

Monitoring and Evaluation of Peer Academic Support Programs in South African Higher Education Institutions: A Case of One University in the Eastern Cape Province

Magdaline Nji Tangwe¹ and S. Rembe²

Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, P. B. X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
E-mail: ¹<njimado@yahoo.com>, ²<srembe@ufh.ac.za>

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ABSTRACT The high failure and retention rates at universities despite peer academic support programs has necessitated the need for the present study to investigate how monitoring and evaluation is carried out to support the facilitators of these programs. The study adopted a qualitative approach, collecting data from a sample of 12 participants made up of program coordinators and peer academic facilitators. The results indicate that there is monitoring and evaluation of these programs by program coordinators and peer facilitators. This is achieved through observation during sessions, unannounced visits and support to facilitators. However, the structures and mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation are not strong enough to enhance effective implementation of the programs. It is concluded that although there are good peer academic support programs at this university under study, there is need for rigorous monitoring and evaluation as well as support by more qualified personnel.

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring is defined as a continuing function that aims primarily to provide the management and main stakeholders of an ongoing intervention with early indications of progress, or lack thereof in the achievements of results (Merten 2010). Fullan (1992: 123) explores, "the monitoring theme is not evaluation in the narrow sense of the team. It involves information systems, resources and acting on the results through problem-coping and problem-solving." In fact, monitoring the process of implementation of peer support programs is as important as measuring the outcome. It becomes a problem if enough support is not provided to the facilitators of academic support programs during monitoring. Academic support has been defined as a condition that promotes success (Hilsdon 2013). Androushchak et al. (2013) reiterates that the availability of academic support for instance in the form of developmental education courses, tutoring, study groups and other programs such as supplemental instruction is an important condition for students' continuation in the

university. Hilsdon (2013) explored that there are different types of support that promote success at school including academic, social and financial support amongst others. Berghmans et al. (2013) believed that there are three types peers or tutors based on their approach to facilitation. These include questioners, informers and motivational organisers. However, the researchers were interested in academic support because most of the students enter the university insufficiently prepared for the rigours of university study. Thus, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate these programs if success is to be achieved.

Park (2014) writes that peer advice is sometimes met with resistance and treated as interactionally repulsive by learners or students. Perhaps, support or lack thereof might respectively mitigate or promote this behaviour. Topping et al. (2013) suggest that if more support is given to tutors, there would be exposed to more learning opportunities. Support has been postulated in different ways; learning supported by discussion (De Wever et al. 2010), institutional support (Buissink-Smith et al. 2010) and explanation, revisiting fundamentals, making links between conceptual areas, testing and clarifying tutors' understanding, and reorganising and building ideas, rehearsing them, and working through them repeatedly so as secure peer facilitators' understanding (Galbraith and Winterbotton 2011). Bodemer (2014) insists that pedagog-

Address for correspondence:
Magdaline Nji Tangwe
Faculty of Education
University of Fort Hare
P. B. X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
E-mail: njimado@yahoo.com

ic support of tutors or peer facilitators is the essential type of support that is necessary while Smet et al. (2010) are of the view that multidimensional support and the model/coach training is paramount in the success of peer academic delivery.

Arendale (2014) stated that at times it may be difficult for the program coordinator to conduct the session observations. This is seen especially when collaborative learning programs are large, and when the program coordinator has other assigned responsibilities. In addition, Kuh et al. (2005) cited in Smith (2010) confirmed that it is the responsibility of the faculty or staff members of the university to advise peer facilitators; through this they may provide the necessary support they need. However, large advising load often makes it difficult for advisors to build strong relationship with all of their peer facilitators. This could mean that the much needed support from the coordinators of the programs can be difficult to get.

However, in a study by Tangwe and Rembe (2014a), they stated that another option is for the program coordinator to arrange for peer observations where peer educators observe the sessions of each other. They continued that an advantage of this option is that, the peer educators have direct experience in the role and can share suggestions from their experiences. For instance, Rosenthal (2008) agreed that in the University of Manchester support is given to facilitators in the form of personal, financial, employment and childcare. This is done to enable the facilitators have a means to make the students be aware of support services available. This stands evidential that monitoring and support is a crucial aspect in any peer support program implementation. Nonetheless, it is for this reason that programs have systems in place for monitoring and reporting purposes which is in line with the aim of this study.

Arendale (2014) stipulated that a wide range of campus resources are required to begin a new program. These include textbooks, access to electronic course management systems (for example, Blackboard). Also, the support of other offices is an important resource as well. For example, Colvin (2007) stated that in the University of Macquarie in Australia, peer academic programs are also supported by the University executive. Accordingly, over the years, the programs have forged an open dialogue with Facul-

ty's Executive Deans as well as the DVC Social Inclusion. Involvement of other offices and support should be given place in the implementation of peer support programs. It is believed that faculty support cannot guarantee the success of the aims of the programs, yet their lack of support can sabotage even the most well-planned reforms (Tangwe and Rembe 2014b). It is, therefore, important to involve other offices in the implementation process.

