

Perceptions of Academic Staff towards Academic Staff Development Programmes in One Selected University in South Africa

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Abstract

Academic staff development is a prerequisite of maintaining and improving quality standards in institutions of higher learning. The current study investigates by a means of an interview if the academic staff perceives staff development as a means of skills development in a selected university in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The qualitative data from fifteen academic staff from five faculties in the selected university were analysed using aspects of a grounded theory approach to investigate staff perception of staff development programmes. This study identified two central themes of staff development: (1) academic development approaches, (2) academic staff's perceptions of the training and development. This study explores these themes with respect to the stated objective and suggest that staff perceptions of development programmes reveal slightly satisfaction about the programmes offered, however, they do admit that developmental programmes are necessary in pedagogy.

Keywords

Staff Development, Teaching and Learning, Higher Education Institutions, Teachers, Perceptions.

Περίληψη

Η επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη του ακαδημαϊκού προσωπικού αποτελεί προϋπόθεση για τη διατήρηση και τη βελτίωση των προτύπων ποιότητας στα ιδρύματα ανώτατης εκπαίδευσης. Η παρούσα έρευνα διερευνά με τη βοήθεια του εργαλείου της συνέντευξης εάν το ακαδημαϊκό προσωπικό αντιλαμβάνεται την επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη ως μέσο ανάπτυξης δεξιοτήτων σε ένα επιλεγμένο πανεπιστήμιο στην Επαρχία του Ανατολικού Ακρωτηρίου της Νοτίου Αφρικής. Τα ποιοτικά στοιχεία από δεκαπέντε ακαδημαϊκά στελέχη από πέντε σχολές στο επιλεγμένο πανεπιστήμιο αναλύθηκαν με τη χρήση μιας θεμελιωμένης θεωρητικής προσέγγισης για τη διερεύνηση της αντίληψης του προσωπικού για τα προγράμματα επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης προσωπικού. Η μελέτη αυτή εντόπισε δύο κεντρικά θέματα επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης: (1) προσεγγίσεις ακαδημαϊκής ανάπτυξης, (2) αντιλήψεις του ακαδημαϊκού προσωπικού για την κατάρτιση και την ανάπτυξη. Η μελέτη αυτή διερευνά αυτά τα θέματα και δείχνει ότι οι αντιλήψεις του προσωπικού για τα προγράμματα

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επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης αποκαλύπτουν ελαφρά ικανοποίηση ωστόσο αναγνωρίζουν ότι αυτού του είδους προγράμματα είναι απαραίτητα για την παιδαγωγική δραστηριότητα.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά

Επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη προσωπικού, Διδασκαλία και Μάθηση, Ανώτατα Εκπαιδευτικά Ιδρύματα, Διδάσκοντες, Αντιλήψεις.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to shed more light on academic staff development in institutions of higher education in South Africa. A special focus is given to one emerging university that was part of the resistance during the apartheid era. Since the democratization of South Africa, higher education has transformed throughout the years. These changes are documented in various government legislation, policies and documents.

Recently there have been calls for the radical transformation of the South African economy, included in the education sector that was adopted from the Bantu system (segregation law). It is undisputed that the apartheid created a society driven by inequalities both socially and economically. Institutions of higher education were also affected by apartheid policies; however, there are now efforts to position South Africa Higher Education institutions (HEIs) globally in terms of competition and quality of education offered. Sizeable changes have occurred in the higher education sector, which has led to a gradual transformation of the academic environment (Teichler, 2007). Increasing competition, over-reliance on private funding, the pressure to publishing in peer-reviewed and accredited journals has led to drastic changes on how academics work, and this has contributed to the wellbeing of HEIs (Lindholm, 2004; Makondo, 2010). Institutions of higher learning in South Africa are faced with various challenges some of which include the expanding of tertiary education without deteriorating the quality and standard of courses offered. As pointed by Steyn (2014) academic staff development is seen as a valid response in addressing those challenges in line to changes taking place in higher education. To this end, HEIs support for academics highlights that they are seen as a core component in providing business activities with teaching, learning and research.

