanisms suggested in these previous sub sections and the distribution of the responses are now given in table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Quality assurance mechanisms for Teacher Education programmes

What to do	Tutors & managers		Policy makers	
	f	%	f	%
Curricula	6	6.38	20	16.95
Monitoring and evaluation	13	13.83	17	14.41
Study materials development and provision	15	15.96	15	12.71
Assessment & examinations	14	14.89	14	11.86
Quality staff & staff development	17	18.09	13	11.02
Student support services	7	7.45	11	9.32
Institutional standards and procedures	6	6.38	9	7.63
Entry requirements	4	4.26	9	7.63
Management & administration	7	7.45	7	5.93
Funding & Resources	4	4.26	3	2.54
Other ways	1	1.06	0	0

It is interesting to note here that whereas policy makers had the highest scores (16.95% of their responses) for curricula as a mechanism to ensure quality assurance, the tutors and managers gave this option only 6.38 % of their responses. Is it perhaps that since the tutors and managers have been involved in the design of curricula they do not see this

as an area of weakness whereas the policy makers are not as intimately involved with the curriculum and therefore see its gaps?

In addition to all the quality assurance mechanisms suggested above, the respondents to this question also suggested that:

- Institutions have 'clear and efficient management systems that involve all the stakeholders'.
- Institutions define the 'minimum entry requirements and pass requirements taking into account background of the teacher'. However, one official suggested that the institutions should 'admit high quality candidates and not simply depend on minimum requirements'. This is another strategy that is likely to create barriers and cut off some people and yet distance education is believed to be able to open up access and cater for the disadvantaged (De Wolf 1994:1558, Holmberg 1995b:13, Rumble 1992:19). At the same time, to improve the quality of teachers it is important that teacher education institutions should endeavour to recruit high quality candidates. This is a dilemma for distance education institutions offering teacher education programmes. See chapter three, figure 3.2 for the vicious cycle of poor quality education.

6.4.9 Conclusion

This section has focused on discussing some of the weaknesses that were identified in the teacher education programmes that have been run by distance education in Uganda. Under each of the weaknesses, strategies of addressing the weakness have also been discussed. It is therefore clear that although a lot has been achieved, there is still a lot more that needs to be done to make the programmes much more effective and efficient.

One common trend in all the recommendations made to improving programmes is decentralisation of services. Distance education students are often scattered across large areas and are likely to face isolation. To reach these students, services must be provided nearest their homes and where possible, perhaps through technology, in their homes. Continuing to provide services centrally is self-defeating and makes programmes more costly for students. True, decentralised services might imply higher costs to the institutions but there cannot be any short cuts to more efficient and effective service provision.

Also, although the strengths and weaknesses have been discussed under different topics, it should still be remembered that these are not mutually exclusive but should instead be viewed as parts of a whole.

In discussing these weaknesses and strengths the respondents were not asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of specific programmes. What has been presented here therefore refers to teacher education programmes that have been run by distance education in Uganda in general. However, since the focus of this study was on INSET for secondary school teachers and since at the start of the study Makerere University was the only institution engaged in this, the next section will now focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the Bachelor of Education (External).

6.5 STRENGTHS OF BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (EXTERNAL)

6.5.1 Introduction

The Bachelor of Education was launched in 1991 as part of the Makerere University External Degree Programme (EDP). Since 1999, the B.Ed External has admitted more than 1,500 students each year and between 1991 and 2000 a total of 974 teachers have completed and graduated with Bachelor of Education; while nearly 2,600 are continuing with the programme. See chapter 3 section 3.6.5 for details on the programme and table 3.7 and figure 3.9 for the numbers admitted and those completing since 1991.

However, in spite of all the achievements highlighted, the programme has faced a number of challenges. In this study, questions were put to the participants in the study asking them to identify what they see as strengths and weaknesses of the programme in the areas off:

- The content of the programme;
- Practical work in the programme;
- Management and administration of the programme;
- Student support in the programme;
- Study materials development and provision in the programme; and
- Assessment and examinations of the programme.

For each of these areas, the same categories as those used in sections 6.3 and sections 6.4 were used to categorise the responses. These same categories will therefore be used to discuss each of the major areas. Also, the Bachelor of Education (External) programme will continue to be referred to as the B.Ed (External).

However, the questions to prospective students did not require them to respond using these specific areas because, it was assumed that since they are not in the programme, they would not be in position to address these questions. Instead they were asked to identify any problems that the B.Ed (External) students they know are facing.

Ultimately, a total of 129 students, 17 tutors and managers and 16 policy makers responded to these questions. The number of tutors and managers who responded to questions in this section is smaller than the total number in the sample (47%) because according to some of them, these questions had already been answered while answering the questions on strengths and weaknesses of teacher education programmes that have been run by distance education (see sections 6.3 and 6.4 for the discussion of these results). In the light of this, although the next sections focus on what is specifically ascribed to the B.Ed (External), the strengths and weaknesses discussed in 6.3 and 6.4 should be borne in mind.

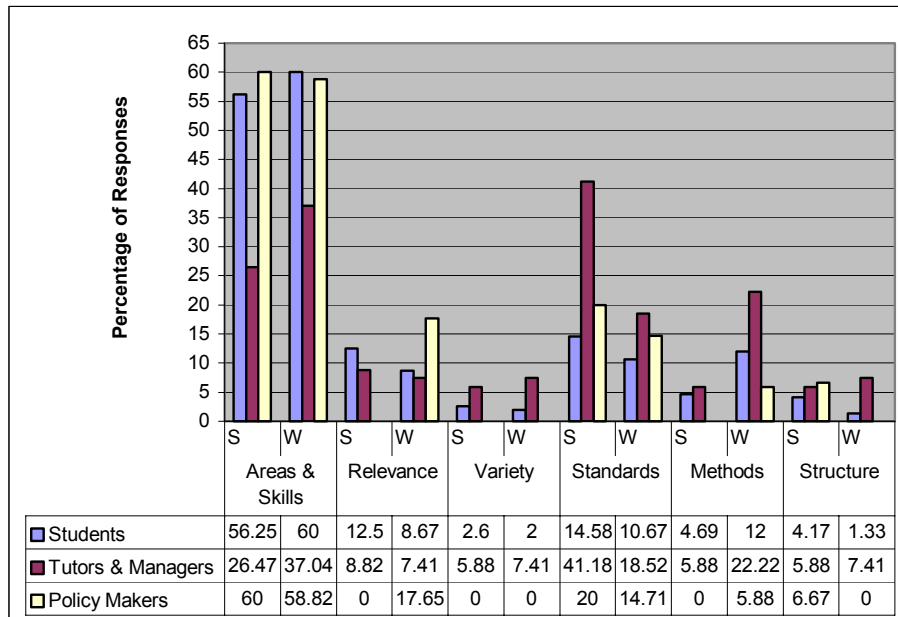
6.5.2 Strengths of the content of the B.Ed (External)

One of the elements described in chapter 3 section 3.6.5 is the curriculum of the B.Ed (External), it is therefore assumed that the comments on the content on the programme is based on the experiences with this curriculum. From the responses received, a number of strengths were identified in relation to:

- Areas covered and skills acquired in the programme
- The relevance of the content
- Variety in the courses offered
- Quality assurance and standard of the content
- Methods used in covering the content
- Structure of the content

Each of these will now be discussed. Figure 6.2 reflects the distribution of the responses received on the strengths and weaknesses of the content of the B.Ed (External). See also the interview schedule item 22a and 23a; the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 23a and 24a; the students' questionnaire item 21a and 22a; and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II –VI).

Figure 6.2 Strengths and weaknesses of content of B.Ed (External)



S - Strength

W - Weakness

a) Areas covered and skills acquired in the programme

According to those who responded to this question, and as illustrated in figure 6.2, 56.25% of responses from students, 60% of responses from policy makers and 26.47% of the tutors' and managers' responses, B.Ed (External) has a rich content that enables the students to acquire knowledge and skills that they need. However, as illustrated in figure 6.2, an almost equal number of respondents argued that the content of the B.Ed (External) is also inadequate in the areas and skills it covers. I believe this is because although the content of the programme has some strengths, it nevertheless still has weaknesses. Weaknesses of the content of the programme are discussed in section 6.6.2.

In this study, the respondents argued that the content of the B.Ed (External) is helpful because in the words of one student, 'content helps in producing competent staff and makes the students more skilful.' Another student was convinced that the rich content '...enables students to compete internationally.'

The content was also said to 'help in understanding more the missed out content at diploma.' This is important since one of the reasons for INSET is to help teachers sharpen their knowledge and skills (Bagwandeem and Louw 1993:1, Dove 1986:224, Garden 1998:226, Iredale 1996:15). Also, the objective of launching the B.Ed (External)

was so to give ‘...students in-depth knowledge of teaching subjects selected for specialization’ (CCE 1990:22). The other strengths identified are:

- The content ‘provides new methods of teaching’.
- ‘The academic part of the content is comprehensive and adequate’. This is as opposed to professional subjects.
- The content ‘covers essential areas like problem solving, knowledge of resources required to teach/learn, research skills’.
- There is ‘sufficient content coverage made through study materials and face to face sessions.’

Related to this all therefore is the relevance of the content of the programme.

b) Relevance of the content of B.Ed (External)

It is important that INSET programmes are relevant to the needs of the teachers. So from the responses received on this question, 12.5% of responses from students, no responses from policy makers and 8.82% of the tutors’ and managers’ responses, the content of B.Ed (External) is relevant because:

- ‘It enables the teacher to improve on the teaching skills to face challenges in the classroom’.
- It is ‘...very valid to the level...’
- It ‘is what the teachers need to teach at their levels. Prepares them to teach at “A” level.’

So according to the responses received in this area, the content of B.Ed (External) is relevant to the teachers’ needs and it helps prepare them for classroom practice. See also figure 6.2.

INSET is meant to help improve the teachers’ knowledge and skills (Bagwandeem and Louw 1993:1, Dove 1986:224 Garden 1998:226, Iredale 1996:15). However for this to be achieved, the content of the programmes should be the kind that will enhance achievement of the INSET aims.

c) Variety in the subjects offered

As already discussed in chapter three section 3.6.5 and as shown in table 3.6 the B.Ed (External) students have elective subjects that they can take. In this study and according to a very limited number of respondents (2.6% of students’ responses and 5.88% of tutors’ and managers’), the content of B.Ed (External) has a variety of courses on offer. See figure 6.2 for the graphic representation of this. According to one student, the

programme 'has a wide curriculum cutting across sciences and arts (including Fine Art). Secondary school teachers in Uganda teach a cross section of subjects although each teacher is expected to have two teaching subjects. It is therefore vital that the B.Ed (External) offer a variety of subjects from which teachers can choose their options.

d) Quality and standard of the content of B.Ed (External)

In section 6.4.8a while discussing quality assurance mechanisms, it was raised that one way of doing so is to ensure that the curricula are of high quality. In response, therefore, to the strength of the content of B.ED (External), the concern of the respondents here was with the quality and standard of the programme. According to them, the content is appropriate for university level, it is of high quality and in some subjects, like Literature in English and English Language Studies, the content is 'almost the same with the full time students'. Other issues raised as a reflection of this high quality and standards are:

- The 'coursework is compact, diverse and rich'
- 'Up-to-date content is covered in the programme'
- The 'research component lays a very good foundation for further research'.
- 'Supervision of research enriches the supervisors as well'.
- Content is logically, systematically arranged'.
- 'Quality control mechanisms are in place'.

According to the results received and graphically presented in figure 6.2, 14.58% of students' responses, 20% of the policy makers' and 41.18% of the tutors and managers' responses, the content of B.Ed (External) is of high quality and standard.

e) Distance learning study package

The respondents in this study were also concerned about the methods that are used to cover the content of the programme and according to them,

- 'Students are encouraged to discover a lot by themselves'. This is important in distance education since distance learners study for the most time on their own. Also, according to Coetzer (2001:75-76), in the new educational approach learners are expected to take responsibility for their own learning.
- The study package gives 'opportunity for up-grading that may not be available for this category of teachers'. This is because distance education opens access to those that are disadvantaged and also allows them to study as they work (De Wolf 1994:1558, Holmberg 1995b:13, Rumble 1992:19 Robinson 1996:6).

- Programme has 'well prepared materials'. The B.Ed (External) utilises especially prepared study materials and according to one of the tutors, this material is well prepared.
- 'Where more than one lecturer teaches on a course, there is cross fertilisation'. The assumption here is that when there is more than one person teaching then different perspectives brought into the course enrich the teaching and learning.

f) Structure of the content

This is the last but not least area of strength of the content identified and it refers to the manner in which the content of the programmes is arranged or organised. Structuring of content is an important factor because as Moore (1986:11, 1996:26) argues, this will determine whether that programme will overall be highly structured or less structured and ultimately, this determines the transactional distance that will exist between the learner and the teacher. According to a small proportion of respondents in the study (4.17% of student responses, 6.67% of policy makers' and 5.88% of tutors' and managers' responses), the B.Ed (External) content is well structured. It is 'logically arranged'. In table 3.6 a summary of B.Ed (External) is provided and this shows that the programme can be completed in a minimum of 6 semesters and a maximum of 12 semesters. This allows a student to study, temporarily withdraw and then return to the programme which introduces an element of flexibility that is important for distance learners. This approach seems to be a high-breed of the two strategies that Holmberg (2001:21) recommends as ways of structuring programmes. According to him, programmes can be either extra paradigmatic, allowing for flexibility, or it can be innovative within an accepted paradigm with classes/cohorts, fixed starting times, fixed schedules for assignments, and fixed duration of the course. The B.Ed (External) has cohorts and fixed schedules for assignments and examinations. However, the student is given opportunity to temporarily withdraw and resume later. See section 2.5.4 for a discussion on Holmberg's theory.

6.5.3 Strengths of the practical work in the B.Ed (External)

Provision of practical work is a challenge to distance education programmes as already discussed in section 5.4 so the students and tutors and managers were asked to show any strengths if any in the provision of practical work in B.Ed (External). See also the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 23a, and students' questionnaire item 21a (appendices II, III and V).

Most of the responses received on this were from students with only 9 tutors and managers giving their views. However out of these few responses, the areas of strength identified were:

- Face to face sessions are used to provide for the practical work
- Tutors are competent to handle the demands of practical work
- Where practical work is required, the programme provides the required materials
- 'Quality control mechanisms of Makerere University apply to these areas as well'
- 'Research has high demands but has been a success story'.

From the responses received, it seems that practical work is most applicable in the subjects of Art and Craft and in English Language Studies that have practical components in their curricula. Also, although school practice is an important element in teacher education, and is not being offered in the B.Ed (External), there was no reference to it at all. See also section 3.6.5 for a discussion on school practice and the B.Ed (External).

6.5.4 Strengths of the management and administration of the B.Ed (External)

The Bachelor of Education (External) is run by the Department of Distance Education in collaboration with the School of Education. Under this arrangement, the Department of Distance Education is responsible for:

- Keeping and maintaining student records
- Receiving and dispatching assignments for marking and eventual distribution of marked assignments to students.
- In consultation with the teaching faculties identify and train tutors, writers, editors and reviewers of the study materials.
- Production, publication, revision and distribution of study materials developed.