The implementation of peer academic support programs in higher education institutions are expected to be monitored and evaluated by coordinators and other stakeholders to ensure successful learning (Tangwe and Rembe 2014b). Mertens (2010: 51) defined evaluation as "selective exercise that attempts to systematically and objectively assess progress towards the achievement of an outcome." Latino and Ashcraft (2012) pointed out that the final program component that is often given too little attention during the monitoring process is an evaluation of the work of peer educators. Latino and Ashcraft, further add that evaluation efforts must be diverse and multifaceted to capture the many aspects of the peer-to-peer learning experience. This is in support of what Wang and Reeves (2007) suggested that learning is contextual, effortful and developmental and as such should be evaluated through triangulation of assessments. This, therefore, suggest that the implementation of peer academic support programs should be monitored and evaluated using different methods, that is using various data collection strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. This will help co-coordinators and other stakeholders of the programs to "have a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation" (Altrichter et al. 2008: 52).

Latino (2008) also recommended that program administrators should look for evidences of success in three areas. The first is the impact of the peer educator on the students served. The second represents the impact of the peer education experience on the peer educators themselves. The third is the impact that the peer education program has on the overall success of the academic program. In fact, monitoring and evaluation should be an integral component of any reform process (Boughey 2010). It is, therefore, important to note that the key to effective implementation of peer support programs depends on monitoring and evaluation that leads to the provision of support to peer facilitators.

Patton (2008) revealed that evaluation of programs can be used to reduce uncertainty about decisions that have to be made even though sometimes evaluations are done and no big decisions are made based on the results. Richardson (2010) argued that the traditional module of monitoring and evaluation exercise performed within higher education is that of a questionnaire, usually administered to students at the end of a module or a course. In this regard, Ponitz et al. (2009) countered Richardson's view on the grounds that questionnaires are often simple in structure and are relatively standardized, often ignoring specific issues relating to content and delivery. Also, Marsh et al. (2010) argued that time constraints can often lead to poorly articulated and inaccurate feedback, since the administration of module evaluation questionnaire does not provide adequate time for response. This, further, raises questions of validity and relevance (Marsh et al. 2010). The study assumes that most of the peer academic support programs in South Africa use some of these methods of evaluation. In addition, this study examines how specifically some of the university's programs are monitored and evaluated and subsequently supported.

Human Resource and Skill Development Canada (2010) explored that program objectives and activities should be revised to more accurately reflect the direction and scope of the program and to ensure that outcomes are achievable and measurable. Thus, it is believed that the implementation of these programs should consider monitoring and evaluation to be the core in the successful implementation of the programs. Wagner et al. (2005) postulated that monitoring and evaluation is not a onetime event, but an exercise involving assessment of differing scope and depth carried out at several points in time in response to evolving needs for evaluative knowledge and learning during the effort to achieve an outcome. This idea ties with what Wang and Reeves (2007) suggested earlier that learning is developmental and should be evaluated through triangulation all the times. The study assumes that peer academic support programs have coordinators to oversee the smooth functioning through monitoring, support and evaluation. The concern is how effective is the monitoring, support and evaluation process as far as implementation of these programs is concerned.

van Dyk et al. (2009) reiterated that since intervention programs are new in most South African universities, it is important to look at the impact of implementation in this type of intervention. This confirms that assessing the impact of implementation on peer academic support programs is a point of concern. An evaluation study was conducted by Blatchford et al. (2012) on teaching assistants failure to develop strategies that ensure success at the California State University, United States of America. The study recommended certain changes to ensure successful implementation and included the following areas: teachers' deployment of peer facilitators, teacher's role relative to peer facilitator, time provided to peer facilitator, peer facilitator's subject and instructional knowledge, and the nature and quality of peer facilitator's interaction with students.

All the above issues are affecting implementation in most universities in South Africa as Boughey (2010) asserted that these problems lie not in the students but rather in the institutions to which those students have been admitted. Thus, monitoring and evaluation and support of these programs should be a continuous process to improve on implementation. Makura (2012) writes as cited in the TLC News Letter, many lecturers from the university under study shared their experiences working with Teaching and Learning Centre's (TLC) facilitators. One professor confessed that working with Language and Writing Consultants (LWCs) on assignment writing was gratifying though the evaluation process needed to be improved. This is an indication that peer support programs implementation needs to be monitored, re-examined and evaluated so that appropriate support should be provided to peer facilitators addressing the challenges being faced by the programs. In fact, the objective of the present study is to determine how these programs are monitored and evaluated.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach: Qualitative Approach

As a broader study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Creswell (2012) accepted that the aim of qualitative research approach is to explore and understand a central phenomenon. This has to do with understanding the pro-

cesses, social and cultural contexts which work in line with various behavioural patterns. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) believed that qualitative method ask mostly open-ended questions. This will accordingly enable participants to respond freely using their own words. Qualitative study enables participants to have the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail without any fear or delay. This is because the method allows the researcher to be flexible and to probe initial participant's responses; that is to ask why or how a particular thing happened (Pope and Mays 2009).