While there has been a growing number of black academics at senior levels in universities within South Africa, the numbers are still unconvincing with 17753 black

academic staff members compared to 26847 whites (CHE, 2016). The staffing ratio has worsened from 24 in 1994 figures to 27 as of 2014 (CHE, 2016). This increase has been met with an increase followed by an increase in student funding, as pointed by National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (2015) the average student grant was at R30000 (2012) and R34000 (2013). As a result, this increase has led to a high number of students' enrolment, although academic staff has not grown. This undoubtedly has exerted much pressure on higher education in South Africa with a number of institutions struggling to keep up with the rest of the world in terms of delivering quality education. However, this pressure has not affected the research output of higher education institutions in South Africa. Given the aforementioned, this article bridges the literature gap in academic staff development. Only a few studies have been done on this topic, especially in South Africa where most institutions of higher education are under transformation.

This paper is organised as follows; section 2 provides a literature overview of the academic development within the South Africa higher education sector, section 3 provides the methods used to analyse the data, section 4 provides findings and discussions of the study, and lastly, section 5 provides a summary and conclusion.

Overview of Academic Development in South Africa's Higher Education

Higher education in the apartheid era in South Africa was marred by discrimination as such that there was poor development of staff skills in black institutions. The apartheid regime channelled resources towards the development of formerly white-dominated institutes. Boughey (2010) posits that in South Africa, academic development was introduced into the higher education system in the early 1980s in response to the perceived needs of the, then, small numbers of black students entering historically white, liberal universities. In an overview of the history of academic development in South Africa, Volbrecht and Boughey (2004) identified three essential components, which have shaped academic development in South Africa, which are 'academic support', 'academic development' and 'institutional development'.

According to Quinn (2012), academic support originated in the 1980s when historically 'white' universities first started admitting 'black' students. Acknowledging this assertion, Boughey (2010) adds by stating that in 1983 the apartheid government passed the University Amendment Act (Act 83 of 1983), also known as the 'Quota Act', in an

attempt to control the number of black students these universities could admit. It arose from a belief that the black students entering Higher Education were ‘underprepared’ for the demands of tertiary study (Quinn, 2012). Boughey (2010) argues that universities resisted the Act vociferously maintaining their right to admit whomever they chose on the basis of academic merit and not any other criteria. As a consequence, academic support, usually in the form of ad hoc or adjunct tutorials or workshops, was offered to students to help them acquire skills which they did not possess before entering university (Quinn, 2012). Given this context, it is hardly surprising that these early academic development initiatives were aimed at equity and equality rather than efficiency although, as will be seen, the extent to which they sometimes marginalised and ‘marked’ students as different raises questions about the achievement of these aims (Boughey, 2010).

Quinn (2012) however points out that although informed by noble ideals of social justice and equity, in time some Academic Development practitioners began to realise that this model was underpinned by deficit assumptions regarding students. The negative premise on which the academic support model was about deficit assumptions regarding students meant that it was continuously challenged and this paved way for the second phase of academic development. Quinn (2012) mentions that academic development was instituted in institutions of higher learning in the second phase due to critics of the support model. The seeds of the second phase of the development of the AD movement can be discerned in the mid-1980s in critiques which began to emerge of the universities themselves (Boughey, 2010).

The third phase (1990-1994) of institutional development was largely shaped by the imbalances that were created by inequality and the need for equity. As alluded by Boughey (2010) by the early 1990s, the academic development movement had engaged with a narrative focusing on the idea that institutions needed to be ‘transformed’. It is important to note that, at this point, discourses constructed AD work were still derived mostly from a concern with equity although the construct of equity arguably was not the same that had driven early student support initiatives which had drawn mostly on liberalism (Boughey, 2010). The institutional development phase according to Quinn (2012) reflects the way AD practice was influenced by ideas regarding the need for systemic change in South African HE; the need for curricula to be responsive to the social and economic needs of the country and for HE to be accountable to stakeholders for the quality of graduates produced.

The ushering of the new dispensation (post-apartheid) in 1994 changed the transformation discourse in higher education. More black students were enrolled in higher education institutions and the demographic profile of staff has changed drastically in these past few years. While more black students have been absorbed in the education system (701.482), 16 per cent fall in the 18-24 year cohort (CHE, 2018). As pointed by Vorster and Quinn (2017) the transformation agenda took a drastic turn when racial tensions in historical universities erupted in 2015/16. This exposed the racial diffusion in terms of cultural beliefs and values held by different population groups. Academic staff in historically white institutions is still white.

