

Students' Perceptions on the Newly Established Bachelor's Degree Programme in Adult Education and Community Development (BAECD)

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Abstract

This study was conducted at the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) by exploring perceptions of the first intake students that were studying the newly established bachelor's degree programme in adult education and community development (BAECD). The study questions focused on the following aspects: students' choice and interest for the programme; programme's contribution to students' career development; merging of adult education and community development fields of study in the programme; and students' recommendations on improving the programme. Descriptive research strategy was used through mixed research approach (qualitative and quantitative research approaches). A sample of 35 students out of 80 class members participated in the study. Five (5) were student leaders purposively selected and 30 were voluntary study participants. Interview and questionnaire data collection methods were used to gather data from student leaders and other participants, respectively. Findings revealed that BAECD students are fond of their programme to the extent that they would not have opted for another degree programme at IAE even if they were given an opportunity to do so today. Most (87%) student support merging

of the two fields of adult education and community development in the established programme because the fields are closely related and the programme will produce multi-skilled professionals with wider career opportunities. The paper concludes that students' perceptions on their choice of the programme and interest prove beyond doubt that the programme adds value to their career development and hence, establishment of BAECD programme by IAE was the right decision. The study recommends that similar studies should be conducted regularly to get insights from students regarding the programme.

Keywords: Students, Perceptions, Adult Education, Community Development.

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Adult Education (IAE) as one of higher learning institutions in Tanzania accredited by the National Council for Technical Education (NACTE) is entitled to design, develop and implement its own training programmes that meet existing market demand. In 2008, IAE designed a new curriculum for bachelor's degree programme in adult and continuing education (BACE). The programme was designed to substitute the then advanced diploma in adult education and community development (ADAE & CD). However, the IAE decision to substitute the title "adult education and community development" with "adult and continuing education" in the new programme was criticised by several stakeholders who argued that the title should have remained the same (IAE, 2014b). IAE students demanded, at different occasions, for re-establishment of the previous programme. Also Mjema (2013) in his institutional audit report recommended for IAE to revert to its previous programme of adult education and community development. Furthermore, findings from situational analysis conducted in 2014 indicated that students and other stakeholders commended the adult education and community development programme because it met the labour market demand (IAE, 2014b). The report also indicated that IAE students and alumni were interested in the programme due to its title believed to sell more in the existing labour market than the BACE programme. Mjema (2013) reported that research showed that BACE programme was among non-famous degree programmes registered by NACTE in the country.

As a result of the research and recommendations from various stakeholders, in 2014, IAE established a bachelor's degree programme in adult education and community development (BAECD). The programme was designed and developed at national technical award (NTA) levels 7 and 8 aiming at enhancing skills and competence

in adult education and community development fields of expertise. Some of the core modules developed in the programme include the following: Application of information and communications technology (ICT); Principles and philosophy of adult education, Psychology of adult learning; Project planning and management; Principles of community development; Management of community development programmes; and Research, monitoring and evaluation (IAE, 2014a). In examining developed modules, merging of the two fields is evident. However, in addressing the context of this paper, one would like to know the link between adult education and community development so as to judge the integrative nature of the BAECD programme. "...adult education is customarily used as a field of operations and study, both involving any context in which adults learn to improve their knowledge, skills and sensitiveness" (Mushi, 2010 p.2). On the other hand, United Nations defines community development (CD) as "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems" (UNITEC, 2015 para 2). These meanings depict similarities in terms of applying the fields at communities' context. Thus, community development and adult education similarities lie on their approaches used in addressing community or learning needs, respectively.

Community development, just like adult education, calls for beneficiaries' participation in addressing their needs. For instance, a study by Ndiwaita, Kilobe and Katega (2015) shows that participatory rural appraisal (PRA) was used to identify socio-economic and ecological opportunities as well as constraints for establishing participatory agricultural development and empowering project (PADEP) in Singida, Mvomero and Iramba districts in Tanzania. The approach allowed for farmers (beneficiaries) participate in decision-making to the project as per principles of community development. Jesse and Mattee (2015)

insist that it is important for community members to be involved in a community development projects right from the initial phase of project identification to implementation phase.

Similarly, participatory approaches are used when establishing an adult education programme in a community. For instance, the IAE involved community members through interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions to get their views on establishing the complementary secondary education programme in Tanzania (COSET). Community members were visited in seven programme districts of Temeke, Magu, Makete, Bagamoyo, Mtwara Rural, Siha and Hai to identify culture and social practices found in the respective districts. Recorded practices included polygamy, ritualism, pastoralism, gender discrimination and traditional dances (IAE, 2009). Collected information from community members was then used as a basis for developing curriculum content as per respective learners' context.