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The present study constituted the population of one university in South Africa offering peer academic support programs. It also includes all peer facilitators and all the coordinators of these programs. The sample for the study was limited to some facilitators as well as all the coordinators of the programs. To meet the purpose of the study, non-probability procedure was used. This study utilized a purposive non-probability sampling technique in the selection of the sample. Creswell (2012) believed that, purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher that a sample has typical elements which contains the most typical attributes of the population. Thus, since the study adopted a qualitative approach, purposive sampling was used.

One university in South Africa was purposively selected for the study, from where a sample of facilitators and all coordinators of these programs were sampled. The participants were as follows; ten peer facilitators and two coordinators for in-depth interviews.

Instruments of Data Collection and Data Collection Procedures

Having employed a qualitative approach, the use of semi-structured interview guide was employed as instrument of data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted with program coordinators and facilitators of the programs. This semi-structured interview guide enhanced the production of in-depth data on the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of peer academic support programs at this university under study. These interviews were conducted

with two program coordinators and with ten peer facilitators.

Data Analysis

Data analyses of in-depth interviews were manually carried out qualitatively. A general analytical procedure was used in analysing the qualitative data based on the key themes that emerged from the audio-tape recordings and field notes. After coding the data and identifying categories and developing themes, a matrix of the main themes was presented to vividly demonstrate the monitoring and evaluation regarding the implementation of the peer academic support programs at the university under study.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics is defined as a matter of principled sensitivity to the right of others (Cohen et al. 2007). Ethical considerations protect the fundamental rights of participants including respect for privacy whilst maintaining the highest level of confidentiality (Wiid and Diggins 2009). Participants in the present study were all encouraged to participate voluntarily; that is out of their free will. While employing in-depth interviews in data collection, participants' anonymity was maintained and guaranteed. Finally, the participants had to sign an informed consent letter.

RESULTS

The monitoring and evaluation of the programs were reported by facilitators and program coordinators alike. Program coordinators were asked about the monitoring and evaluation of these programs (SI and LWC) and they reported that feedback is provided to facilitators verbally and in written form immediately they are observed. From these, monitoring emerged during monthly meetings which are held on trouble shooting and also during observation; and unannounced visits by program coordinators during sessions held by facilitators.

Theme 1: Monitoring Through Observations

Coordinators of the programs were asked if they were monitoring facilitators and how. All

their responses were encouraging as to how they carried out the monitoring and evaluation process, which were through peer observation and visiting their sessions. One coordinator declared that there are two types of observations that they usually undertake and these include peer observation and supervisory observation. Peer observation is where fellow peer facilitators observe their peers during sessions while supervisory observation is where this is undertaken by the supervisor or what is commonly known as program coordinators. In the words of one of the coordinators:

There are two types of observation; peer observation where there is a roaster put up to know who observes who. Here the facilitators are told. The other one is the supervisory observation, where the supervisors pop in unannounced or announced (coordinator 1).

Coordinators were also asked to explain how they evaluate the work that is done by facilitators. The two coordinators gave similar responses. They reported that they evaluate their facilitators through their attendance and feedback from students whom the facilitators are providing services to. For example, one of them remarked:

I evaluate the work of facilitators by looking at their attendance which is one of our performance indicators; we also get evaluation feedbacks from the students (coordinator 1).

Attendance is an important criterion for evaluation. Similarly, another issue that came up was how coordinators provide feedback to the facilitators; their responses were almost similar. According to the program coordinators, feedback is provided to facilitators orally and sometimes in written forms and this is done immediately the facilitators have been observed during their facilitation. One of the coordinators reported that “we provide feedback to facilitators through verbal and written form immediately after observation” (coordinator 1).

However, the other coordinator talked of one-on-one consultation with the facilitator or sometimes the more experienced facilitators provide feedback to the less experienced ones through re-reviewing of work done by them. Also, the manager of the coordinators writes report to evaluate how the coordinators are helping the facilitators in their work. The coordinator asserted that:

There is usually one on one consultation to discuss any issue that is troubling the facilitators. I also make sure that, for the newly recruited facilitators, the most experienced facilitators must go through the assignments they review before it is handed to the students. There is also report writing by the manager to evaluate the coordinators (coordinator 2)

The program coordinators were of the view that this type of monitoring and evaluation both by themselves and peer facilitators will ensure a speedy process of correcting any anomaly. Hence, feedback is fast and not delayed.