Given this discourse, South Africa has not engaged significantly to address the structural and cultural changes beyond student and staff demographics (Vorster and Quinn, 2017). This slow pace of transformation is indicative of the current pressure of transformation in various government sectors. The protests that has been delving higher institutions since 2015 is reflective of the slow pace in the transformation agenda, where students feel something needs to be done now. As suggested by Vorster and Quinn (2017) the discourse calls for the decolonisation of higher education. In this case, change is the major reason why the structural and cultural fibre needs to be disrupted. This is evident primarily from historically white institutions where buildings, ceremonies, symbols and rituals continue to be dictated by western ideologies.

Methods

This study followed an exploratory research design because it enabled the researcher to gain insights into staff perceptions on in-service training and how it affects professionalism. Exploratory research is useful and appropriate when a researcher wants to gain insights on a problem that has little or no information that is known about it (Churchil & Brown, 2004). This research design fits well within the qualitative research used in this study as a guide on data collection methods employed in the study. Above that, this research approach is also in line with the paradigm (interpretivist) informing this research

Sample size

The sample was 15 staff members in five faculties. This number was chosen in terms of what the researcher wants to detect and in terms of the relation which exists between the

case and the phenomenon. While this number is not representative of the whole staff population, it gave a snapshot of the problem under investigation. Denscombe (2014) points that interviews do not need a big sample because it is practically hard to survey a big population, and besides they are meant to draw insight into a problem.

Sampling Method

The study was conducted in one Eastern Cape University. The academic staff of this university represented the population of this study. The respondents needed to be employees of the university under study. Three positions were targeted and they were namely; Professor, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer from each faculty to participate in this study. The fifteen respondents selected were part of any development program in the selected University. A purposive sampling technique was utilised to identify the respondents' profile and their position in the university. Cheteni (2016) points that a purposive sampling technique is whereby the researcher selects participants based on their expertise to a subject matter. This helps in fulfilling the trustworthiness of the information that was received since the respondents are part of the programme under investigation. As pointed by Cheteni (2016), this technique is based on selecting participants by their expertise in the process yielding accurate information about the phenomenon under study.

The research Instrument

The interview approach was selected on the basis that the study was measuring perceptions of academic staff with regards to staff development programmes. According to Neuman (2014), an interview involves a one-on-one verbal interaction between the respondents and the researcher. The interview guide consisted of the following topics: current perceptions on staff development, knowledge gained from such programmes and the impact of those programme on their teaching capabilities.

Consequently, the study was composed of open-ended questions. A pilot study was done with three academic staff in the department of education to assess the validity of the questions and issues of clarity of the questions. The pilot study participants were excluded from the actual study. The interviews were projected to take at least 15 minutes or more, although the timescale can vary based on how the responses are received. The interview was structured and face to face, whereby the same questions

were probed to respondents. Face to face interviews allow a researcher to obtain a large chunk of data, ask more complex or sensitive questions and probe issues deeply compared to the distribution of questionnaires.

Transcription, Note Taking and Recording

During the interview process, the researcher did some note taking and recording. Arksey and Knight (1999) are in support of using a tape recorder due to the advantage of allowing a researcher to concentrate on what is said. Moreover, it improves the accuracy of the data collection since the tape can be replayed for better understanding. However, note-taking helps to note the behaviour of the participant and even their body language.

Thematic Analysis

An inductive thematic analysis method was adopted by the study. Thomas (2009) describes the inductive approach as a method used to condense extensive raw data into brief data formats that create understandable links between the objectives of the research and the outcomes. The thematic analysis follows six step as follows:1) familiarisation of data, this includes transcription, reading and rereading material, 2) generating of codes or systematic coding features to the research questions, and looking for connections, 3) searching for themes and gathering codes relevant to text, 4) reviewing of the themes to crosscheck suitability and creating a thematic map, 5)naming and defining themes by generating clear definitions,6) lastly, producing a report by selecting relevant extracts of chosen themes and relating them to research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher should relate themes to research questions as opposed to their importance to quantifiable measures.