Practices show that there is evidence as to when adult education programmes bring-in some aspects of community development and in other cases as to when community development programmes bring-in aspects of adult education. This is because these are inextricable related disciplines in which "discussion of one is incomplete without a discussion of the other" (UDOM, n.d. para 1). In 2009, learning needs survey was conducted for adult education programme of COSET shows a scenario linking the two disciplines. In the survey, learners pointed out that they not only wanted to study academic subjects but also generic themes, namely, entrepreneurship, environmental studies, bee keeping, nutrition, livestock keeping, poultry keeping and fishing, to mention a few (IAE, 2009). In principle, mentioned generic themes included community development themes because they are geared towards

establishing income generating projects to overcome their common problems. Thus, programme designing and implementation require both adult education and community development skills. In such scenarios and many others, it is evident that community development aspects are well featured in adult education programmes and vice versa.

Loth and John (2015) in their study on women economic empowerment argued that education initiatives encompass a solution to address financial literacy challenges facing women in their community development projects. Thus, adult education interventions are needed to address such community challenges even though community development skills are concurrently needed. Also gender discriminations that hinder women from participating in their community development projects as indicated by Mongi (2005 cited in Loth and John, 2015) need adult education intervention to create awareness on socio-economic rights among community members.

Considering the relationship between the two fields of adult education and community development, it is clear that establishment of a degree programme that merged the two was a wise decision. However, IAE is not inventing the wheel because experiences show that such practice is happening not only at IAE but also at various academic institutions in Tanzania and other countries. In Ethiopia, for instance, the Haramaya University established a degree in adult education and community development (AECD) through its department of adult education and community development (HU, 2017). Also University of Nairobi, in Kenya, offers a post-graduate diploma in adult education and community development under the school of continuing and distance education (UoN, 2017). In Tanzania, the University of Dodoma offers a bachelor of education in adult education and community development under its school of educational studies (UDOM, n.d.).

Practice by different academic institutions as in literature shows that adult education and community development degree programmes are designed to produce graduates who can both work as community development practitioners and adult educators (HU, 2017). Also practice shows that the two fields of adult education and community development are inextricably related (UDOM, n.d.). It is within this context where research problem and questions for this study were built at aiming at getting learners' perceptions on the newly established programme at the Institute Adult Education.

Research Problem

Merging two fields of Adult Education and Community Development in the newly established BAECD programme has been perceived as the needful and important step by IAE in meeting the market demand. The fact is evident disclosed by Mjema (2013) and IAE (2014b) whereby establishment of BAECD programme has been appealed because it has a higher market demand than to the only BACE degree programme that existed. As a result, the two programmes - BAECD and BACE - are concurrently run and students enroll to both. However, BAECD is quite new and the first degree programme of the Institute comprises both adult education component and non-adult education component i.e. community development. Previously, only adult education programmes were offered by the Institute. Hence, such unique feature calls for an investigative research towards exploring students' perceptions on the newly established BAECD programme.

Purpose

The study explored students' perception on the newly established bachelor's degree in adult education and community development of the Institute of Adult Education.

Research Questions

1. What are students' insights regarding their choice and interest to the BAECD programme?
2. What are students' perceptions with regard to BAECD programme's contribution to their career development?
3. What are students' views on merging adult education and community development fields of study in the programme?
4. What are students' recommendations towards improving the BAECD degree programme?

METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive research strategy to search answers for the research questions and employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The population of the study comprised of all 80 second year students of the BAECD - 2015/2016 academic year. The class was purposively selected because it was the first batch and with longer experience in the programme than their first year counterparts. By virtual of their leadership positions, 5 class members were purposively selected and requested to participate in the study through interviews. They included the president of IAE students' organisation (IAESO), two class representatives to IAESO government, class chairperson and class deputy chairperson. The rest class members were then invited to voluntarily participate in the study. Out of those, thirty students (16 females and 14 males) volunteered to participate and responded to the study questionnaires.

Data Analysis Plan

In analysing closed-ended questions, the researcher used tallying to get frequencies. For the case of open-ended questions, the researcher grouped and coded responses of similar opinions and then tallying was used to get frequencies as well as percentages. The researcher used

tables and figures to present the analysed data. Apart from descriptive statistics, content analysis was also used to analyse qualitative information. Important excerpts from interviews were captured and presented in findings.