The School of Education on the other hand is responsible for the teaching functions and these include:

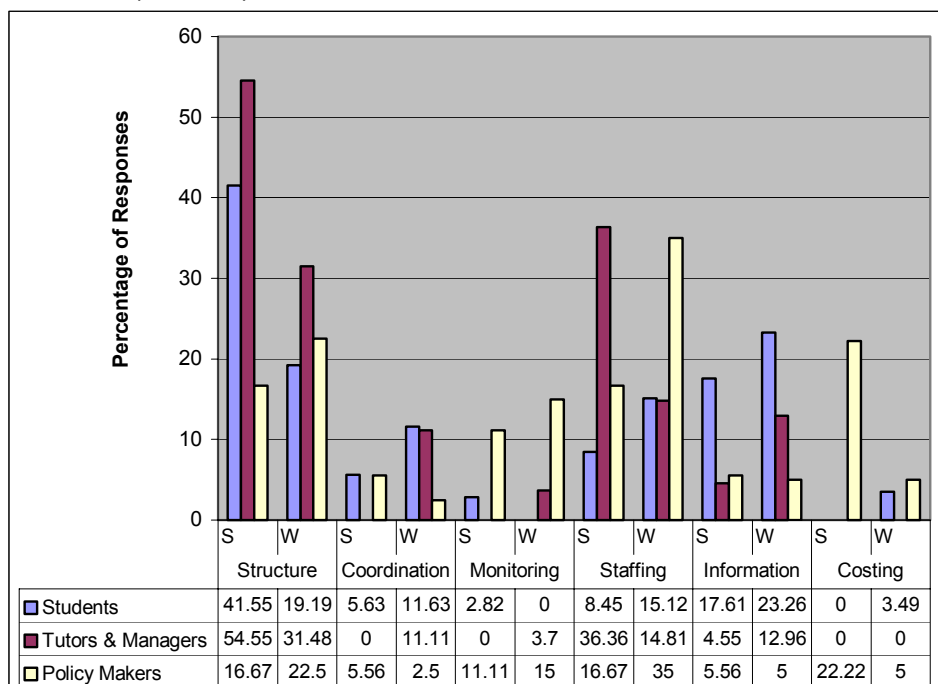
- In collaboration with the Department of Distance Education identify tutors, writers and reviewers of study materials, and external examiners.
- Recommend reading lists for the different subjects and where necessary vet study materials acquired.
- In collaboration with the Department of Distance Education ensure that standards are maintained in teaching and in the assignments and examinations set.

This collaborative strategy of managing programmes is typical of dual mode universities like Makerere University. In most dual mode universities, a service unit is established to

take charge of the administrative tasks of the programme (Bottomley and Calvert 2003:1). However, as already raised in chapter two section 2.7.4, the demarcation between administrative and academic functions is not always obvious.

The respondents in this study were asked to comment on what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of such an administrative and management strategy. See also the interview schedule items 22b and 23b; the tutors and managers' questionnaire items 23c and 24c; the students' questionnaire items 21c and 22c; and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II –VI). In their responses, a number of areas of concern were identified and those with the highest responses are illustrated in figure 6.3, which gives what was raised as the strengths and weaknesses of the management and administration of the B.Ed (External).

Figure 6.3 Strengths and weaknesses of management and administration of the B.Ed (External)



S – Strength

W - Weakness

Each of the strengths raised will now be briefly discussed.

a) Structure and organisation of the Department and the programme

The highest number of responses on the strengths of the programme from students (41.55%) and tutor and managers (54.55%) were in relation to the structure and organisation of the Department and the programme; policymakers on the other hand had 16.67% of their responses. In their view, the fact that the programme has a specific

Department handling the programme is an advantage. Related to this, one manager was glad that the programme has been 'institutionalised into Makerere University'. Which means the programme is recognised by the university and can therefore receive attention like all the other university programmes. See also figure 6.3 for the graphic presentation of this data.

Other issues raised with regard to the structure and organisation of the Department and the programmes were:

- The 'management is well focused though the tasks ahead are very challenging', and according to one student, the management is 'trying to be up to standard'.
- 'Top management of the programme is good and committed'. The implication here is that the lower administrative cadre in the Department is not committed. This should be of concern to the Department because there is no officer that is too small to matter. The success of the Department should depend on commitment from all staff both top and lower cadre.
- 'There is a hierarchy of management. Work is delegated with different offices handling different issues'. This is clearly employing what Peters (1994:113) calls rationalisation through division of labour that he says is important in distance education.
- 'Management is flexible'.
- 'The management is working hand in hand with students to deal with some problems'. This reflects the Department's effort at involving students in the management of the programme.
- The Department also 'organizes face to face sessions' and 'schedules programmes/activities'.

Those who responded to this question are clearly concerned about the how the Department is organised and how this enables the Department to efficiently serve its clients.

b) Coordination and monitoring of activities of the B.Ed (External)

As already mentioned, the B.Ed (External) is run on a collaborative basis involving the School of Education and other university departments and also, that its students are scattered across the entire country. This is similar to a number of distance education institutions which also have students scattered across distant places (De Wolf 1994:1558, Perraton 2000:136). This therefore implies that there is need for a lot of coordination of activities. The respondents to this question were also of the view that

coordination is important and it is one of the strengths of B.Ed (External). The proportion of those with this view was, however very small, only 5.63% of the students' responses, and 5.56% of the policy makers'. See figure 6.3. The two major issues raised were:

- 'There is some good coordination of the management with the different departments within the institute'. This also includes coordination with other university departments.
- Involvement of students in the coordination of activities. As one student said, 'setting up of student leaders – coordinators'.

Since there is division of labour in distance education, it is important that all activities are well coordinated to avoid confusion and frustration for all involved.

Closely related to this is monitoring of activities which in the view of again a small proportion (only 2.82% of the students' responses, and 11.11% of the policy makers') is a strength in the B.Ed (External). To them, students are participating in the monitoring of activities through the involvement of their student leaders. Also that, 'emphasis on deadlines' is a good monitoring tool.

c) Staff required to run the B.Ed (External)

To effectively run its activities, the B.Ed (External) needs well-trained and highly motivated support and academic staff. It needs staff to manage and administer the programme; tutors to run the face-to-face sessions, provide academic guidance to students, and to set and mark assignments and examinations; reviewers to review all the study materials developed; editors and various other support staff. These must be people with professional skills but who must also be knowledgeable in distance education (Bottomley and Calvert 2003:3). To achieve this, there is need for careful recruitment and for training and retraining of those already involved in the programme.

According to the respondents in this study (8.45% of the students' responses, 16.67% of the policy makers' and 36.36% of tutors' and managers' responses),

- The 'Department has staff qualified in distance education'.
- Staff 'is committed, qualified, and well intentioned...'
- Training workshops are run for tutors and writers.
- Programme also utilises '...learned and experienced lecturers'.

See figure 6.3 for illustration of presentation of strengths and weaknesses.

d) Information dissemination and public relations

Students had the highest responses on this with 17.61% of their responses while policy makers had only 5.56% of their responses and the tutors and managers with 4.55%. Some of the strengths identified in relation with information dissemination and public relations were:

- Attention and tolerance of student problems and so in the words of one student, the Department is 'responsive to students' needs' and this they say, 'enables students to continue with the programme'.
- Related to this, the students were also glad that 'there is always somebody to attend to the students at the reception.'
- Subject coordinators keep the students well informed.
- Orientation sessions are organised for first year students and according to one of the students, these sessions are '...suitable for upcountry students'.
- 'The administrators are approachable'.

Provision of clear information is certainly important and also, it is important that administrators and managers show concern for the learners and are seen to be easily approachable for as one student said, this 'enables the students to continue with the programme'.

e) Fees and costing of B.Ed (External)

In the view of the policy makers, (with 22.22% of their responses) the B.Ed (External) charges low fees and that the students can pay this in instalments thus permitting many more to enrol in the programme. The students and tutors and managers did not share this same sentiment with the policy makers and so none of them raised this as a strength of B.Ed. Students instead raised this as one of the areas of weakness. See figure 6.3.

Apart from the strengths that have been discussed in 6.5.4 a-e, a small proportion of respondents also identified the following:

- Flexible programming of the activities (1.41% of student responses, and 11.11% of the policy makers' responses). This is particularly important since one of the reasons many join distance education programmes is because of the need for flexible methods of studying (Peters 1996: 45, Rumble 2000:1).
- High number admitted and the Department's ability to sustain the programme in spite of this challenge (1.41% of student responses, and 11.11% of the policy makers' responses). This also reiterates one of the advantages of distance education already

highlighted – that is its potential to open up access and to recruit many students (Holmberg 2001:17).

Management and administration of B.Ed is therefore an important element of the programme and some strengths have been identified which perhaps need reinforcement so as to achieve even better results.

6.5.5 Strengths of the study materials development and provision in the B.Ed (External)

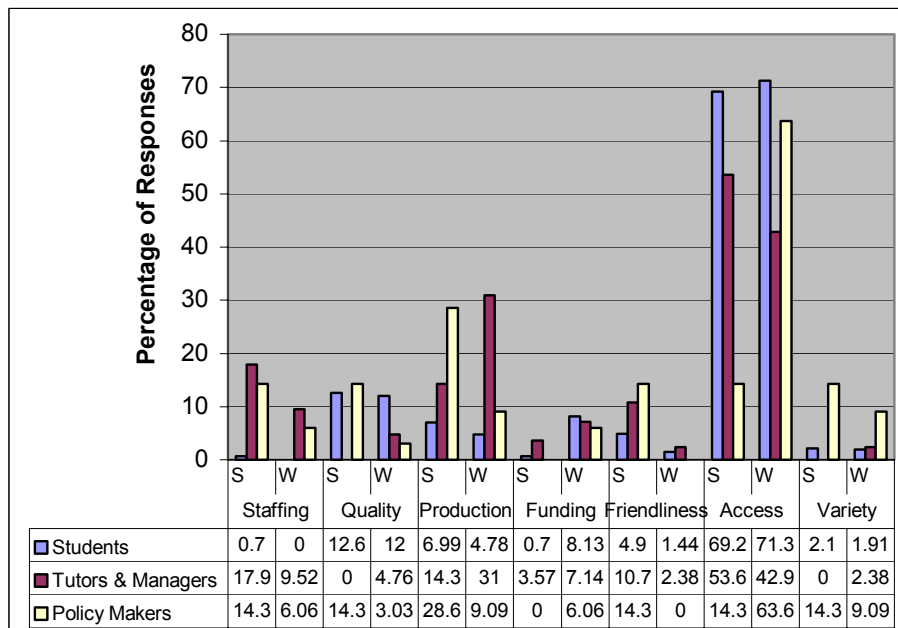
The Bachelor of Education (External) uses a study package that includes:

- Written materials including, handouts, textbooks, reference materials and especially produced modules;
- Student study group meetings;
- Face-to-face sessions;
- Audio cassettes and radio; and
- Other student support services.

However, written materials are supposed to be the core medium of instruction in this programme while all the others are meant to be support or to supplement the written study material. The respondents in this study identified a number of strengths related to study materials development and provision in the B.Ed (External). See the interview schedule item 22c and 23c; the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 23d and 24d; and the students' questionnaire item 21d and 23d and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II –VI).

Figure 6.4 graphically represents the strengths and weaknesses identified.

Figure 6.4 Strengths and weaknesses of study materials development and provision for B.Ed (external)



S - Strength

W - Weakness

From this figure it is clear that the issue of access to the study materials received the highest responses both as a strength and a weakness. This I believe is a reflection of the importance that all the respondents attach to the development and provision of study materials.

Each of the strengths of study materials development and provision will be briefly discussed in the next sub sections.

a) Staff for materials development and provision

Tutors and managers had the highest number of responses on this with 17.86% of their responses. I believe, this is because they benefit directly from the training workshops often organised for writers and reviewers of study materials. Also, according to them,

- Study materials have been 'written by writers who have been trained to write for distance education learners'.
- There is 'willingness of writers to develop materials'.

One tutor particularly believes that the 'head of materials development is very focused and has a big vision for the section...'

Policy makers also share some of these sentiments with the tutors because according to one of them, the 'writers training workshops held help equip distance education writers

with special skills'. Altogether in 14.29% of their responses, the policy makers said that recruitment, training and motivation of staff in materials development and provision were achievements in the B.Ed (External). Only one student (0.70%) saw this as strength.

b) Quality of study materials

Study materials in distance education must be of high quality so simply providing any study material is self-defeating. In section 6.4.8c quality study materials is identified as one of the mechanisms that distance education institutions need to put in place so as to ensure quality programmes. Quality in the study materials is therefore critical and must be assured for as SAIDE (1996:70) say, a quality distance education programme has well-designed study materials. In this study, and as illustrated in figure 6.4, some of the students (12.59% of their responses) and policy makers (14.29% of their responses) were of the view that B.Ed (External) has some high quality study materials. To them, this is because:

- Study materials provided are relevant. In the words of one student, 'without those materials it would have been impossible to proceed'.
- 'Handouts are precise to the topics of study'.
- 'Students get enough study materials through borrowing and the materials are constantly updated'. This seems to be more so for professional courses because one student said, 'sufficient materials offered for professional subjects'.

Ironically, none of the tutors and managers raised this as a strength and yet they are the study materials developers! So does this imply they have no confidence in what they have themselves developed?

c) Development of study materials for B.Ed (External)

The development of study materials starts from the planning of the course, through its writing, reviewing, editing, and illustration to the reproduction of the completed material (Robertshaw 1997:71, Rowntree 1986:19 –23). Regardless of the media that is eventually used it is important to remember that the development process is long and likely to involve a number of people, and unless the material is eventually available to students, the entire process will have been futile. Well-designed study materials are useless if they are not reproduced and made accessible to students at the right time.

In this study, some strengths related to the development of study materials were raised. The highest responses were from policy makers with 28.57% of their responses;

students had the least responses with only 6.99% of the responses while the tutors and managers' responses were 14.29% of their responses. According to them, there has been effort at developing study materials and as a result, 'a few modules have been produced'.

d) Funding for study materials development and provision

The production of study materials for distance education often requires high initial investment but unfortunately, this is sometimes ignored by a number of policy makers to the detriment of distance education with the result that poor quality and inadequate services are provided (Bates 2000:128, Berge 2001b:19, Orivel 1994:1572, Robinson 1996:20-27). However, in the B.Ed (External) programme, the respondents were of the view that this programme has done well in utilising its 'limited funding to develop quality materials'. This programme is funded almost solely from tuition fees that students pay, so all its funds for materials development is raised from the fees. The Department allocates 16% of its income to study materials development and provision. From the B.Ed (External) alone, this amounts to about US\$ 80,000 annually.

e) User friendliness of the study materials

Study materials developed should be in a language and structure that will not inhibit learning but which will instead promote learning. For example, Rowntree (1986:58) says that course material should not be overloaded because it only leads to stress for the learners. Holmberg (1986:108-111, 1995b:47, 2001:38-41) is also concerned about the user friendliness of the study materials, and he suggests that course materials developed for the distance learner should be presented in an interactive manner. The learner should be addressed personally and should be given opportunity to interact with the material through the self-checking exercises.