Results and discussions

As mentioned in the introductory section, data were collected from fifteen (15) academic staff at one university in the Eastern Cape Province. The respondents were asked to indicate their age group, gender, position in the university, years of experience, faculty as well as their highest level of academic qualification. The information is presented in table 1 presented below.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Respondent	Gender	Age Group	Position	Faculty	Years of Experience in the Faculty	Highest Level of Academic Qualification
R1	Male	26-30	Junior Lecturer	Management & Commerce	5 years	Masters
R2	Female	31-35	Junior Lecturer	Management and Commerce	10 years	Doctorate
R3	Female	20-25	Research Administrator	Management and Commerce	2 years	Honours
R4	Male	20-25	Research Administrator	Agriculture	2 years	Honours
R5	Male	36-40	Senior Lecturer	Agriculture	8 years	Doctorate
R6	Male	36-40	Research Supervisor	Agriculture	14 years	Doctorate
R7	Female	41-45	Postgrad Research Manager and Supervisor	Social Sciences and Humanities	18 years	Doctorate
R8	Female	26-30	Junior Lecturer	Social Sciences and Humanities	2 years	Masters
R9	Male	46-50	Research Coordinator	Social Sciences and Humanities	5 years	Masters
R10	Female	21-25	Research Administrator	Education	1 year	General Degree
R11	Male	31-35	Lecturer	Education	5 years	Masters
R12	Female	36-40	Postgraduate Lecturer	Education	8 years	Doctorate
R13	Male	26-30	Course Coordinator	Nursing Sciences	3 years	Honours
R14	Male	31-35	Senior Lecturer	Nursing Sciences	2 years	Masters
R15	Male	26-30	Junior Lecturer	Chemistry	1 year	Masters

Table 1 shows that the respondents were drawn from five faculties at the university and the respondents had a tenure, which ranged from one year to 18 years. In terms of highest levels of academic qualifications, the results show that there was a high level of academic qualification among the respondents since the least qualified had bachelor's

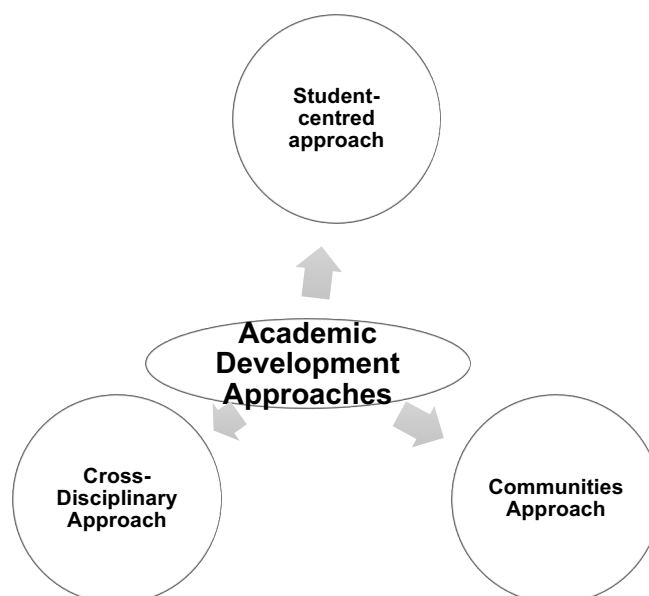
degrees while the highest qualified respondents had doctorate degrees. Out of the total fifteen (15) respondents that participated in this study, nine (9) of them were male while the remaining 6 respondents were female. The table shows that two out of 15 respondents, i.e. 13% were in the age group 20-25 years. In addition to this, those who were aged between 26-30 years represented 27% of the respondents. In the age group of the 30s was 20% who were aged between 31-35 years during the time data was collected. This was followed by the respondents in the age group 36-40 years who represented 20% of the respondents. The participants of this study had diverse professionals which ranged from faculty administrators, junior lecturers, senior lecturers, research supervisors as well as project managers.

Themes

The following part provides some of the themes that were generated after data transcription.

Theme One: Academic Development Approaches

The respondents were asked about the approach they use which enhances their development, several approaches were provided which range from the student-focus approach, communities approach and cross-disciplinary approach.



Student-Focus Approach as an Approach to Academic Skills Development

Following the interviews conducted, the research found that some of the respondents make use of the student-centred approach as a method for academic skills development. According to Richardson (2005), student-centred approach focuses on encouraging faculty members to examine their teaching and learning practices through a reflective inquiry. This involves student feedback acting as an input in the development process. Some of the respondents were directly quoted as indicated by one of the respondents quoted below.