RESULTS

Students' Decision to Join the Programme

This study tried to find out whether students chose to join the programme voluntarily by themselves or with some external influences. Findings indicated that 73 percent respondents chose the programme themselves without external influence, while 27 percent chose it as a result of influence from others (Figure 1). None of the students reported to have been allocated unwillingly to join the programme.

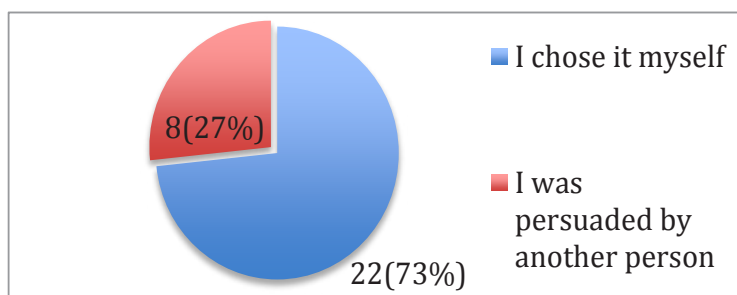


Figure 1: Distribution of students' choice of the programme (N=30)

Also interviewed students had similar responses regarding their decision to join the programme. One of the interviewed students said that, "actually I had no interest about this programme but my husband influenced me to join it ... I now find it very useful and interesting." Another respondent said that, "I heard about the programme from a colleague and developed interest in it. Therefore, I decided to join through a word of mouth."

Having got insights on their decision to join the programme, the researcher wanted to know whether or not students regret joining the BAECD programme. Results to this aspect showed that students are positive with no regrets. Table 1 shows distribution of responses on the question.

Table 1: Students' responses on whether or not regret to have joined BAECD programme (N = 30)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
I regret because I dislike this programme	0	0%
I regret and feel lost but trying to cope	0	0%
I do not regret because it is what I wanted	23	77%
I do not regret though I knew little about it when applying	7	23%
Total	30	100%

Findings in Table 1 show that 77 percent of respondents wanted the programme and therefore, do not regret joining it. Other (23%) respondents indicated that they do not regret though they knew little about the programme when applied for it. One of the student leaders said that, "I do not think if there is anyone among us who might be regretting for being in this programme. The programme nature and content make it unique as well as attractive."

Students' interest in the BAECD programme

Findings indicated that students are fond of BAECD programme. It was revealed that the BAECD students would not have opted to another degree programme at IAE even if they were given the opportunity to

do so today. All students said that they were unwilling to switch from BAECD to another programme because their programme is better than other programmes offered at IAE since it is multidisciplinary in nature and promotes self-employment. Another degree programme offered at IAE is bachelor in adult and continuing education (BACE), which BAECD students compared with their programme.

Students revealed their interest in the BAECD programme by stating aspects that they like in the programme. Findings showed that aspects liked the most by students in the programme range from facilitation methods, programme content to resulting competencies.

Table 2: Aspects liked the most by students in BAECD programme (N = 30).

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Participatory facilitation methods	3	10%
Training on resources mobilisation	3	10%
Community participatory approaches in solving problems	9	30%
Programme content	8	27%
Skills on project planning and proposal writing	7	23%
Total	30	100%

Table 2 shows that majority like skills provided on how to solve community problems by involving community members themselves. Other students like the programme content because it addresses community needs. Also part of project planning and proposal writing is of interest to students because it is applicable in day-to-day life entrepreneurial activities. One of the interviewed students said that, “What I like most in

this programme is its applicability to real life situations. Learning is also highly participatory.” Students emphasized that the programme content is designed in a way that focuses more on real life issues rather than theory. “Contents such as planning and management of simple domestic projects like poultry, livestock, or bee keeping make the programme lively and realistic to actual students’ life ways” (interviewed student).

Apart from aspects that students like the most, there were few that students dislike in the programme. Table 3 presents a list of aspects that students are unhappy with.

**Table 3: Aspects that students dislike most in BAECD programme
N = 30**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
No specific areas allocated for students’ field work	2	7%
Actual field practice learning is inadequate	5	16%
Inclusion of teaching subjects in the programme	9	30%
No enough learning materials in library	3	10%
Dislike nothing	11	37%
Total	30	100%

Findings in Table 3 show that (37%) students have nothing to dislike in the programme because they are satisfied with the way the programme is designed and implemented. However, other (30%) students dislike inclusion of teaching subjects in the programme. Others (16%) complained of inadequate internship period. The students argued that

one and half months of internship to students is inadequate for them to practice learned skills. Some students (10%) are also unhappy based on the fact that there are inadequate learning materials in the library and others alluded to the fact that IAE does not organise internship placements for its students. They argued that it is difficult for students to organise internship placements on their own.