In this study, the respondents were of the view that the study materials developed for B.Ed (External) 'are written in a simple language to be easily understood by the students'. Also the study material is 'easy to read and use' is written in an interactive manner and includes local examples.

f) Access to the study materials

As mentioned in the introduction to this sub section, access to study materials had the highest number of responses, 69.23% of the students' responses, 14.29% of the policy makers' and 53.57% of the tutors and managers'. Study materials in B.Ed (External) are made available through the Book Bank in the Department of Distance Education, the

Institute of Adult and Continuing Education library, other university libraries, through the handouts given to the students and by individually photocopying of various other materials.

According to the respondents, B.Ed (External) students have access to the study materials. Some of their comments were:

- ‘After payment one is allowed to sign for books’
- ‘Library services are open to all students except we may lack time to visit’.
- ‘Some study materials have been sent to upcountry libraries at identified centres’ while some has been sold to students.
- Study materials are available ‘even in the non-final stage. Available as pilot modules’.
- ‘Borrowing system ensures sustainability of provision’.
- ‘Materials are adequate for the learners. Modules being provided. Handouts are given. Textbooks are available in the main library.’

From all these comments, these respondents see that Makerere University is endeavouring to make available study materials to the students of B.Ed (External). However, the strategies being used to do so are clearly not the ideal in a distance education setting. For example, why ‘lend’ study units as well? Most distance education programmes give study materials but only lend out library materials. Makerere may have been forced into this for a variety of reasons. These weaknesses are discussed further in section 6.6.5.

g) Variety of study materials and integration of ICTs

A limited number of responses were received on this with only 2.10% of the students’ responses, none by tutors and managers and 14.29% by the policy makers. However according to them, there have been attempts at offering variety by acquiring some study materials from other universities. Some material from Nairobi University is available. Also, in some subjects audiocassettes have been produced.

6.5.6 Strengths of student support in B.Ed (External)

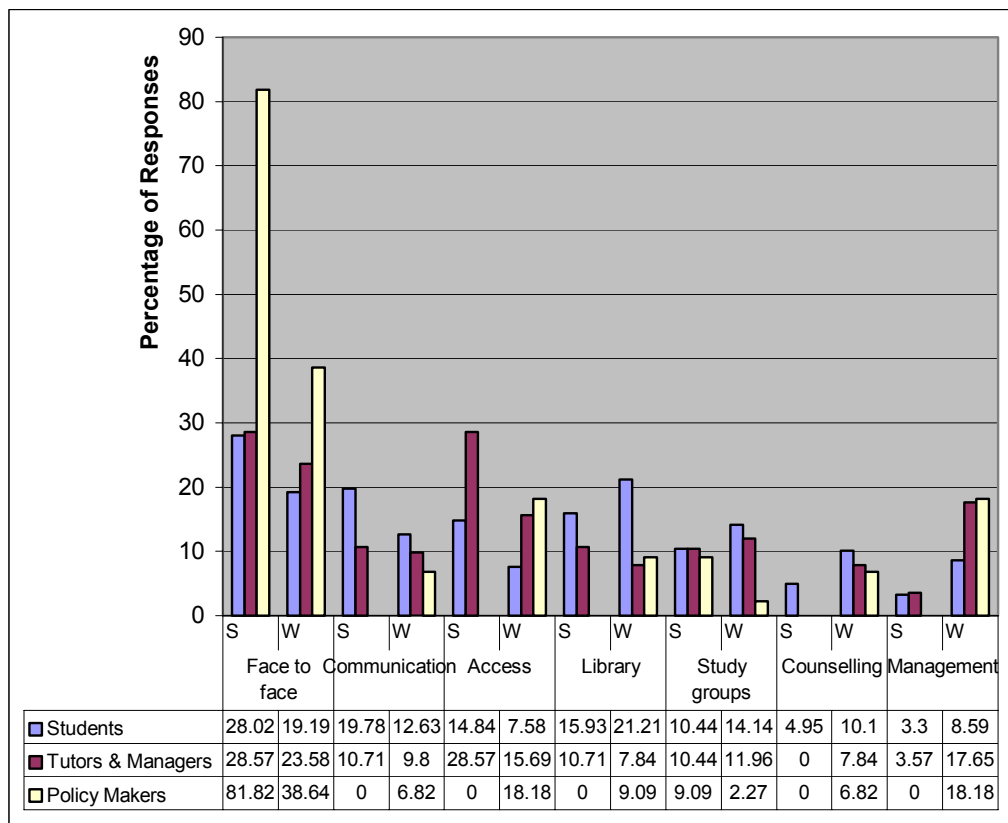
Student support in the B.Ed (External) is in the form of:

- Regular face to face sessions held mostly centrally at Makerere University but occasionally also at the regional centres
- Student group meetings often initiated and organised by students in their localities. Students can meet alone as students and could invite a specific tutor to help them with specific problem areas.

- Access to library services. This is provided through the main University Library, other University Libraries, the Departmental Book Bank, and through some public/institutional libraries that the Department is collaborating with.
- Provision of general information through the Departmental website, prospectus, notices, radio announcements and various circulars.
- Counselling and guidance. Any student with a specific problem can approach any staff member and seek counsel or guidance. The University Hospital also has a counselling unit that is open to all the university community.

Students, policy makers and tutors and managers who participated in this study were asked to reflect on the provision of student support for the B.Ed (External) and to comment on its strengths and weaknesses. See the interview schedule item 22d and 23d; the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 23e and item 24e; the students' questionnaire item 21e and 22e; and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II –VI). The results of this are reflected in figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5 Strengths and weaknesses of student support in B.Ed (External)



S - Strength

W - Weakness

Each of the strengths identified will now be discussed. The weaknesses will be discussed in section 6.6.

a) Face to face sessions for B.Ed (External)

According to Department's prospectus, at least two face-to-face sessions are organised every semester and the B.Ed (External) students are expected to attend these, although the sessions are not compulsory. According to responses received, 28.02% of the students' responses, 81.82% of the policy makers' and 28.57% of the tutors and managers', face-to-face sessions are important and have been organised for these students. Overall, of all the strengths identified on students support, face-to-face sessions had the highest responses. The policy makers had the highest number of responses citing face-to-face sessions as one of the strengths of the students support for the B.Ed (External). The evidence of this strength is that:

- Face-to-face sessions '...are arranged for students both at the university and at specific regional headquarters in the upcountry'.
- 'Face-to-face sessions are organised during the school holidays so do not clash with the school programmes'.
- 'Face-to-face sessions are relevant and supportive to students'. 'Encourages students share cultural and academic experiences'. One of the characteristics of distance education is that the learner and the teacher are separated and so the challenge the distance learners face is having to cope with isolation (Amundsen 1996:61-79, Keegan 1996:119, Moore 1996:22, Peters 1994:227, 1996:45, Verduin and Clark 1991:8). Where, therefore, face-to-face sessions are organised, they provide opportunity for students to overcome this isolation and have opportunity to interact with one another and with their tutors.
- 'Teaching during the face-to-face sessions is well done'. Although this was not explained it could imply the teaching is well organised but it could also imply that the actual teaching/learning experience was rich.

b) Communication and information flow

In a situation where the student and the learner are separate, strategies of bridging the gap between them are important. This separation can be:

- in terms of physical distance and time (Keegan 1996:118-119)
- the separation of the teaching and learning acts (Keegan 1996:130)
- psychological and communications space (Moore 1996:22)

Communication and information flow are therefore very important for purposes of bridging this gap. According to the respondents in this study, one of the strengths in the student support for B.Ed (External) students is the communication and information flow in the programme. Out of all the responses the students gave on strengths of students support, 19.78% cited communication and information flow while the tutors and managers' responses on the same amounted to 10.71% of all their responses on this question. The policy makers did not see this as strength at all. This may be because since they are not directly involved in the programme, they may not see the place of this in the programme. According to those who responded to this question, the evidence of this strength is that:

- 'Information is always given to students through radios, notice boards and briefing during face-to-face sessions'.
- 'Radio Uganda has been effectively used for announcements'.
- 'Effort is made to meet students from time to time to discuss their problems'.

c) Library services for B.Ed (External) students

Some reference to library services was made in section 6.5.5f while discussing access to study materials. Makerere University regards provision of library services as one of the support services and to the respondents in this study (15.93% of student responses, and 10.71% of tutors and managers') this is an important service which is relatively well provided. To them, this is because the university libraries are accessible to students and they can borrow books; and also because there are efforts at ensuring access to library facilities through upcountry centres. Next here are some of the comments received on this subject.

- 'Borrowing system ensures sustainability of provision of study materials even in time of shortages'.
- 'Regional centres and libraries available for coordination'
- 'Upcountry libraries have been opened to provide services nearer the students'.
- 'Some good textbooks are available in the library but students upcountry do not have easy access to them.'

d) Study group meetings for B.Ed (External) students

As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this sub section, students can initiate and organise their own study group meetings that can then take place with or without a tutor's assistance. These self-help groups as Robertshaw (2000:3) argues are important

for *'peer tutoring'* and like the face-to-face sessions they are also important as ways of dealing with isolation. The respondents in this study do not seem to see this as particularly very strong because only a few responses were received, only 10.44% of students' responses, 9.09% of policy makers' and 3.57% of tutors and managers'.

Nevertheless the following strengths were identified:

- There are 'active student study groups at the upcountry centres'.
- Through these meetings, students can 'seek/learn from others'. Also that 'peer group promotes socialisation'.
- Study groups are a huge potential – 'allowing students to support each other'.
- 'Student study groups that are always encouraged have helped the students to improve on those communication skills and give counselling among themselves'.
- 'Students are encouraged to study in groups. This consolidates what has been learnt'.

Form all these responses, student study group meetings are seen as important because of their potential to enrich learning and also because they provide opportunity for student/student interaction and support. This illustrates what Peters (1994:227, 1996:46) says because to him, social interactions are still important in distance education and are often provided through face-to-face sessions or through student self-help groups.

e) Guidance and counselling for B.Ed (External) students

A small proportion of students were of the view that guidance and counselling in B.Ed (External) is actually strength because only 4.95% of their responses were on this. Policy makers and the tutors and mangers did not see this as strength at all so there were no responses on this. However according to the students,

- 'Students are guided through the course outlines, information provided through the radio and notice boards'.
- Counselling services available to those who need this.

This all seems really sketchy and needing some more attention. B.Ed (External) students are all working adults who must be facing a lot of challenges and would therefore benefit from much more comprehensive guidance and counselling. This has been discussed in section 6.4.5b and is again picked up in section 6.6 when weaknesses of the programme are discussed.

f) Access to student support services

In relation to all the student support services that the respondents raised, they were also concerned about access to these services. And according to a number of students (14.84% of their responses) and tutors and managers (28.57% of their responses), access to the services is an important element in the provision of student support services.

According to them,

- student support is an 'essential part of the programme where students do most of the work on their own';
- there have been reading materials and counselling services for those in need;
- 'some effort is put in support to students'; and
- student support 'has been effective though more needs to be done'.

Provision of student support services can only be meaningful to the students if the service is actually accessible to the students. An excellent but inaccessible service is not useful to the students. According to Robertshaw (2000:1) a lot of questions should be asked in relation to how easily students can access the support services.

In addition to all these strengths discussed in 6.5.6a – f, a few other strengths were pointed out albeit by very small proportions of the respondents. These strengths are:

- There are attempts at good management and administration of the services
- Tutors are available during the face to face sessions
- There have been minimal attempts at integrating ICTs

6.5.7 Strengths of assessment and examinations in the B.Ed (External)

Assessment and examination in the B.Ed (External) is carried out through:

- Continuous Assessment (coursework and tests) which account for 40% of the final examination mark
- Written unseen examinations that account for 60% of the final examination mark.

The programme is governed by the '*general regulations of the University and in addition, by the regulations of the School of Education*' (Department of Distance Education 2000:4). The pass mark is therefore 50% and the award is classified as follows:

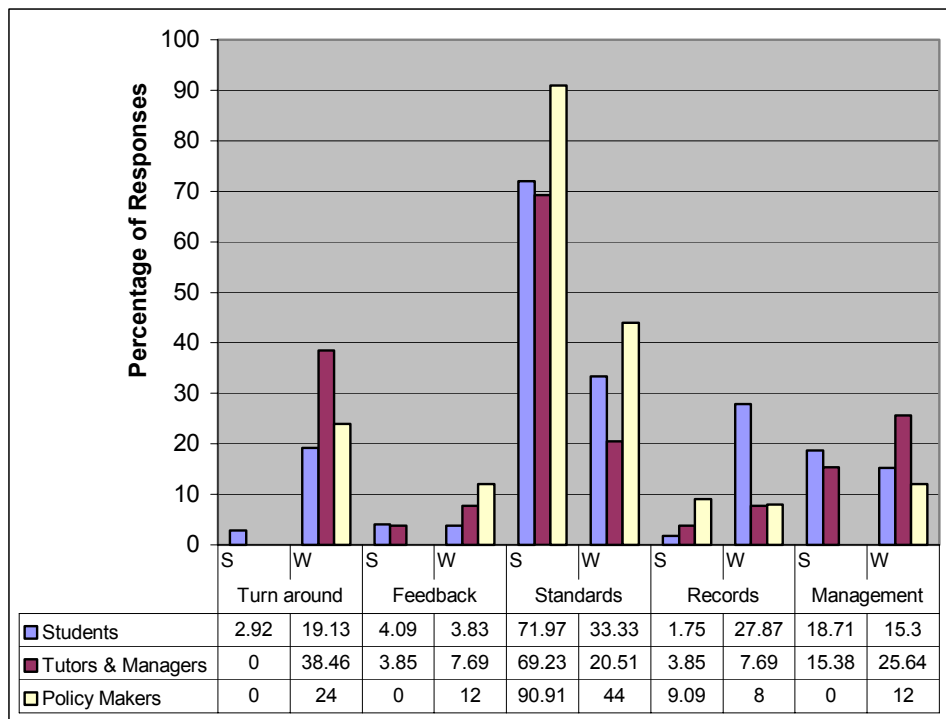
Table 6.3 Classification of the Makerere University Bachelors Degree

Class		Grade Point Average (GPA)	Marks
Honours	First Class	4.40 - 5.0	80% - 100%
Honours	Second Class	Upper Division	70% - 79%
		Lower Division	60% - 69%
Pass		2.0 - 2.79	50% - 59%

Source: Department of Distance Education (2000:6)

The students, policy makers and tutors and managers who participated in this study were asked to reflect on this assessment and examination system, processes and regulations and identify what to them constitute strengths and weaknesses. See the interview schedule item 22c and 23c the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 23d and 24d, the students' questionnaire item 21d and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II –VI). The results of the answers to these questions are given in figure 6.6.

Figure 6.6: Strengths and weaknesses regarding assessment and examinations in the B.Ed (External)



S - Strength

W - Weakness

Each of the strengths identified will be discussed now and the weaknesses will be discussed later in section 6.6.

a) Assignment turn around

As already pointed out assignments are important because they can give learners opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences (Manning 2001:61). However for this to be meaningful students should receive prompt feedback on these assignments. Assignment turn around therefore reflects the time that an assignment takes from the time it is set and given to students, through submission for marking, the marking itself

and return of the scripts to the students. In this study only a small number of the students (2.92% of the responses) saw this as strength in the programme. According to them, the assignments are well conducted although one student immediately adds ‘...but putting out results is always delayed so much’.