“In conducting my lectures, my intention is to ensure that every student understands what is expected of them in terms of their curriculum. However, by just merely looking at the students, or talking throughout the entire double periods, it is extremely difficult to come to a conclusion on whether they have understood or not. As a result, the culture I have been using for the past year is that I ask learners to participate as well. By participating, I mean they have to tell me and their classmates what they have understood throughout the week or any given number of lectures. Their feedback reflects back to me all the areas they are lacking, what needs to be improved and the areas that have been well mastered” (Response from R1).

Communities Approach as an Approach to Academic Skills Development

In addition to the student-approach to skills development discussed in the preceding section, this study also found that some academic staff make use of the communities approach in order to enhance their skills development. Communities approach to skills development is described as the idea of sharing of ideas and interactivity of participants for it to be effective. As a technique for skills development, some of the respondents are quoted below.

“We tend to meet different students throughout the process and at times we even face difficulties as members of staff to understand what is expected of us. At times you even embarrass yourself when you are presenting your year-end results to your bosses and so as the learners to us. As a result, I saw it essential to use an approach entitled communities approach which enable, especially my students, to share ideas on any teaching staff and the particulars that need to be

understood. At times I even share with my work colleagues the skills and ways to better do things and attain our objectives”. (Response from R12).

Similarly, Respondent 14 also indicated that he uses the same approach, but on a different dimension and incorporates different methods simultaneously. This respondent is quoted below:

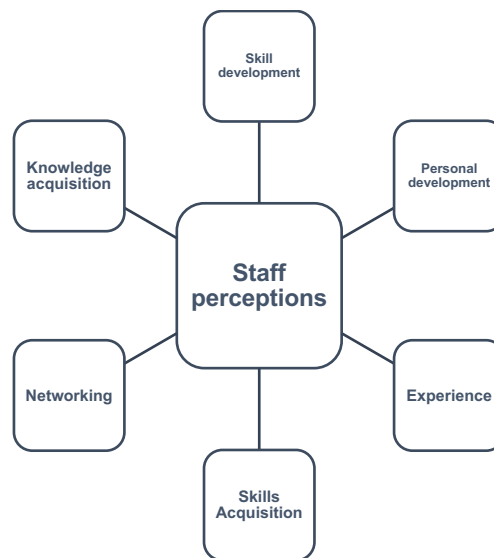
“In order to ensure that both of us (academic staff and students) fully develop in terms of our skills, I ensure that the secrets to success are collectively shared. What is good for one person can also be good for another person. So why can’t we share the ideas in order to create a better world for everyone. On top of that, I allow my students to provide feedback on the important steps to better their skills development. In doing so, we can provide one another with important feedback and enable other learners to learn from the perceived successful ones”. (Response from R14).

Cross-Disciplinary Approach as an Approach to Academic Skills Development

The last approach currently used for academic staff development within the university under study is the cross-disciplinary approach. According to Leask et al. (2005), there is a need for concentrated efforts were activities should be centralised so as to strengthen the weakness of other approaches used in skills development. In doing so, a collection of approaches is used for skills development. As one of the respondents quoted below the cross-disciplinary approach is less costly as it turns to complement the strengths of one approach.

“...the use of interdisciplinary approaches, that is, the incorporation of different learning approaches is essential because it enables combined and diverse ways of personal development. This is basically cheaper since people will concentrate on diversified efforts and put more effort on what is good for their personal development”. (Response from R9).

Theme Two: Academic staff's perceptions of the training and development



Skills Development

One of the objectives cited by the majority of the respondents on the reason why they joined a particular academic staff development programme is that of skills development. Skills development is constantly needed in the universities as it determines the quality of students produced and also determines the nature in which lectures are conducted). In this study, the respondents noted different reasons why skills development through the academic staff development programme is essential in their career as indicated in the quotes below.

“....skills development is essential as it enables us to conduct our duties efficiently and effectively. I joined this academic development programme in my faculty because it is very important for skills development. We learn skills every day and in different ways. However, through the on-going programme, there are several mentors who ensure that people acquire new skills through several ways and other approaches as I have mentioned earlier on in this interview such as the feedback mechanism and the communities approach where the ideas have to be shared. So, yeah, skills are needed and they are easily acquired through the current development initiative”. (Response from R1).