The programme versus students' career development

From this study, it was found that students agree that the programme is adding value to their career development. One of the students said that, "The programme has added value to my career development because I have learnt how to write a project proposal and acquired competence in lobbying, advocacy and mobilising communities." Another student said that, "The programme adds value to my career since it makes me multipurpose and gives me self-empowerment skills. It promotes self-reliance spirit among us." From these excerpts, it shows that students believe in themselves with regard to what they are learning. Students believe that with skills they had before joining the programme, there was no way they could have been able to do such aspects like project proposal writing, applying participatory methods to solve community problems, identifying development projects, planning for programmes, monitoring projects and evaluating projects, to mention a few.

Furthermore, other students argued that competence emanating from the programme has a direct relationship to their career development since it makes them highly resourceful. One of the students stated that,

"The programme gives new skills that enhance our efficiency in undertaking our duties... Now I can confidently say that we are good planners who can budget, monitor and evaluate implementation of an adult education or community development programme. We are greatly resourceful at our workplaces, I believe."

Another student who is one of the long serving and experienced primary school teachers claimed that, “I now know about participatory approaches in adult learning and community problem solving. This makes me special and expert of my own caliber among teachers at my school.”

The two quotations indicate that BAECD students have confidence on their competence acquired from the programme so far. It shows clearly that there is value-addition to their knowledge and skills that eventually add value to their career.

Students' views on merging of adult education with community development

The study revealed that few (13%) students thought that the two fields of study should stand alone as two different study programmes to reduce students' work load. However, most (87%) students preferred merging of the two fields of adult education and community development based on reasons indicated in Figure 2.

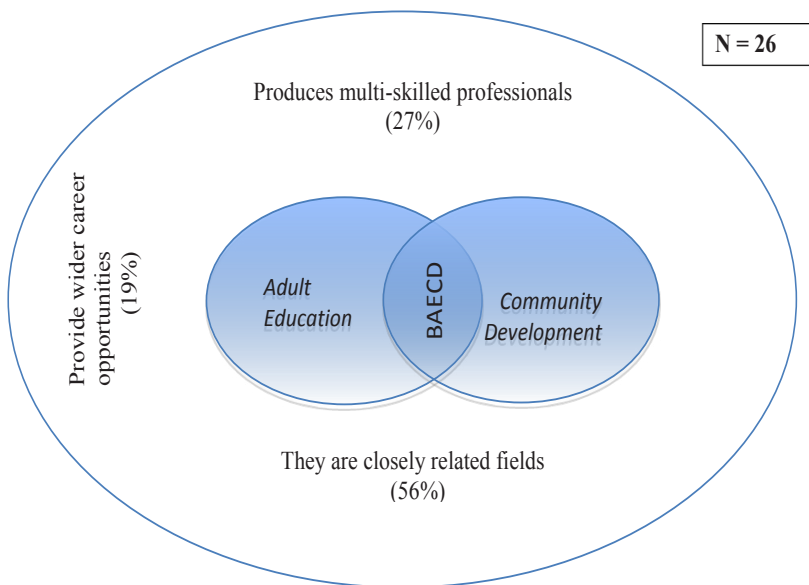


Figure 2: Students' reasons of merging adult education and community development fields of study

Figure 2 indicates that out of 26 students who argued for merging of the two fields, (56%) thought that the said fields should be merged because they are closely related, while (27%) thought that they should be merged because they produce multi-skilled professionals. Other students (19%) thought that it will provide a wide range of career development (Figure 2).

Students' recommendations towards improving BAECD programme

Students gave several recommendations towards improving BAECD programme. Most of recommendations are reactions to the list of aspects students dislike the most in the programme as stipulated before (see Table 3). Table 4 gives students' recommendations for improving BAECD programme.

Table 4: Students' recommendations to improve BAECD Programme (N=30).