Closely related to assignment turn around is the feedback that students receive on assignments, tests and examinations.

b) Feedback on assignments, tests and examinations

This was also raised by a very small proportion of those who responded to the question, (4.09% of the student responses and 3.85% of the tutors and managers’ responses). According to them some of the strengths with feedback on assignments and examinations is that,

- ‘All assignments are marked and returned...’
- ‘Assessment through assignments fosters self-motivated learning’. Self-motivation is critical in distance education since the students study for the most time on their own.

c) Standards of assignments, tests and examinations

In section 6.4.8d, assessment and examination was raised as one of the mechanisms of quality assurance that teacher education programmes in Uganda should put in place. In other words, any teacher education programme in the country could be judged to be either poor or mediocre depending on the standards and management of its assessment and examinations. The respondents were therefore asked to identify some of the strengths of the B.Ed (External) assessment and examinations system and according to the majority of those who answered this question, the standard of the assignments, tests and examinations in the B.Ed (External) is good. Overall, 71.93% of the student responses on what are strengths of B.Ed (External) were on standards, while policy makers’ responses were 90.91% and the tutors and managers’ 69.23%. According to them,

- ‘Rigorous examinations. Fully controlled through Makerere University regulations which ensures fair assessment’.
- ‘Assessment is continuously done through coursework and tests. And the awards of marks constitute 40% to exam mark. This is good so students always try to work hard to attain it.’
- ‘Provides effective assessment and examinations upon which promotion of students from one level to another is based’.

- 'Ensures students receive valid award'.
- 'The assessment and exam are on the basis of improving and maintaining standards and distance education has tried to do this'.
- 'Strict measures regarding malpractice. This is very good.'
- 'Students compare well with the internal students'.
- 'Standardisation of final exams by external examiners'.

In addition to all these comments, some of the respondents believe that:

- 'Tests act as a balance in continuous assessment'. In section 6.4.6a, one of the weaknesses identified in distance education programmes is that assignments are open to cheating. Tests are therefore important since there is more control over their administration.
- 'Pass mark of 50% motivates everyone'.

Some respondents however variously described the standards of the assignments, tests, and examinations as 'fair', 'reasonably good', and 'adequate'. By implication, there is room for improvement. As can be seen in figure 6.6 a number of weaknesses were also identified and these will be discussed later in section 6.6.

These comments reflect that the respondents were concerned with the equivalence of the B.Ed (External) standards to the standards that apply to the internal programmes. It is also important to note that the programme is subject to the general university regulations and that external examiners are involved for purposes of quality assurance. As already discussed in 6.4.6b, it is important that standards are maintained for acceptance of the graduates. If the B.Ed (External) graduates were rejected as poorly trained teachers then the programme would collapse. It would not be possible for the programme to continue running if its graduates are not accepted by the education system.

d) Management of students' assignment and examination records

Management of record of marks is important in assessment and examinations particularly since the marks scored are used for award of the degree. Well-conducted assignments but poorly managed records are likely to create confusion and frustration to both students and tutors. It could even lead to the programme being discredited. However, only a minimal number of students (1.75% of the responses), policy makers (9.09% of their responses) and tutors and managers (3.85% of the responses) were of

the opinion that the assignment and examination records are well managed and have improved. According to them, in the programme, the 'introduction of record cards' and the 'efficient' staff have lead to improvement in the management of the students' records.

Closely related to all this is the overall management of assessment and examinations.

e) Management of assessment and examinations

The B.Ed (External) students are dispersed across different districts in the country. The management and administration of assessment and examinations in these circumstances is therefore a challenge since it includes:

- Coordinating all the tutors involved in the setting of assignments, tests and examinations.
- Ensuring that all the students receive the assignments that are set.
- Receiving unmarked assignments and distributing the marked ones.
- Managing the students' records
- Coordinating the marking of assignments, tests and examinations
- Conducting tests and examinations often in different venues.

Some of the respondents were of the view that the present management of assessment and examination is appropriate - 18.71% of students' responses and 15.38% of the tutors and managers' responses. The evidence of this strength according to them is:

- 'Exams and coursework are conducted under good supervision; with strict measures regarding malpractices'. In relation to this, one student actually confesses, 'I like the strictness with which exams are conducted'.
- 'Introduction of assignment cards and computers has reduced losses of results'.
- 'The provision of exam cards and need to be fully registered before sitting exams ensures that there is little or no exam malpractice'.
- 'Timetabling of examinations is fair. Students are notified of any changes in the timetable or examination venues'.

The areas of good management of assessment and examinations identified are with regard to supervision, records managements, timetabling and dissemination of information.

6.5.8 Conclusion

This section has focused on discussing some of the strengths of the B.Ed (External) that were identified by the respondents in this study. It is important that in all future plans for

the B.Ed (External) and to ensure that the programme is run much more effectively and efficiently, Makerere University reflects on what is already good in the programme, seeks to maintain these and where necessary improves them.

The guidelines discussed in chapter 8 are based partly on what is identified in these sections as the strengths of the B.Ed (External). However, in spite of all these strengths, the programme also has a number of weaknesses and these are discussed in the next section.

6.6 WEAKNESSES OF THE BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (EXTERNAL)

6.6.1 Introduction

As mentioned in section 6.5 students, policy makers and tutors and managers were asked to indicate what they see as strengths and weaknesses of the B.Ed (External). Each of the following areas were addressed in the questionnaires:

- The content of the programme;
- Practical work in the programme;
- Management and administration of the programme;
- Student support in the programme;
- Study materials development and provision in the programme; and
- Assessment and examinations of the programme.

See also the interview schedule item 23; the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 24; the students' questionnaire item 22; and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II – VI). A total of 129 students, 17 tutors and managers and 16 policy makers responded to these questions. In addition a total of 15 prospective students responded to this question.

The weaknesses and problems identified in the programme will now be discussed in the next sub sections. The categories used in discussing the strengths were used in categorising the weaknesses as well and the distribution of the responses on weaknesses has already been reflected in figures 6.2 – 6.6. Reference will be made to these figures in the forthcoming discussions.

6.6.2 Weaknesses of the content of the B.Ed (External)

A number of weaknesses were identified and these are in relation to:

- Areas covered and skills acquired in the programme

- The relevance of the content
- Variety in the courses offered
- Quality assurance and standard of the content
- Methods used in covering the content
- Structure of the content

Each of these will now be briefly discussed.

a) Areas covered and skills acquired in the programme

The highest number of responses on weaknesses of the content of the programme was actually on weakness in the content covered and skills acquired in the programme. A number of the respondents were of the opinion that the content covered is too heavy and in some instances inadequate (60% of the students' responses, 58.82% of the policy makers' responses and 37.04% of the tutors and managers').

One of the criticisms is that the 'content is heavy and not adequately attended to...' In the words of another student, the content is 'narrow in perspective'. The programme may be overloaded because according to one policy maker, there is 'a lot of repetition of what was covered in the diploma training for example areas like professional studies, and methods of teaching'. All the students on the B.Ed (External) programme are diploma holders. The B.Ed (External) is therefore expected to '*...to upgrade the subject matter of the subjects they are teaching through acquisition of content and professional knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to teach/practise those disciplines that will be offered*' (Department of Distance Education 2000:3). It is therefore not appropriate for the programme to repeat what has already been covered at the diploma level.

This criticism of 'heavy content' and 'inadequate coverage' reflects what Dove (1986:244) and Odaet (1985:45) observed when they said that the teacher education curricula are sometimes irrelevant and overloaded. Closely related to this is the problem of heavy workload being left to students. According to one student, 'more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of work is left to the student which is a problem due to inadequate material'. Students covering most of the work should not be a problem in distance education because in this form of education students **are** expected to do most of the work on their own. However, the students see this as a weakness particularly because of inadequate material.

The programme is also accused of being too theoretical and not helping students acquire the skills they need. For example, according to some policy makers,

- ‘Theory and practice not integrated – teacher therefore made “trainable not trained”. Programme is ‘too theoretical. Does not help the teachers become creative’. This criticism is similar to that which SAIDE expressed with regard to some of the distance education programmes run in South Africa in the early 1990s. According to SAIDE 1996:42-43), the courses were fragmented with no link between theory and practice
- ‘Students are not given enough background to research.’ Ironically, according to the B.Ed (External) curriculum, in the first year semester two the students take a course on research methods which is expected to give them background and theory of research in preparation for the practical research project done in the third year (Department of Distance Education 2000:5,18). It would therefore imply that either the course is being too theoretically handled with no link between the theory and practice, or the topics covered in the course do not adequately prepare the students for the practical project.

It is therefore of great concern that an INSET programme is being accused of only making the teacher ‘trainable not trained’. This criticism has been labelled against Pre-Service Teacher Education and Training (PRESET) and INSET is expected to address this anomaly not perpetuate it.

b) The relevance of the content

Closely related to overloaded curricula and inadequate coverage is the problem of irrelevance of some courses. The highest number of responses on this was by the policy makers with 17.65% of their responses, students had 8.67% of their responses while the tutors and managers had 7.41%. The evidence of this irrelevance was in the choice of subject combinations and in the courses offered.

‘Some teachers take combinations that are not relevant to the classroom e.g. Administration/Evaluation’. Also that the ‘content does not cater for primary school teachers...’ In chapter three section 3.6.5, the curriculum of B.Ed (External) is given and according to this curriculum, students can take subjects that are not taught in schools. This is now being viewed as a reflection of irrelevant courses for, the Ministry of Education and Sports requires that every teacher should study two teaching subjects to be registered as a graduate teacher. A circular sent out by the Ministry of Education and Sports states as one of its conditions the following:

a head of institution, Deputy or teacher/lecturer who undertakes any long term course in subjects which are not related to his or her subject specialisation shall not be granted study leave’. If he or she insists and proceeds to complete the course, s/he will not be registered at that level of qualifications’. Lubanga 28th May 2002:2

Related to the problem of irrelevant subject combinations is the problem of some courses on offer being viewed as irrelevant. For example some of the students said, 'content in some semesters is not relevant. For example Geography year I semester I courses'; 'some content for example Philosophy of Education is tedious and yet not relevant'. It is not clear why the students are saying these courses are irrelevant. It could be, especially in the case of Philosophy of Education, because as Dove (1986:244) says '*some topics persist because they are hallowed by tradition even though their usefulness has passed*'. Alternatively, the courses are may be taught theoretically and not applied to the classroom situation so the students do not see their relevance to their practice.

The content of the B.Ed (External) was also said to lack variety in the courses offered. There are few electives and the subject combinations are focusing on areas like the art courses that are already 'saturated'. As one policy maker explained, the content is 'not meeting national needs'. Still focusing on 'saturated areas and not sufficiently covering really needed areas like Maths and Science'.

c) Quality assurance and standard of the content

In section 6.5.7, the strengths of the B.Ed (External) were discussed. A number of respondents reported that the content of the programme was of a high standard. Nevertheless, there is still concern that this is not totally the case and this is reflected in the responses received, with 10.67% of students' responses, 14.71% of the policy makers' and 18.52% of the tutors' and managers'.

According to some of the policy makers' the 'content does not seem to prepare teachers to teach 'A' Level'. This may be because as some students suggest, the content is 'a bit shallow' and is 'rushed over'. In chapter 3 section 3.5.4 the different categories of teachers in the school system was discussed. Diploma holders are not expected to teach 'A' level classes however, after training in the B.Ed (External), secondary school teachers in the programme should now be able to teach 'A' Level classes. However there seems to be perceptions that these teachers cannot handle these classes. Unfortunately no study has been carried out to actually establish whether this view is based on simply attitudes or it is based on the teachers' inabilities.

In addition, some of the students suggest that it is problematic for the programme to be broad and for the students to be expected to work on their own. For example, some students said,

- 'Not all the contents are covered during face to face hence the students have to learn on their own'
- 'The syllabus is very wide but face-to-face is limited'.
- 'There is a wide curriculum to be covered as per the semester system and yet the time given for face-to-face is short'.
- 'Not all the content is covered since there is an assumption that students study by themselves'.

These comments raise very troubling implications. The students seem to have problems with 'working' or 'studying' on their own and are as a result heavily dependant on the face-to-face sessions. To them therefore being asked to study on their own is a reflection of weaknesses in the system. However, what about the concept that distance education demands that a student studies on his or her own? Also, according to Robertshaw (2000:4) one of the dangers of providing face-to-face sessions is that students can easily become dependant on them. This seems to be the problem now being faced in the B.Ed (External). Perhaps the Department of Distance Education is not preparing students to study on their own. Considering especially the fact that the rest of the education system does not entirely help students to work on their own. Coming to distance education must be resulting in 'culture shock' and the distance education providers must help learners cope with this 'culture shock'.

Another criticism raised is that 'students only read what they expect in exams'. This is perpetuating what has become a disease in Uganda's school system; the problem of an examination- oriented system (Ministry of Education and Sports 1999:6). Surely at this level and more so for an INSET programme, greater emphasis should be on active learning, skills development, and school-based education. Examinations should not be the focus of studying but unfortunately this seems to be the case for the B.Ed (External).

d) Distance learning study package

The B.Ed (External) has a study package that includes:

- **Print study materials:** Includes especially produced materials often referred to as 'Study Units'; handouts; relevant textbooks, photocopies of extracts
- **Audio Cassettes:** In some courses - not available for all courses
- **Face to face sessions:** Two centrally organised sessions each semester; especially arranged sessions at the study centres
- **Student study groups:** Organised by students in their localities and sometimes they involve a tutor

- **Assignments:** Various assignments are set in each course for both study purposes and for assessment
- **Self-directed learning:** As distance learners, students are expected to be largely self-driven and to study most of the time on their own

According to Holmberg (1986:1), distance education is based on multi-media approaches using a combination of:

- Print study materials
- Face-to-face meetings taking place at various locations
- Correspondence communication between learners and the institution
- Use of other media (and combination thereof) like telephone, radio, computers and TV for various activities.

This is what the External Degree Programme (EDP) in general and B.Ed (External) in particular has sought to emulate in the study package it has.

The respondents in the study were therefore asked to comment on this study package. In 12% of their responses, students said that the study package used to deliver the content were weak; policy makers had 5.88% of their responses while the tutors and managers had the highest responses with 22.22% of their responses on weaknesses.

According to them, the major problems are to do with inadequate study materials provision, poor methods of teaching used during the face-to-face sessions and inadequate face-to-face session.

- 'Content outlines are provided but the learning materials are not availed'. In the words of one of the tutors, 'lack of study materials including reference materials' undermines quality.
- 'Face to face is not sufficient to cover the course'. This issue has also been discussed in section 6.4.5.
- 'Inadequate interaction with tutors'
- 'Lack of teaching practice'. Teaching practice or school practice also called the practicum is clearly important in teacher education because it serves many purposes (Ben-Peretz 1994:5993, Dove 1986:251). So the fact that it is missing from the B.Ed (External) should be regarded as a weakness in the programme. The teachers are therefore not necessarily encouraged to put to practice what they learn as they upgrade. To assume that since these are qualified teachers and therefore have no need for school practice is to imply that knowledge and teaching methods do not

change, learner profiles do not change and that the environment in which teaching/learning takes place does not change either.