Personal Development

In addition to the issue of skills development discussed above, some of the respondents indicated that they joined the particular academic staff development programme for their personal development.

“I registered to participate in this programme so as to better myself professionally. That is this programme enables me to have professional growth. In doing so, I mean I am getting more skilled in the professional area or in the career that I want to do. As an educator and a research supervisor, I need to better myself and improve my skills set for the job I currently do. Even if I leave this job for another one, I will always go with my developed personality”. (Response from R8).

Experience

The study also found that some of the respondents joined the prevailing academic staff development programme in order to gain experience. The respondents indicated that experience is gained by continuously participating in the academic staff development programmes as well as taking up prominent roles throughout the sessions. Some of the responses are quoted in the following section.

“...the skills development programme also allows me to gain more experience. I mean, the more the skills are developed, the more experience I acquire. Experienced workers normally take little lead time to articulate challenges and it takes more courage to become experienced especially in our field of work as academics. So by participating in the academic skills development facilitated in my department, I was given an opportunity to gain more knowledge and experience in terms of my conduct. Programmes like this have helped me to gain a great deal of knowledge”. (Response from R10).

According to Quinn (2012), participating in the training programmes on the job and off the job enable a diversity of the respondents in terms of their skills usage and knowledge. Hence, the findings obtained during primary data collection comply with the existing literature that training and development through several alternatives are important since it improves the confidence levels of the participants, their experience as well as skills acquisitions.

Skills Acquisition

The majority of the respondents indicated that they registered to take part in the staff development programme because of its ability to improve their skills set. Some of the respondents are quoted below.

“...this programme is important because of its ability to improve the skills of academic staff on an intensive scale. Through teamwork that is necessitated by this program, the participants in the academic development programme are able to collectively acquire necessary skills required for their personal development as well as professional enhancement”. (Response from R15).

Networking

Some of the respondents indicated that by participating in the academic staff development programme at hand, one of their secondary aims is to increase networks in terms of professional development and other social reasons. One of the respondents is quoted below:

“Besides skills development, I also think that the development programme at hand helps me to link-up with other people who share the same interests as I do. You know through these networks, one can link up with the potential employers or even someone who will become a long-lasting friend if we click” (Response from R8 interviewed on 20 October 2017).

Knowledge Acquisition

Further, the academic development programme at hand is also perceived to be beneficial in terms of its ability to increase the propensity of the respondents to acquire new knowledge. Some of the respondents indicated that knowledge acquisition is a continuous process and it is up to the participant to continuously absorb it or not. The respondents quoted below participated in primary data collection through the interviews.

“The whole idea of all these training programmes is to ensure that academic staff becomes knowledgeable because the academic discipline requires people who look for knowledge continuously. I encourage people to participate in such programmes as they are essential in terms of knowledge acquisition and there

are whole lots of ways in which people gain such important knowledge”.

(Response from R7 interviewed on 20 October 2017).

In addition, one of the junior lecturers in the Faculty of Management and Commerce indicated that the academic development programmes are important because they enable the participants to make themselves better regarding the particular skills they focus on. Similar to the issue of the impact of training and development on skills acquisition, literature also reveals that individuals participating in staff development programmes have the edge to learn more knowledgeable aspects than those who do not (Makawiti, 2011).

Preconditions for Academic Staff Development Programmes

Following the interviews that were done by the researcher, the study found out that training and development programmes need support from the university and they is a need for the university to allocate financial resources to support this exercise for the benefit of academic staff as well as students. Quinn (2012) points out that institutions need to support professional training in every way, especially financially. It is important for the university to make sure that their academic staff receive academic skills developments which will assist them in delivering better lectures to their students (Makondo, 2004).

The following responses were directly quoted from respondents in regards to resources allocation as indicated below.

“I think it is of paramount importance to have skills development programmes for academic staff. There are many things that can be done to make this possible, one of the things that a university can do is to make sure that every year they allocate resources to support skills development. This, however, can be costly because all academics need to be trained but at the end of the road it will help our students to acquire better education from their lecturers”. (Response from R10, interviewed on 20 October 2017).

However, one can conclude that the university is supporting academic skills development but there is need to allocate more resource to these programmes to make sure that every academic staff is trained for the benefit of students to receive a good education.