Recommendations	Frequency	Percentage
1. Increase programme study materials	10	33%
2. Establish programmes at Certificate, Diploma, and Masters levels	5	17%
3. Organise internship placements for students	5	17%
4. Allow more fieldwork practical than classroom teaching and learning	7	23%
5. Omit teaching subjects from the programme	3	10%
6. Collaborate with other institutions offering the same programme	3	10%
7. Advertise the programme to employees and public	4	13%

Table 4 indicates that 10 (33%) students recommended that there should be more study materials, while others (23%) argued for more fieldwork practical than classroom learning. Other students (17%) recommended for establishment of the programme at other qualification levels and organise field practice to students rather than let students organise internship placements on their own. Furthermore, some (13%) students recommended that the programme should be advertised further to stakeholders. One of the interviewed students said that, “IAE should market the programme intensively because there are many community development and adult education practitioners in the country who would like to join this important programme but they are not informed of its existence.” Another student added that, “IAE has not advertised the programme in our district councils. Most of us knew

about the programme through Institute alumni. Otherwise no one would have known about BAECD.” These excerpts show that the programme information should be widespread to community so as to reach a large population. In addition, some (10%) students in Table 4 suggested that collaboration with other institutions offering similar programmes is necessary to ensure programme quality and programme sustainability (Table 4). Furthermore, some other (10%) students recommended for removal of teaching subjects from BAECD programme.

DISCUSSION

Based on results from this study, it is evident that all students joined the programme voluntarily without being coerced. Amongst them, majority chose the programme by themselves and few were encouraged by other people. Findings indicated that none of the students regrets for being a BAECD student. Also based on the fact that none of the students would have wanted to swap from BAECD to another programme, therefore, it is evident that students contented with what the BAECD programme offers. This being the case, ideas for reverting the BAECD programme as stated before IAE (2014b) in the situation analysis report and by Mjema (2013) in the institutional audit were valid.

From the findings, it is evident from students’ perspectives that the programme is strongly adding value to their career development. Most students seem to be attracted to the community development part of the programme probably because 98 percent of class members are professional teachers and they have never studied the courses. A question here is on whether responses could have been the same if such respondents were not teachers or if they were fresh from school. Could the programme deliver similar satisfaction to such kind of students? This question remains unanswered and might not carry much weight in this paper but the fact remains that current students are highly motivated

and satisfied as a result of adding community development content to the adult education field of study.

Merging the two fields of adult education and community development in one programme was a decision that was reached based on survey and recommendations by stakeholders as indicated in IAE (2014b) but it was never piloted anywhere in the country. BAECD students having joined the programme and studied for two years are in a position to portray a clear picture of the merged fields in the programme. Merging of the two fields appears to be a good decision accepted by majority of students. Most students claimed that the programme makes them multi-skilled with wide career opportunities. It is likely that one might critique that the programme is heavily packed and therefore, the two fields should be separated to reduce students' workload. However, it should be noted that today's labour market is very competitive (Gordon, 2013). Thus, graduates who are multi-skilled have wider opportunities in the market than those who are not. The more the skills one acquires, the greater the chance for absorption in the labour market and also for career advancement. Graduates of this programme have an opportunity, on one hand, to work as community development practitioners and on the other hand, they will play the role of adult education practitioners in public or private sectors in the country (HU, 2017). However, it might be too early to judge benefits accruing from the programme since at the moment, there are no graduates of the BAECD programme on the labour market. Hence, such pattern calls for a tracer study to BAECD students graduating from IAE.

In line with all success stories from second year BAECD students, the Institute should put into consideration recommendations set by students. All recommendations as presented in Table 4 should be considered equally regardless of frequencies indicated because each affects growth and success of the programme probably in the same extent. In due regard, further research is equally important in addressing the recommendations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Students' perspectives regarding their choice of the programme and interest in it proves beyond doubt that the programme adds value to their career development and hence, establishment of BAECD programme by IAE was a right decision to make. Merging the two fields of adult education and community development remains an important intervention that creates professionals with multi-skills who can serve as community development practitioners and adult education experts at the same time. Therefore, significance of merging the fields cannot be overemphasized. The following are researcher's recommendations:

- i. IAE should establish a follow-up mechanism to tress BAECD graduates so as to assess application of adult education and community development skills acquired at the Institute. The measure will help the Institute to improve the programme based on feedback obtained from the graduates.
- ii. IAE should consider extending the programme to other campuses in the country so as to reach many prospective students who are in need.
- iii. Similar studies are to be conducted regularly to get students' perceptions on the programme so as to enrich evidence-based decision-making for quality and sustainable endeavors.

Acknowledgement

The researcher acknowledges academic contribution from Professor Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga of Zimbabwe Open University who carried out a critical review on this paper and gave her inputs with regard to methodological rigor, writing style and general quality of the work.

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