- ‘Some of the modules do not follow the distance education format. Some of them were copied from textbooks’. Distance education should be written in an interactive and friendly manner and these materials should perform all teaching functions (Holmberg 1986:108-111, 1995b:47, 2001:38-41, Rowntree 1986:11 –13). It is therefore inappropriate for distance education not to be developed in a distance education mode. Also, if the materials are simply ‘copied from textbooks’ this is tantamount to plagiarism by the course writers and if this is true, then the academic honesty of the writers is questionable and so are the quality assurance mechanisms for materials development employed by the Department of Distance Education.

The other weakness identified albeit by a very small proportion of students and tutors and managers was structuring of the content that these said is inappropriate.

e) Views of the prospective students on the weaknesses of the content of the B.Ed (External)

When the prospective students were asked to identify problems that students of B.Ed (External) face – item 23 of the prospective students’ questionnaire (appendix IV) - a total of 15 of them answered this question. According to these prospective students, B.Ed (External) students face problems with the content of the programme because:

- ‘Not all content is covered.’
- ‘Some of the content covered is a repetition of what is already covered at diploma level’. The curriculum should therefore be reviewed to avoid these repetitions.
- Research in the B.Ed (External) ‘is compulsory and yet some students find it difficult’. As already discussed in section 6.6.2a, the B.Ed (External) students take a course on research methods which is meant to give them a background on research however many still face problems when carrying out the practical project work.
- Programme is too long. Although other prospective students were of the view that the programme is actually too short since distance learners need more time for study.

As already discussed in sub sections 6.6.2a-d, these issues were raised by the other respondents as well.

6.6.3 Weaknesses of practical work in B.Ed (External)

Just as with strengths of practical work in the B.Ed (External), there were only a few students and a few tutors and managers who responded to this question. Nevertheless, some weaknesses were identified and these include:

- Inadequate time for the practical work.
- Face to face sessions are too short and since the practical work is done during this time, the time is inadequate.
- Practical work is also done hurriedly.
- Staff is also inadequate.
- Study materials and materials for practical work are also inadequate.
- Some of the facilities are not available at all. 'For example no access to language laboratory so as to practice language skills'.

Some of the students were also not satisfied with the standards of the practical work because according to some of them,

- 'Practical skills are not articulated properly since the number (of students) is massive, time too short and tutors few'.
- 'School practice is not done yet some of the students are no longer practising teachers.

As a result of these inadequacies in the practical work, the courses are largely theoretically handled and the methods learnt are not implemented in schools.

6.6.4 Weaknesses of the management and administration of B.Ed (External)

Figure 6.3 presents the strengths and weaknesses of the management of B.Ed (External). The weaknesses will be discussed using the same categories used in the discussion of the strengths.

a) Structure and organisation of the Department and the programme

The respondents who answered this question identified a number of weaknesses and the following is the distribution of the responses received:

- 19.19% of the students' responses;
- 22.5% of the policy makers' responses and
- 31.485 of the tutors' and managers responses.

One of the major problems identified is to do with the bureaucracy in the University and in the Department, which according to one student, results in delayed decision-making and implementation of decisions. Another student confessed, 'administration is quite

away from the students and this is bad'. Bureaucracy here therefore implies the gap between the learners and administrators is too wide. Moore (1996:22) says in distance education there is a transactional distance to be crossed this is '*...a psychological and communications space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of the instructor and those of the learner*'. It is therefore important for the Department to design strategies of bridging this gap.

Another problem identified is the inadequate involvement of students in the administration of the programme. The programme has student subject leaders and group coordinators however, according to one of the students, 'student leaders not known by the guild government'. The student guild government is supposed to be the students' voice at the university unfortunately, this government caters more for internal students and the external students' leaders are not recognised. Closely related to this is the view that the administration seems 'reluctant to help' the students because the face-to-face sessions are held off campus which forces the students to walk long distances to the venues. The other problems raised are:

- 'Negative attitude of top university administration'. This may have arisen because the students are facing a number of challenges but do not seem to receive appropriate support from the top University administration.
- Administration is 'weak and disorganised'. 'Not well organised and not streamlined for example, no adequate preparation is made for face to face sessions so lecture rooms not always enough'.
- 'Inadequate space for managing the programme'.
- 'Department is overloaded so issues are rushed over with little attention to them'.
- 'Slow payment for marking scripts'.
- 'Programme is depending on part-time tutors whose commitment is elsewhere'. Although Makerere University is a dual mode university, the lecturers are not obliged to teach external students as well. This role is therefore taken as 'extra load' and is perhaps not attracting as much commitment as required.
- 'Roles and responsibilities of the different players in the programme do not seem to be clear'.

b) Weaknesses in the coordination and monitoring of activities

As mentioned in section 6.5.4, the B.Ed (External) is run on a collaborative basis drawing different players. For this to work well, roles and responsibilities ought to be very clear and there ought also to be good coordination and monitoring of all the activities.

Unfortunately according to the respondents in this study, (11.63% of student responses, 2.5% of policy makers' and 11.11% of tutors and managers') the programme is not well coordinated and nor is it well monitored. Evidence of this weakness is:

- 'Regular evaluation of the programme is still lacking'. 'Workshops and seminars for monitoring and evaluation are not regularly held'. According to Seaborne (1997:85), monitoring of service delivery in distance education programmes is critical to establish whether the standards set are being met. So the fact that according to these respondents, the B.Ed (External) programme is not regularly monitored and evaluated would imply that it is likely to be difficult to ascertain how far the programme's standards are being met.
- The Department did not consult with the Ministry of Education and Sports on subject combinations.
- 'Lack of adequate coordination between the Department (B.Ed Ext) and the lecturers'.
- 'Face to face timetable not balanced. Some days redundant others congested'. This issue is discussed in greater detail in sub section 6.6.6a.

c) Weaknesses in staffing in B.Ed (External)

Staff involved in the B.Ed (External) is drawn from different departments including:

- Institute of Adult and Continuing Education especially the Department of Distance Education
- Other Makerere University Central Administration Departments and these are, Bursar's Department, Academic Registrar's Department and Dean of Students' Department.
- School of Education from which many of the tutors, writers, and reviewers are drawn
- Other Faculties in the University also from which some of the tutors, writers, and reviewers are drawn
- Kyambogo University, and various other educational institutions and Departments. Tutors, writers and reviewers are also drawn from these institutions.

The major issues raised by the respondents in relation to this included competence of the staff, the number, level of commitment, motivation and gender. According to the these respondents (15.12% of the student responses, 35% of the policy makers' and 14.81% of the tutors and managers) there are a number of weaknesses with the staffing condition and these include:

- Inadequate training of staff involved. As far as some of the respondents were concerned, some of the staff demonstrate that they do not have the required knowledge and skills to handle adult distance learners due to lack of orientation and training. This echoes what Bottomley and Calvert (2003:3) raise when they argue that staff serving in distance education programmes should have both professional skills and knowledge and skills in distance education.
- Inadequate staff. The programme has a large enrolment but the tutors are too few and this leads to 'delay of results and not covering the course outlines in time'. One student also said that the management is 'disorganised because it has insufficient manpower'.
- Lack of total commitment from part time staff. Nearly all the tutors are part time and according to this study, these tutors are not totally committed to the programme. As one policy maker said, the Department is 'depending on part-time tutors/writers whose commitment is elsewhere'. This is a problem that the University of Papua New Guinea also faced. The university staff in other departments regarded their involvement in the external studies programmes as 'extra work'; and were therefore reluctant to participate (Pena 1993 as quoted by Aguti 1996:57).
- 'Staff is not gender balanced. The overcrowding of the Department with very many women makes the programme bad for many of these women are arrogant'. This is a debatable issue. Is the arrogance a result of their being women or does the problem lie elsewhere?
- Poor motivation of staff because of delays in payments for work done.

Staffing in the B.Ed (External) is clearly facing a number of challenges and considering the centrality of staff in any programme, Makerere University needs to plan to deal with these challenges.

d) Weaknesses in information dissemination and public relations

The students were particularly unhappy with information dissemination and public relations in the Department and they had 23.26% of their responses on this, the policy makers had 5% of their responses and the tutors and managers had 12.96% of their responses. The evidence of this weakness is that:

- 'A lot of information that students need is not always given'. Also that even the little information available is not given in time, is sometimes inconsistent and as a result confusing.
- 'Inadequate sensitisation of the university community'. So the rest of the university community does not fully know or understand the challenges faced by the distance

learners. In her hand over report the outgoing Head of the Department of Distance Education highlights this as one of the continuing challenges in the Department. According to her, *'although the programme has been institutionalised as a Makerere University program many of the executives do not understand how it should operate'* (Bbuye December 2002:9)

- Poor communication with tutors/supervisors.

The result of all this poor information flow according to one student is 'a lot of confusion in the management'.

The students in particular were also unhappy about the attitude of some staff members whom they described as 'rude', 'harsh', 'do not possess the humanitarian approach to dealing with people', 'barking', threatening to the students, and not considerate. All these descriptions do not reflect caring and understanding instead there is clearly no empathy. These are attitudes that cannot lead to a harmonious working relationship yet as Holmberg (2001:38-41) says, empathy is critical as a pre-condition for effective presentation of learning matter and for provision of learner support.

e) Fees and costing of the B.Ed (External)

Students enrolling on the B.Ed (External) programme have to pay fees and meet other costs. As already shown in table 3.6, the different costs and fees include:

- **Tuition fees:** Sh. 400,000= each academic year. Paid in two instalments – first semester Sh.250,000=, 2nd Semester Sh.150,000=
- **Other fees:** Sh.50,000= registration for 1st Semester; Sh. 12,000= for 2nd Semester; Sh.60,000= for examinations each academic year; Sh.4,000= for new identity card; sh.1,500 for renewal of identity card
- **Other costs:** Upkeep during face-to-face sessions and during examination periods; transport to and from venues for face to face; purchase of relevant textbooks and photocopying of other literature.

Note that at the time of writing this report, the exchange rate was 1US\$ = 2,000 Uganda Shillings.

When asked to identify some of the weaknesses in the management and administration of the B.Ed (External), a small proportion of students (3.49% of their responses) and policy makers (5% of their responses) were of the view that fees and costing in B.Ed (External) is problematic because the fees are high and students have to pay up by certain deadlines regardless of whether the teachers' salaries have been paid or not.

Also that because of additional costs, for example, cost of accommodation during the face-to-face sessions the programme is overall too expensive for students. This is in agreement with Robinson (1996:15) who argues that the more face-to-face sessions in a course the more costly the course.

In relation to this, some of the students were of the view that financial records are poorly maintained. The Department of Distance Education still keeps its financial records manually with hardly any integration of ICTs. It does not therefore benefit from what computerised financial systems would offer – easier, quicker and accurate recording and tracking of revenues and expenditures (Bates 2000:151).

Besides all the weakness in the management and administration of B.Ed (External) already discussed so far, a few others were identified and these are:

- Huge student numbers that the administration does not seem capable of handling.
- Lack of flexibility in the programme because of deadlines for submitting payments, registration, submitting assignments, and times/periods for examinations
- Overall poor service delivery.

f) Views of the prospective students on weaknesses in the management and administration of the B.Ed (External)

Prospective students were also of the view that B.Ed (External) students face problems with the administration and management of the programme because,

- services are highly centralised;
- records are poorly managed and maintained
- students have problems paying fees; and
- because of limited intake of students.

To deal with these problems, the prospective students were of the view that:

- Management is decentralised by setting up offices at the districts.
- Reduce the cost of the programme so as to make it affordable to the teachers.
- Students should be sponsored and they should be given study leave. This latter recommendation would however defeat the purpose of INSET by distance that is to provide training and education while the teachers continue to serve in the schools.

6.6.5 Weaknesses of study materials development and provision in B.Ed (External)

A number of weaknesses in the development and provision of study materials were identified and each of these weaknesses will be briefly discussed. See also figure 6.4 for

the distribution of these weaknesses and the interview schedule item 23c; the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 24d; the students' questionnaire item 22d; and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II – VI) for the questions.

a) Staff for materials development and provision

This problem was particularly highlighted by policy makers (with 6.06% of their responses) and tutors and managers (with 9.52% of their responses). According to them, the problems are:

- Inadequate staff and inadequate training of the said staff.
- 'Lack of encouragement and motivation for authors'. The payments are slow and there is only inadequate follow-up of writers and so writing of materials is slow.
- 'Training sessions for writers are too short'. Writers are expected to write outside the workshops so many have failed to fulfil their obligations/commitments.

b) Weaknesses with quality of study materials

According to Rowntree (1986:32-66) self-instructional materials should be of high quality that among other things:

- has content that is well balanced, well structured and not overloaded;
- Incorporates learner activities that will encourage the learners to engage in active learning; and
- is highly readable.

In this study, poor quality was one of the weaknesses of the study materials of the B.Ed (External) that the respondents pointed out (11.96% of the students' responses, 3.03% of the policy makers' and 4.76% of the tutors and managers'). According to them:

- some of the material is not entirely relevant. For example, some of the material brought in from Nairobi University at the launch of the EDP was not all relevant;
- materials written are 'shallow'; and 'sometimes old and obsolete textbooks are provided';
- some of the material that has been developed has typographical errors;

Study materials, regardless of the technology used to deliver the material is expected to be central to distance education because study material is one way in which the distance between the learners and the institution/tutors is bridged (Keegan 1996:130, Robinson 1996:7, SAIDE 1996:21). So if the study materials being developed and provided to

students are of poor quality, the students are likely not to benefit fully from these study materials.

c) Weaknesses in the development of study materials for the B.Ed (External)

According to the respondents in this study, the entire development process is slow, poorly monitored, and has failed to satisfy the needs in the programme. As one tutor put it, 'slow development of study materials. Takes too long to prepare a single material. Modules take too long being written, reviewed and typeset for publication'. In addition some of the policy makers were of the view that the Department does not seem to have a '...clear plan/programme' for the production of study materials. So instead the 'material seems to be produced in an *ad hoc* manner'.

Developing study materials is a long and tedious process, and so there should always be lead time for their production. Study materials should be developed before students are enrolled (Perraton, Creed and Robinson 2002:50). At the Open University, UK for example, courses are approved three years before the first students are admitted and in that time, the course material is developed (O'Shea and Downes 1997:60). In the case of Makerere University, I believe part of the problem is because the study materials are being developed with students already on the programme and so both the students and tutors expect the study material to be ready in the shortest time possible but certainly not after three years as in the case of the Open University, UK. Makerere's predicament with study materials seems to reflect what Kamau (2001:50) says is hasty procedures that result in programmes being launched before study materials is developed.

The respondents were also dissatisfied with the conditions under which the study materials are being developed. As discussed already in 6.6.5a above, writers are expected to continue writing outside of the training workshops and this is not happening.