Professional Assistance

One respondent when asked whether the university supports skills development, she indicated that she is aware of skills development and the university is doing its best to train its staff. Respondent 8 indicated that skills development to be a success it always need professional assistance. This is shown in the direct quotes below.

“Looking at what the university has done in terms of academic skills development, I think it is phenomenal. This institution is doing its level best to train its staff to be the best educators to their students and I have my colleagues who have benefited from such training. I can also say that for this to work out for the benefit of both institution and staff members is always important to have professional assistance to conduct these training”. (Response from 8, interviewed on 20 October 2017).

In accordance with the findings indicated above, Makondo and Makondo (2014) alludes that it is a known truism that the majority of university teaching staff members are not trained on pedagogical issues yet there are expected to demonstrate effectiveness in facilitating teaching and learning.

Discussions

A university developing a professional development programme is heavily influenced by its leadership. Since a great deal of resources, including staff evaluation and promotion usual reside with top management. While the participants identified certain supportive resources as being essential for professional development, literature indicates that support alone maybe insufficient to foster effective learning communities. Toole and Louis (2002) contend that human and social resource only sustain professional learning communities as they interact with each other.

Therefore, it appears that the top management may need to intensify their understanding of organisational support, interpersonal processes associated with professional development in the learning communities. University leaders need to develop robust understanding of how preconditions, namely social and human resources interact better to enable universities to become professional learning communities.

The findings of the study revealed that attending staff development initiatives, such as seminars is important because it develops the academic staff in their personal capacity to practice their duties (Scott and Scott, 2005). As mentioned by the interviewees, there

are several ways in which their personalities tend to be developed. It can be either by focussing on the trainees through their feedback or by sharing ideas on the development agendas (Quinn, 2006).

According to Quinn (2012), participating in the training programmes on the job and off the job enable a diversity of the respondents in terms of their skills usage and knowledge. Hence, the findings obtained during primary data collection comply with the existing literature that training and development through several alternatives is important since it improves the confidence levels of the participants, their experience as well as skills acquisitions.

In accordance with McCarty and Murphy (2014), the main purpose of introducing particular skills development programmes is to ensure that there is an improvement in the skills of the participants. Hence, the findings obtained from primary data collection are in line with the existing theoretical and empirical literature.

Having considered these findings from primary data collection, literature also maintains that through training and development initiatives, different individuals tend to network and establish links that are essential for personal and professional development (Marlow, 2009). Hence, a conclusion can be brought that the respondents perceive the training programme to be beneficial to them either professionally or personally.

Summary of The Main Findings

Following interviews that were conducted it was discovered that most academic staff use a student –focus approach, where students feedback act as an input in the staff development process. This approach was said to develop students at the same time the academic staff also achieve personal development. Meanwhile, other academics used a communities approach where ideas are shared with colleagues for input. In this way, personal development is guaranteed. In addition, this approach is said to be effective on novice, insecure and poor performing participants (Scott and Dixon, 2008). Likewise, some participants used a cross-disciplinary approach to offset weakness found in other approaches. However, it suffers from a lack of coordination and duplication.

In terms of academic staff perceptions on staff development programmes, it was highlighted that skills development helped staff to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. Academic skills programmes are beneficiary to both the student and academics as mentioned by the participants. Some pointed out that they gain personal

development through academic skills development programmes. Yet some stated that it improves their confidence level in teaching and presentation.

Meanwhile, some participants stated that they gain experience through the attendance of academic skills development programmes. This was in line with the objectives of skills acquisition, networking and knowledge acquisition benefits. Moreover, the expected skills to be acquired through the participation in academic staff development programme include analytic skills, information technology skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations will help improve or strengthen staff training and development programmes in the selected university. The university should establish a staff training and development unit to coordinate all the activities pertaining to staff development. This unit should be responsible for identifying needs as pointed out by the staff members. The unit would gain more input in training needs if it works closely with the human resource department, which could provide guidance on every staff competencies. The results of the interviews indicated that most academic staff do not attend staff development programmes, but, once or twice per year. It is recommended that the proposed unit should have adequate resources and make it possible for academics to attend programmes more frequently.

Ethical Statement

This study received ethical clearance from the University of Fort Hare and the Office of the Registrar. The certificate reference number is ADU221SMAN01.

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