The responses given on weaknesses in the development and provision of study materials in the B.Ed (External) were distributed as follows:

- 30.95% of the tutors and managers' responses
- only 4.78% of the students' responses; and
- 9.09% of the policy makers' responses.

d) Weaknesses in the funding for study materials development and provision for the B.Ed (External)

This slow process of development of study materials may be linked to the problem of funding because according to the respondents, there is limited funding available for the

development of study materials. According to a number of authors, start up costs in distance education are often high because of initial investments on technology to be used and cost of developing the study materials (Bates 2000:19, Berge 2001b:19, Orivel 1994:1572). Unfortunately the Department of Distance Education does not seem to have adequate funding for this purpose although it allocates 16% of all income remitted to the Department to study materials development and provision. From the B.Ed (External) alone, this amounts to about US\$ 80,000 annually; but still seems inadequate for the needs that have to be met.

Students also have problems with this because, since the study materials are inadequate, students have to photocopy a lot of other materials and this to them is '...very costly'. Instead, one student suggests, modules should be sold to students at subsidised prices to enable as many students as possible to afford'.

e) Study materials that not user friendly

According to Rowntree (1986:207) study materials should be readable, however according to the respondents in this study, some of the study materials are not readable and user friendly. Very few comments were received on this with only 1.44% of the student responses and 2.38% of the tutors and managers' responses. Nevertheless, these few say,

- Language used in the some of the modules is not user friendly and needs to be scaled down'.
- 'Material should be interesting and motivating'.

f) Inadequate access to the study materials

The problem of access has already been implied in all the discussions of development and funding of the study materials. According to those who raised this issue, access is poor. The responses given on inadequate access to the study materials in the B.Ed (External) were distributed as follows:

- 71.29% of the students' responses;
- 63.64% of the policy makers'; and
- 42.86% of the tutors and managers'.

Some of the weaknesses identified are:

- Inadequate materials, 'few copies of those available, inadequate reference books, study modules/units especially in the teaching subjects...' One tutor exclaims, 'very sad situation. Inadequate study materials in relation to the numbers on the programme'.
- 'Some salient references critical to programmes are missing in the book bank'.
- 'Distribution is poor because of lack of regional centres'.
- 'Some courses are launched without the study materials'. If the study module/unit is the instructor (Rowntree 1986:11 –13), then study materials should be developed **before** courses are launched.
- 'Library facilities are centralised and services are poor. No library facilities in the districts'.
- Makerere external students are not **given** the study material developed, instead they can **borrow** these from the Department through a system referred to as "Book Bank". However, 'limited time is given to students to borrow books from the book bank'. 'Management of the book bank is very hard for a book returned after deadline.'

Distance learners should not be borrowing the study modules but should be given these as part of the study package. According to Robinson (1996:10), one of the criteria for a successful distance education system is that all learners should be provided with all the required study materials. Makerere has however been forced to lend students study materials because of its inability to cope with the demands. But as one student said, 'distance education without modules is making life of the student very hard since the module is the instructor. This is dangerous to Makerere should another university begin a similar programme with provision of study materials'. This student's comment is a threat and challenge to Makerere to revisit its strategies of materials provision.

The last problem identified with regard to the development and provision of study materials has also been alluded to and this is lack of variety in the study materials and lack of integration of ICTs. Print media is almost the only media used. A few audiocassettes are produced in only limited courses.

g) Views of the prospective students on weaknesses in the development and provision of study materials for the B.Ed (External)

The prospective students were of the view that the major problem related to study materials that the B.Ed (External) students face is poor access to study materials

including poor access to reference materials. Makerere should therefore, according to them endeavour to provide all relevant study materials to all the students.

6.6.6 Weaknesses of student support in the B.Ed (External)

As already mentioned in sections 6.3.5 and 6.4.5, student support is central in all distance education programmes. The respondents in this study were asked to identify the weaknesses in the student support system in the B.Ed (External). See also the interview schedule item 23d; the tutors and managers' questionnaire item 24e; the students' questionnaire item 22e; and prospective students' questionnaire item 23 for the questions (appendices II – VI).

A number of weaknesses were identified in student support in the B.Ed (External) and these will be discussed in brief in the next sub sections. See figure 6.5 for the distribution of the responses.

a) Weaknesses of face-to-face sessions for B.Ed (External)

The responses given on weaknesses of face-to-face sessions for the B.Ed (External) were distributed as follows:

- 19.19% of the students' responses;
- 38.64% of the policy makers'; and
- 23.58% of the tutors and managers'.

One of the problems highlighted by the students, tutors and managers was the fact that the period for the sessions is too limited and that there is very little interaction between the students and their tutors. Face to face sessions are supposed to be supplementary to the study materials. However there seems to be a heavy dependence on these sessions (Robertshaw 2000:4) as reflected by the following comments:

- There is 'dependence on face to face sessions'
- 'Face to face sessions are on and off'
- Distance education should be carefully planned – or else it can produce half-baked teachers as the time for face-to-face appears not to be enough'.

This may be as a result of inadequate study materials as already discussed in section 6.6.5 but it could also be as a result of the learners' concept of what constitutes distance education. The comments seem to imply that as long as a topic has not been covered **during** the face-to-face sessions then it cannot be studied. It is as if nothing else goes on outside of the face-to-face sessions.

Another problem identified is the congestion of the classes during the face-to-face sessions. As mentioned in section 6.5.6, most of the face-to-face sessions are held centrally. This therefore implies bringing in all the students of any specific year. Since some of the classes are large, (some as large as 500) then the result is congestion in the lecture rooms, at the Department of Distance Education and at all the other service departments in the university. Also, related to this, because the sessions are centrally held, all the different subjects are timetabled for coverage and so the timetables are also congested- sometimes into the night- and 'so students do not have time to engage in wide reading'. See appendix VIII for a sample of a face-to-face timetable.

The respondents were also not happy because the face-to-face sessions are held in multiple venues outside the main University Campus. As one tutor said, 'face-to-face sessions are scattered across the entire city. Off campus face-to-face sessions are a menace to both students and tutors'. These sessions are a menace because tutors and students have to travel from their residences to the Department and to the face-to-face venues. Ultimately this becomes expensive, another concern raised by the respondents.

b) Weaknesses in communication and information flow in the B.Ed (External)

Communication and information flow is important in the coordination of student support however, according to a number of respondents, this is not well done. The responses given on weaknesses in communication and information flow in the B.Ed (External) were distributed as follows:

- 12.63% of the students' responses;
- only 6.82% of the policy makers'; and
- 9.8% of the tutors and managers'.

The major problems identified are:

- 'Information provision is centralised'. For a student to gain access to information, he/she must get in touch or physically visit the Department. This may have improved for students who have access to Internet because of the Department's web page **<http://www.makerere.ac.ug/distance>**. This web page has all the basic information that a student would need on the course. Although as discussed in chapter seven section 7.2 and as shown in figure 7.1 only 23.08% of the students in this sample have access to Internet.
- 'Delays in information delivery. Some of the information gets to the students when it is late'.

- Due to poor public relations in the Department, '...students do not seek provision of information and other services'. This implies that social interactions in the B.Ed (External) are poor and the psychological distance between the learners and the institutions is huge (Peters 1994:227, 1996:46).

c) Weaknesses of library services for B.Ed (External) students

Library services for the B.Ed (External) students are provided through the Main University Library, other University Libraries, the Departmental Book Bank, and through some public/institutional libraries that the Department is collaborating with. However according to the respondents, this system has some weaknesses and those identified are:

- 'Inadequate library services especially in up-country are not yet fully stocked in major subjects'.
- 'Inadequate funds for provision of adequate library services'.
- 'Inadequate time for consulting the libraries'.
- 'Poor study environment e.g. limited sitting capacity in the libraries'.

The responses given on weaknesses in library services in the B.Ed (External) were distributed as follows:

- 21.21% of the students' responses;
- only 9.09% of the policy makers'; and
- 7.84% of the tutors and managers'.

d) Weaknesses of study group meetings for B.Ed (External) students

Student group meetings are important as a means of breaking the isolation that distance learners often face (Robertshaw 2000:3). However according to the respondents in this study (14.14% of student responses, 2.27% of policy makers' and 11.96% of tutors and managers') these study group meetings for the B.Ed (External) students is a weakness because:

- Meetings are too few because 'it is difficult for students to form study groups because of distances from one another'. According to (Robershaw 2000:1) one of the challenges that face these student group meetings is the geographical distribution of the students. This is a major challenge however, if Makerere and the students had access to Internet and other technologies, then meetings could still be organised for example as discussion forums on the Internet.

- ‘Group meetings not given official status’. ‘Group meetings not given professional guidance’. Student group meetings are organised and managed by students so the Department does not prescribe that these take place and neither are tutors always present.
- Weak students do not contribute in discussions; while shy ones remain shy and the bright ones dominate’. This I believe is typical of all groups and that is why knowledge of group dynamics is important for all who participate in the group.

e) Weaknesses in guidance and counselling for the B.Ed (External) students

According to (SAIDE 1996:74) counselling should be part of the student support system, however in this study, and according to the respondents, guidance and counselling for B.Ed (External) is limited and inadequate (10.1% of student responses, 6.82% of policy makers’ and 7.84% of tutors and managers’). According to one of the tutors, ‘students seem to be struggling in relation to counselling and library services. They are not facilitated’ and this as one student said, is the reason some of the students drop out.

f) Weaknesses in access to student support services for the B.Ed (External) students

As a result of all the weaknesses in student support for the B.Ed (External) students discussed so far, overall therefore access to services is poor because:

- Student services are not decentralised since outreach or regional centres are not active.
- ‘Students of B.Ed external not allowed access to their halls of residence yet they subscribe to its maintenance each year. They should be accommodated during face-to-face sessions’.

g) Weaknesses in organisation and management of student support services for the B.Ed (External) students

As a support institution, Makerere University has to ensure efficient organisation and management of all the programme activities including provision of student support (Keegan 1996:131). However, according to a number of the respondents (8.59% of student responses, 18.18% of policy makers’ and 17.65% of tutors and managers’) this organisation and management is weak because:

- Of ‘lack of policy on student support’. Robinson (1996:18) identifies lack of policy as one of the factors that can lead to deficiencies in distance education.

- The students are too many for the staff available to manage the programme. Distance education is supposed to work on economies of scale so the higher the enrolment the cheaper it is likely to be (Perraton 2000:118). However, the enrolments should be at levels that the institution can manage.
- ‘Students are scattered across the entire country’ which makes it difficult to manage them and to manage student support services for them. The challenge of scattered students populations is typical of distance education students (De Wolf 1994:1558, Perraton 2000:136).
- ‘Limited and centralised services’. Outreach centres for provision of support are therefore ‘not very active’.
- ‘Facilities that students need are not put in place prior to admission of students’.
- Student leaders are not adequately involved in the management of the programme. Also, ‘external student body not represented anywhere in the university administration’.

h) Views of the prospective students on student support services for the B.Ed (External) students

According to the prospective students, the B.Ed (External) students face a number of problems some of which have to do with student support. According to them,

- transport to the University and accommodation during face-to-face are expensive;
- the time for interaction between the tutors and students is inadequate; and students also receive very little attention from lecturers.
- ‘some students live in very far and remote places’; and
- the face-to-face programmes are ‘too tight so students do not get opportunity to attend religious services’;

To deal with these problems, the prospective students recommended that:

- Makerere should seek to understand the students and provide services according to the student needs.
- Makerere establish student study centres in all towns in the country so that support is provided through these centres. Face-to-face sessions would therefore be held at these centres thus decentralising the sessions.
- ‘Increase the length of the face-to-face sessions’.
- Library services should also be provided at all the districts.
- Lecturers be available for consultations and should also visit students at their work stations.

- To deal with the problem of accommodation for students, the University should provide accommodation during the face-to-face sessions.

6.6.7 Weaknesses of assessment and examinations in the B.Ed (External)

As already shown in section 6.5.7, assessment and examinations in the B.Ed (External) consists of continuous assessment (coursework and tests), and examinations. These are also governed by the general Makerere University regulations and the School of Education regulations (Department of Distance Education 2000:4). The participants in this study were also asked to identify the weakness of this assessment and examinations system. Figure 6.6 also represents the distribution of the weaknesses identified. Each of these weaknesses will now be briefly discussed.

a) Weaknesses with assignment turn around

Tutors and managers had the highest number of responses on poor assignment turn around, with 38.46% of their responses on weaknesses of assessment and examinations in B.Ed (External); next was the policy makers with 24% of their responses and last the students with 19.13% of theirs. The major problem identified here was delays in assignments/test/examinations results. These delays are partly because:

- 'Assignment scripts take too long in the sorting office'.
- 'Delays in assignment submissions'.
- Tutors are few and are also involved in other programmes '...so delays in return of results'.

The other related problem is with late return of the assignments scripts. This is problematic considering that the Department takes assignments as a study tool and not simply an assessment tool. If scripts are returned too late then students cannot easily use the feedback and the scripts for study purposes. This is a problem similar to what UNISA faced in the early nineties for according to Fraser (April 1992), tutorial material often delayed in the post causing delays in the return of marked assignments. Assignments should ideally be marked as fast as possible and returned to the students because according to Rumble (1992:66) while quoting Rekkedal (1993), long assignment turn around periods could lead to student drop-out. Assignment turn around is therefore an issue that the Department of Distance Education needs to address.

b) Weaknesses with feedback on assignments, tests and examinations

As a result of the delays in the return of the assignments, feedback is therefore delayed, even then, the comments given in the assignments are not comprehensive and do not

therefore provide any guidance to the students; in the words of one policy maker, ‘...no motivation or guidance in the comments given’. According to Rumble (1992:66), one of the functions of correspondence tuition is to provide help to the students through the comments given.

Also, according to some students in this study, the assignments results are sometimes released long after results have been processed. Consequently some students fail not because they performed poorly in the continuous assessment and in the examinations but because the assignment results were not submitted in time.

In addition, some students also expressed the fear that there is ‘bias in marking some assignments’. It is not clear what this bias is exactly and it is perhaps something that the Department of Distance Education should look into. Especially as will be discussed in the next sub section (section 6.6.7c), some students think there are examinations ‘leakages’.

The highest percentage of responses on this were from the policy makers with 12% of their responses, followed by tutors and managers with 7.69% of their responses and students with 3.83% of their responses.

c) Weaknesses with standards of assignments, tests and examinations

Overall, from comments received on weaknesses of assessment and examinations, this issue had the highest responses with 33.33% of student responses, 44% of policy makers’ responses and 20.51% of tutors and managers’ responses. See figure 6.6.

One of the problems raised was to do with the standards of the examinations that were described as ‘heavy’, ‘inappropriate’, ‘ineffective’ and that the Department does not ensure ‘standardised setting’. These are some of the comments received expressing these sentiments:

- ‘Foundations of Education is too heavy, and has too many parts’
- Incorporation of some subjects like professional subjects into one examination instead of separating them. This course is therefore very heavy.’
- ‘Language used in exams is sometimes too difficult’
- ‘Assessment is not uniform and is ineffective...’
- ‘Likely to be ineffective because of large numbers’.

Examinations should not be heavy, inappropriate and ineffective because each examination should be appropriate to the level and standards expected. It is interesting to note that one of the concerns raised with regard to the standard of the content is that some of the content is repeated and this was with particular reference to professional subjects (see section 6.6.2a) However, the same courses have now been dubbed heavy. Nevertheless, it is apparent that professional studies is a problematic area and needs further evaluation.

Closely related to this, it was also suggested that the marking and grading of assignments, tests and examinations was not fair and consistent. According to one student, 'marking does not seem to be fair and consistent' and that some lecturers 'leak exam to their relatives'. The other intriguing and puzzling issue is that some specific lecturers of psychology were cited as malicious. Is the problem with the subject or is the problem with the specific lecturers? All this brings to question the quality assurance mechanisms being employed and the level of seriousness and confidentiality with which the examinations are handled.

In addition, some students seem to imply that because these students are distance learners, the examinations should not be so 'tough'. Some of them for example said,

- 'Lecturers do not consider the students' situation of being far away from reading rooms when grading them'.
- 'Examinations have 'high pass mark'.
- 'Pass mark be reduced for distance education students as they have little time for face-to-face.
- Students should be given a list of questions from which lecturer will pick the examination questions.

These comments imply that because the B.Ed (External) is a distance education programme standards applied should be lower. Whereas it is vital that the providers take into account the character of the distance learner while planning and running the programme, this is no reason to lower standards. This would only reinforce the view that distance learners are second-class learners and the awards are of a lower quality.

Probably because the students find the courses heavy and the examinations tough, the respondents also said that the failure rate is too high and therefore there is a 'high rate of retakes'. Unfortunately no study has been carried out to establish the reasons for the high failure rate. However, as discussed in section 6.6.6a since the students are

dependant on face-to-face sessions, and study materials are inadequate, perhaps the students are subsequently not doing sufficient personal study and so come to the examinations very unprepared for the same.

d) Weaknesses with records management

In every distance education programme, assignments and examinations' records should be kept and analysed and the results of the analysis used to improve the system (Rumble 1992:67). In the B.Ed (External) programme, assessment and examination records are kept and managed by different people and sections in the University. Although, the Department now has computers for processing of results, a lot of the work is still manually handled and students cannot access results on line.

- Tutors are expected to keep records of work covered, assignments set and marks awarded; examinations given and marks awarded in the courses they teach.
- The Department of Distance Education whose mandate is to keep and maintain student records, receive and dispatch assignments for marking and eventual distribution of marked assignments to students.
- The Director of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, the School of Education and the Academic Registrar's office all receive copies of results and participate in the process of approval of results for award.

However, according to the respondents, there are a number of weaknesses in this whole process. With regard to this, students raised the highest number of responses with 27.87% of their responses, policy makers with 8% and tutors and managers with 7.69%.

Some of the weaknesses identified are:

- Errors in records of assignments and examinations and in addition, when this occurs, it is 'difficult for students to get attention when there are errors in assignment records or when they need to verify results. Staff processing results not easily available to students'.
- Sometimes results are missing and recovering these is tedious and slow.
- Some tutors misplace students' assignments.
- The credibility of some of the people involved in the processing of results has been questioned. One student claimed that some of the personnel are open to bribes.
- Record of registered students is not always readily available to tutors and so processing results is made more complicated. For example if a student's assignment results are missing is it because the student did not register, has dropped out, did not do the assignment or that that the assignment has simply not been delivered to the

tutor for marking? The concern here is with the tracking system that is being used to track the students' assignments. Perhaps the weaknesses raised here are a reflection that the system is not entirely efficient.

- The number of staff handling assessment and examinations records in the Department is too small for the student numbers on the programme.

e) Weaknesses with the management of assessment and examinations

Tutors and managers had the highest number of responses indicating that the management of assessment and examination of B.Ed (External) is weak. They had 25.64% of their responses on this while the students had 15.39% of their responses and the policy makers' were 12%. The concerns raised here were that:

- The assessment and examination process is highly centralised, 'so students from afar are disadvantaged'.
- The examinations are held only in Kampala but in dispersed centres that make management and administration of the examinations difficult and expensive to both the students and the university.
- Examinations are sometimes held during the school term causing disruptions in schools.
- Tutors are not promptly paid for work done which is demoralising to them.
- Students physically hand in assignments at the Department and this is expensive to the students. Although students can post their assignments to the Department, many do not and prefer to hand these in directly.
- Students have to wait for long to retake courses and even then, they have to pay for these retake examinations. A student that has to do a retake can only do so when next the course is offered – which is normally in the following academic year.
- Examinations are held on the Sabbath, (Saturday) which according to one student 'are a thorn in the flesh and a terrible menace – a constitutional breach'.

f) Views of the prospective students on weaknesses of assessment and examinations in the B.Ed (External)

Prospective students also identified some problems the B.Ed (External) students face with regard to assessment and examinations. According to them these students are given too many assignments and with their other commitments, have problems doing the assignments well and in time. As a result weak grades are obtained. Also, students have to post the assignments to the university, which is a challenge to some, and when assignments are marked, results are not promptly released.

The prospective students suggested that to help the external students cope with these challenges:

- Students should be given guidance on how to write assignments and they should also be given sufficient time in which to do so.
- Encourage group work so that students can support each other. Feedback to assignments should also be discussed.

The Bachelor of Education (External) is an INSET programme leading to a higher award. Therefore assessment and examinations is an important element in the programme. However, there are a number of loopholes that have been identified which need to be addressed if the programme is to gain higher credibility and if the programme is to meet the needs of the upgrading teachers and the schools they serve.

In addition to identifying strengths and weaknesses of the B.Ed (External), the respondents were also asked to express their views regarding whether the programme helps the trainees acquire competencies that they need as teachers. The next section will now discuss the findings on this.

6.6.8 Important teacher competencies and how the B.Ed (External) helps teachers acquire these competencies

According to the Teachers' Code of Conduct for Uganda's teachers, the teacher's principal duty is to help the child develop (Ssekamwa 2001:82). Teacher education programmes in Uganda are therefore expected to prepare teachers to fulfil this role so the competencies that teachers acquire during the training should be the kind that will enable them do so (Obwoya Kinyera, Auma-Okumu, et al. 2002:14).

The study therefore sought to establish the respondents' views about what they consider as:

- Important competencies a teacher should have. To establish this, students and tutors were asked a yes/no question for each of the competencies while the prospective students and the policy makers were asked to list the competencies a teacher should have.
- Whether the B.Ed (External) helps the teachers achieve these competencies or not; and
- If not the reasons for this failure.

See section 4.5.7 for the discussion on teacher competencies and also appendices II – VII for the questions asked (interview schedule and prospective students' questionnaire items 20 and 21b; tutors and managers' questionnaire item 22; students' questionnaire item 20).

The next sub sections will now discuss these study findings.

a) Important competencies

Table 6.4 gives the list of important competencies and the responses given by the students and the tutors and managers while table 6.5 gives the views of the prospective students and the policy makers. The questions asked did not seek to establish the **most** important competencies but simply what is believed to be generally important.

Table 6.4: Students, Tutors and Managers' Views on Importance of Competencies

COMPETENCY	PERCENTAGE OF FREQUENCIES			
	Students		Tutors & Managers	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
Communication	97.83	2.17	100	0
Knowledge of Subject Matter	96.74	3.26	100	0
Teaching skills	96.74	3.26	100	0
Assessing & Examining	94.51	5.49	100	0
Administering and managing educational activities	92.35	7.65	100	0
Problem solving	95.65	4.35	97.22	2.78
Knowledge of resources required to teach	94.57	5.43	97.22	2.78
Research	93.99	6.01	97.22	2.78
Designing learning materials	92.39	7.61	97.22	2.78
Critical Thinking	89.13	10.87	97.22	2.78
Curriculum development	90.56	9.44	94.44	5.56
Involving the community in the school	82.07	17.93	91.67	8.33

According to all the respondents, the three most important competencies are ability to communicate, knowledge of the subject matter and teaching skills; while the least important competency according to the students and the tutors is ability to involve the community in the school.

Prospective students and the policy makers were asked to indicate the competencies that they view as important and to categorise their views, the same categories as those given to students and tutors and managers were used.

As table 6.4 shows, it is interesting to note that both the prospective students and the policy makers were not of the view that it is important for teachers to have research and

critical thinking skills and also that it is not important for the teachers to be able to develop and design curricula.

Critical thinking skills are vital for teachers since their work involves daily critiquing study materials and student work; and helping pupils develop critical thinking skills. So it is disappointing especially that the policy makers do not think this is important. Surely teachers incapable of being critical are likely to be ineffective in the promotion of open mindedness! Policy makers are important in determining what happens in Uganda's teacher education so if they do not believe in the importance of some of these skills, then this is likely to impact what is eventually put into the teacher education programmes.

Table 6.5 now provides the distribution of the views of the prospective students and policy makers on competencies they consider as important.

Table 6.5: Prospective students and policy makers' views on important competencies

COMPETENCIES	RESPONSES			
	Prospective Students		Policy Makers	
	f	%	f	%
Knowledge of Subject Matter	14	9.27	21	17.65
Teaching skills	12	7.95	17	14.29
Communication	13	8.61	7	5.88
Assessing & Examining	0	0	6	5.04
Involving the community in the school	1	0.66	3	2.52
Designing learning materials	2	1.32	2	1.68
Knowledge of resources required to teach	3	1.99	1	0.84
Administering and managing educational activities	5	3.31	0	0
Problem solving	1	0.66	0	0
Research	0	0	0	0
Critical Thinking	0	0	0	0
Curriculum development	0	0	0	0

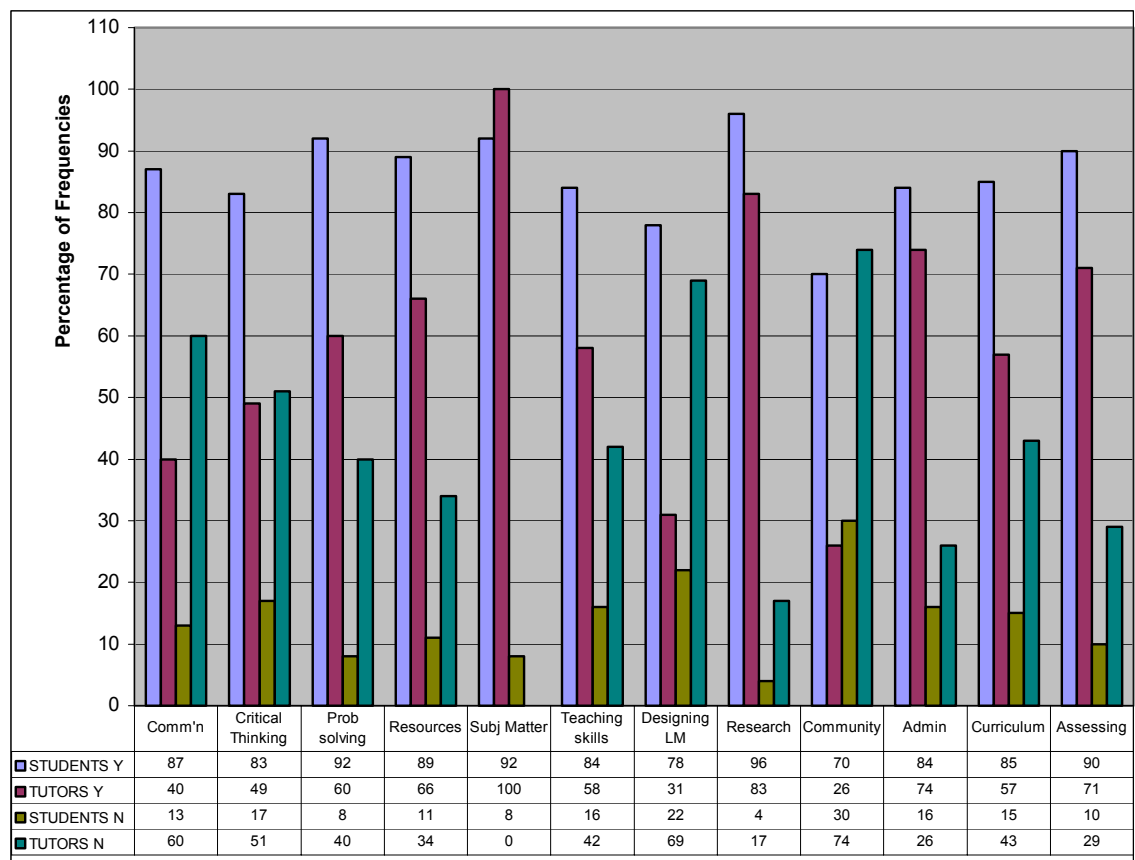
b) Students, tutors and managers' views on whether the B.Ed (External) helps teachers acquire the important competencies

Students and tutors and managers were asked to indicate whether the B.Ed (External) helps teachers acquire competencies and to give reason for saying that the programme does not help teachers acquire some of these competencies. According to the statistics, each competency had respondents who were of the view that the programme does not help the teachers acquire the said competencies but the study did not seek to establish

where B.Ed (External) fails most in equipping teachers with competencies. Figure 6.7 illustrates this.

The highest frequency in each group of respondents was on the programme’s failure to equip the teachers with skills on helping involve the community in school activities. 74% of the tutors and managers and 30% of the students said the programme does not equip teachers with abilities to involve the community in school activities. It is significant to note that all viewed this competency as least important and this perhaps explains why the programme does not cater for it either. Since the tutors and managers see it as unimportant, they will not seek to have the programme cater for it; on the other hand, the students will not strive to acquire this competency because they do not see its importance.

Figure 6.7: Percentage of frequency of students and tutors and managers and their views on whether B.Ed (External) equips teachers with competencies



A number of reasons were put forward for the programme’s failure to help teachers acquire these competencies and these reasons include:

- Theoretical courses
- Inadequate support to students
- Methods of teaching employed
- Inadequate study materials
- Curriculum does not emphasise skills
- Inadequate opportunities for practice
- Inadequate & poor staff
- Student inadequacies
- Inadequate facilities

Each of these reasons will be briefly discussed in the next sub sections.

Theoretical Courses

In sections 6.6.2 and 6.6.3 the weaknesses of the B.Ed (External) content and of practical work in the programme were discussed, in both instances, the respondents expressed fears that the programme is too theoretical. It is for this reason that the respondents said it therefore fails to help teachers acquire important skills. According to some of them,

- 'Emphasis is on acquisition of content.' The programme 'is focused on academic rather than education activities'.
- 'The programme is too theoretical, too bookish. Involves a lot of rote learning'.
- 'Programme is examination oriented'.
- 'No effort is put to developing those skills where attempts are made, the effort is far too inadequate'.

These criticisms seem to confirm fears expressed by Bates (1994:1577) and Perraton (2000:12) with regard to some distance education programmes. For according to them, whereas distance education programmes, have worked hard at developing study materials and providing students self-contained courses, this same practice is being feared to lead to 'lack of critical thinking' and to 'rote learning'. However, the B.Ed (External) seems to rely very heavily on face-to-face sessions so the 'rote learning' is not a result of the study materials alone but must be a result of an entire programme that is skewed towards theoretical courses.

Inadequate support to students

To strengthen the teaching/learning environment, student support is critical however as discussed earlier, student support for B.Ed (External) students is weak. It is for this reason that a number of the students and tutors and managers were of the view that a weak student support makes it difficult for the students to acquire the competencies that they need. The reasons for this failure is that:

- 'Face to face sessions are too short so most of the competencies cannot be covered'.
- 'Students are not followed up while they are away from University'. Also, students are given inadequate guidance and counselling.
- It is difficult for students to fully acquire research skills because 'supervisors of the research projects do not seem to have uniform guidelines on how to go about the students' research project'. This therefore implies the students are not sufficiently guided.

Related to inadequate student support, the other reason for poor acquisition of competencies is poor methods of teaching employed by the tutors.

Poor methods of teaching employed by the tutors

For teachers to acquire the various competencies, then methods of teaching and learning should promote acquisition of those competencies. However, according to the students, tutors and managers who responded to this question, the 'methods used do not encourage this' because:

- 'The programme caters for a large group of learners...' Since the classes are large teaching/learning does not promote interaction so the tutors use 'the lecture method which hinders critical thinking' and which is not practical.
- 'The teaching is examination oriented'.
- Training does not help teachers design learning materials.
- Some tutors 'handled the content superficially so it becomes difficult to learn from such'.
- 'Some tutors do not know the teaching skills at all and there is nothing much to learn from them'. Majority of the tutors in the programme are lecturers in universities and can therefore be said to be out of touch with the classroom practice and so unable to realistically help teachers acquire competencies needed in the classroom.

Inadequate study materials

The study materials are inadequate both in quality and quantity so the study materials do not help the learners acquire the competencies needed. Since these materials are of poor quality as earlier discussed in section 6.6.5 the materials do not promote active learning which good study materials ought to.

Curriculum does not emphasise competencies

The curriculum of B.Ed (External) is given in chapter three section 3.6.5 and according to the respondents in this study, it is difficult for the B.Ed (External) to help teachers acquire all the important competencies because the curriculum does not emphasise these competencies. For example, according to some tutors, 'the programme does not emphasise those skills'. 'No component in the curriculum covers some of these skills'. For example, 'some of the skills completely left out e.g. community involvement', and students are not given 'opportunity for them to actively participate in curriculum development or communication skills'. Also, some of the skills are only briefly mentioned and not dealt with in detail.

As far as teaching skills is concerned, one student said, 'since students on B.Ed do not carry out supervised SP they tend to keep on teaching the way they have been without minding about improving on the teaching skills'. According to Bagwandeem and Louw (1993:10) and Iredale (1996:13) with time, the knowledge and skills that the teachers acquire are likely to become either obsolete or old fashioned, therefore a programme that does not help teachers review their teaching skills fails the teachers and the schools.

Related to the inadequate curriculum is the lack of opportunities for students to actively practice these competencies.

Inadequate opportunities for practice

The entire teaching/learning process does not offer the teachers sufficient opportunities to practice the competencies they need. According to the respondents this is because:

- There is not school practice so the teachers can not acquire 'teaching skills, designing learning materials as well as assessing and examining ...'
- 'No community involvement in the study programme so students cannot acquire skills in involving the community in school'.
- 'Time for face to face sessions is limited' so students do not get sufficient time to practice and acquire the necessary competencies.

Some authors have said that distance education may be more effective at delivering facts or information but may not be so effective at helping learners acquire certain skills (Bates 1994:1577, Dove 1986:244, Garrison 1996:12, Henri and Kaye 1993:27-28, Holmberg 1993:331, Odaet 1985:45).

Student inadequacies

The failure to acquire the competencies is also attributed to student inadequacies. For example, according to the respondents,

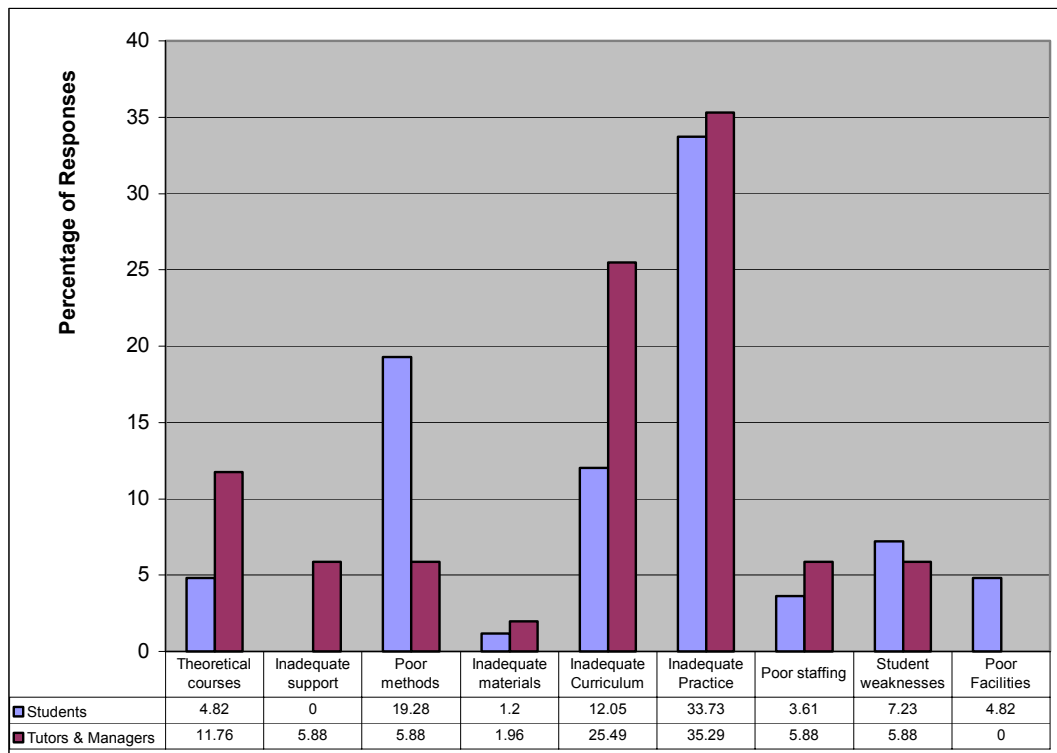
- ‘Students’ written work has too many grammatical errors...’ Students do not therefore seem to have a good command of the language of study and this is inhibiting them.
- ‘There is a likelihood that some students do not engage in their own research but merely copy research from former students’. As raised earlier in discussing weaknesses in assignments in sections 6.4.6 and 6.6.7, students are believed to cheat in assignments and examinations. This implies the students are not actively engaged in the learning process and so they cannot acquire the required competencies.
- ‘Some people’s background education is shaky’. According (Dove 1986:241), Iredale (1996:13), and Robinson and Latchem (2003a:4) a number of students joining teacher training colleges join with much lower passes than students joining other professional courses. This might explain why in this study, some respondents said that the educational background of some B.Ed (External) students is shaky. With this kind of background, such students need a lot of support if they are to acquire any competencies. See also figure 3.2 for the vicious cycle of poor quality education.
- ‘Teachers enrolled for B.Ed are motivated by higher pay. Students keen to simply pass exams’. Students are therefore not keen on acquisition of competencies but only in passing examinations.

The respondents also had other reasons for the failure of B.Ed (External) to help teachers acquire important competencies. Some of these reasons are:

- Inadequate staff and facilities
- The Department is itself a poor example to the students.

Figure 6.8 now presents the distribution of the students, tutors and managers reasons for the programme’s failure to help teachers acquire competencies.

Figure 6.8: Students' and tutors and managers' responses on why B.Ed (External) fails to help teachers acquire competencies



Views of the policy makers and the prospective students

Policy makers and prospective students were asked to give reasons for their views.

Some policy makers were of the view that the programme **does** help the teachers acquire competencies although some of them also added that this is not achieved fully.

The policy makers and the prospective students gave a number of reasons for believing that the B.Ed actually helps teachers acquire the vital competencies that they need as teachers. According to them this is because:

- Courses offered help upgrade the teachers' subject knowledge and skills.
- The curriculum of the programme gives opportunity for the trainees to refresh their knowledge and skills.
- 'Since teachers study as they work, B.ED helps them immediately apply what they learn in the field'.

In addition to these reasons, some officials were of the view that since the number of students applying for the programme has remained high, then the public must believe the programme is good enough. Of course this may not be sufficient reason for Makerere to think that because it still receives applicants therefore all is well. May be Makerere continues to receive applicants because there is no alternative.

However, 20% of these policy makers did not believe that the B.Ed helps teachers acquire the necessary competencies. The reasons given are in agreement with the reasons given by both the students and the tutors and managers; and this is because according to policy makers,

- Courses offered are theoretical and so ‘content and pedagogy (theory and practice) are divorced and not integrated in the delivery’.
- The B.Ed graduates are weak in content knowledge because the B.Ed curriculum emphasises professional subjects
- The programme does not also seem to have sufficient academic and administrative staff so students are receiving inadequate attention.
- Students are not given sufficient support and opportunity to practice and so develop the competencies.
- Some of the students on this programme joined the programme with very weak academic backgrounds so are disadvantaged right from the beginning. Such students ‘...do not therefore rise to excellent levels...’
- Many of these students also have numerous other responsibilities and so are unable to concentrate so as to develop the competencies.

From all these it is evident that whereas the B.Ed (External) has helped teachers acquire some key competencies, this is not wholly achieved because of inadequacies in the curriculum, methods of teaching, quality and access to study materials, student support services and because of the inadequate opportunities for practice. The challenge therefore is for the programme to address these inadequacies so as to ensure that the teachers graduating from the programme are competent enough to serve as well informed, highly skilled and motivated teachers.

6.6.9 How to cater for the needs of teachers and schools

The challenge facing teacher education is providing training that meets the needs of the teacher trainee but also meets the needs of the schools. Policy makers, tutors and managers were asked how best the needs of the teachers and the schools could be met and a number of strategies were recommended. Sixteen tutors and 12 policy makers responded to this question and their views are reflected in table 6.6. See also tutors and managers’ questionnaire item 19 (appendix II), the interview schedule item 19 (appendix VI), for the questions and also appendix VII.

Table 6.6: Policy makers and tutors and managers' views on how best to cater for the needs of teachers and schools

STRATEGY	RESPONSES BY			
	Policy makers		Tutors & managers	
	f	%	f	%
Needs assessment and evaluation	24	32.43	28	45.16
Careful scheduling and programming	20	27.03	10	16.13
Relevant and well designed curricula	9	12.16	7	11.29
Efficient students support	7	9.46	6	9.68
Study materials provision	1	1.35	4	6.45
Recruitment, & training of staff	2	2.7	1	1.61
Other ways	11	14.86	6	9.68

In the next sub sections, each of the strategies recommended will be briefly discussed.

Needs assessment and evaluation

According to the respondents to this question, it is vital to identify the needs of both the teachers and the schools and to develop, plan and manage programmes according to the identified needs. In the view of some of the respondents in this study, it would be necessary:

- To 'carry out a feasibility study in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. Incorporate the findings in the course content'.
- That 'needs assessment should be carried out prior to retraining or upgrading. Identify training gaps and then design the appropriate strategies.'
- 'Students should not be forced to take up whatever the University is offering. Their choices should be based on their needs'.

In addition, this needs assessment and evaluation should also include outlining the roles and obligations of the different stakeholders; and there should be clear strategic plans for teachers' education indicating who should train and when. In this way, schools would not fall into the pit of having many teachers training and none to attend to the learners' needs (Robinson 1996:6).

Perraton et al. (2002:28) argue that before a decision is taken whether to use distance education, decision makers should establish the contribution that distance education will make to the different levels and types of education. This I believe involves matching the needs of the schools with what distance education can offer. Perraton et al. also add that decisions would need to be taken regarding the different roles of the different participants in the distance education programme.

Careful planning and scheduling

One of the complaints raised earlier with regard to the B.Ed (External) is that it sometimes takes teachers away from schools during the school terms. So to avoid this clash of interests, the respondents recommended:

- ‘Coordination between institutions offering distance education and the Ministry of Education to work out calendars’. The Ministry of Education and Sports draws out the school calendars each year so, if Makerere University were to collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Sports while planning its B.Ed (External) programme activities then, clashes and complaints would be minimised.
- ‘Plan programmes remembering that “children go for holidays but teachers do not go for holidays”. The assumption that Makerere has always made is that the teachers are ‘free’ during the school holidays and so the face-to-face activities are organised then. However, according to this official, this is not entirely so. Much more collaboration is therefore needed with the Ministry of Education and Sports.
- ‘Plan and reduce workload of teachers on programmes to give them time to study’. Providers of distance education programmes cannot reduce the teachers’ workload but if there is negotiation between all the stakeholders and also, as discussed earlier in chapter five section 5.6.4, there is policy governing study leave for teachers, then perhaps this can be addressed.
- ‘Plan more time for practical teaching to ensure application of knowledge and skills being learnt’. The B.Ed (External) does not for instance include teaching practice in its programme activities and this has been viewed as a weakness in the programme. It is therefore recommended that, the programme carefully plan to integrate teaching practice to ensure application of knowledge and skills.
- ‘Programmes should be longer so that a little is covered each year’. This would imply a lighter study load for each semester.

Relevant and well-designed curricula

One of the weaknesses raised is that some courses of the B.Ed (External) for instance are irrelevant and do not meet the needs of some of the teacher trainees. A weakness in teacher education programmes earlier identified by Dove (1986:244) and Odaet (1985:45). So according to the respondents, this can be dealt with by:

- Designing curricula that are relevant to the school needs. However a contrary view was expressed that ‘ University programmes should be aimed at educating the people and not training according to the classroom needs. University programmes

should go beyond the classroom'. These two views represent the dichotomy that exists in terms of what the curriculum for teacher education should contain.

- As part of the training programme, 'teachers known for good practice to support trainees/act as mentors this ensures application of proven skills'. In section 6.6.8b one of the reasons raised for the failure of B.Ed (External) to help teachers acquire competencies, is that some of the tutors have no knowledge of teaching skills. As Fraser (April 1992:126) observes some of the lecturers in the UNISA teacher education programme were out of touch with the '*...the realities of the trade*' since they had been out of the teaching profession for many years. Involving active teachers as mentors is one way of promoting partnership between the university staff and the schools and exploiting the advantages each group contributes to the teaching learning experience.

In addition to these strategies that have been discussed, the respondents also recommended that:

- Teachers should be trained in areas or subjects of need.
- Distance education programmes should have efficient student support systems.
- Study materials should be provided to all the students on the distance education programmes.
- Recruitment and training of staff of all the staff employed on the distance education programmes.

6.6.10 Conclusion

Since it's launching in 1991, the Bachelor of Education (External) has had a number of achievements however, this section has identified some of the weaknesses that have impeded its work. These weaknesses are in the areas of:

- The content of the programme;
- Practical work in the programme;
- Management and administration of the programme;
- Student support in the programme;
- Study materials development and provision in the programme; and
- Assessment and examinations of the programme.

As a result of these weaknesses, the programme has also been unable to effectively help teachers acquire some of the key competencies that they need as teachers.

This section has also explored some strategies that could be used to meet the training needs of both the teacher trainees and the schools in which they operate.

6.7 SUMMARY

This chapter explored the strengths and weaknesses of teacher education programmes that have been run by distance education in Uganda, and how these weaknesses can be addressed. The chapter also discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the B.Ed (External) in particular. However, although a number of these strengths and weaknesses were identified, it is important to remember that none of these can work exclusively on their own but should be looked at in relation to others. A holistic approach to dealing with the problems should be adopted because the different sub systems are interdependent. Focusing on one while neglecting the other is likely to be counter-productive.