Theme 2: Unannounced Visits

Another way of monitoring facilitators is through unannounced visits to facilitators' sessions and workshops in PASS venues and even outside where sessions are held. Although, this is supposed to be something the facilitators know about, the coordinators confessed that they do these visits unannounced. The coordinators were asked to explain the reason why they visit facilitators unannounced, and one of the response was that “I go unannounced to enable me see the real setting” (coordinator 2). It may be assumed that the coordinators want to instil a sense of professionalism into the facilitators especially the supplemental instruction leaders because sessions are mostly organised by them. These unannounced visits are to ensure that facilitators know that they should always prepare before going for their sessions. However, sometimes facilitators are intimidated by these visits and may panic in-front of the students and this can be embarrassing and frustrating both to the facilitator and the students. This is very common with novice and inexperienced and less prepared facilitators.

Theme 3: Support from Program Coordinators

Monitoring and evaluation usually go along with support as they are useless if support is not provided by the supervisor. Information was sought on the support and satisfaction of the support provided to the facilitators by coordinators. The majority of the facilitators indicated that they were being supported with respect to their job descriptions or what they are expected to do as either SI or LWC. Varieties of ways through which the facilitators are supported were

indicated by the facilitators and include the provision of materials, financial support, teaching them on how to facilitate learning, and printing various support documentation. One of the facilitators narrated the nature and type of support received from program coordinators as follows:

We do receive much support from the program coordinator; especially as we are taught on how to detect plagiarism and how to manage the key areas of an assignment (Facilitator 2).

Another peer facilitator recounted his own help as follows:

The coordinators provide us with materials for facilitation like bold markers, photocopy materials and materials to compile our portfolio of evidence (Facilitator 5).

Despite the expression by the majority of the facilitators, that they receive sufficient support from program coordinators, some peer facilitators refuted this alleged support. One of them said:

I receive little support from the coordinator and as a matter of fact, I am restricted to review and not to correct the assignments. This makes students not to be satisfied with what we are doing as LWC (Facilitator 8).

The fact that they are facilitators limits them on how to help student. This shows that they are trained on how to facilitate, that is guiding students on what they do not understand and not to lecture. Perhaps, this facilitator finds it difficult to do so and want to lecture, which is not the case.

Regarding whether they were satisfied with the support that the program coordinators were providing to them to achieve effective implementation of the programs, the majority of facilitators agreed that they were satisfied. One recurrent issue the facilitators were happy about is that the program coordinators are always available and can be consulted at any time during working hours. One anxious facilitator expressed that "I am highly satisfied with the coordinators of the program because they are always available when they are needed" (Facilitator 6).

Although some of the facilitators were satisfied, they had some reservations concerning the hours they put in, but usually deducted by the program coordinators. One of them stated that:

I am completely satisfied because all my queries are always attended to by the coordi-

nators, though sometimes our hours that we claim are reduced for no apparent reason. We count on these hours to be able to claim enough for the month (Facilitator 2).

Two peer facilitators were not satisfied and did not blame the program coordinators for not providing the necessary support facilitators deserve to be able to effectively implement the peer academic support programs. One of them said "I am satisfied to a lesser extent because the coordinator cannot properly discharge her duties since her hands are tied as well" (Facilitator 9). In a similar manner, another facilitator also stated her dissatisfaction concerning the support they receive as peer facilitators. He said that "I am not completely satisfied with the support because a lot is expected to happen within a very short time" (Facilitator 10).

Theme 4: Monitoring and Mentoring of Less Experienced Facilitators

Facilitators were asked if they have someone monitoring and evaluating their activities, majority of the peer facilitators reported that they have mentors who assist them to do their work well and provides suggestions for improvement where need arises. A facilitator indicated:

I have a peer mentor who monitor's my activities. She is a senior student with more experience than me in this SI business. The mentor assists me when I have difficulties especially on time management, stress and managing large groups. She also directs me on what I am supposed to do as well as assign me to students in my discipline who want to consult anyone at TLC with their academic work (Facilitator 1).

Similarly, another facilitator revealed:

I have a peer mentor who acts as a guide to my activities; this is a master's student, an LWC with plenty of experience. In order to facilitate my work as LWC, the mentor makes propositions for adjustments where necessary on the assignments I review. The mentor also assigns LWC related work to me and assists me wherever and whenever necessary in my duties as LWC (Facilitator 2).

Although majority of the peer facilitators indicated that they have mentors, one said she has gained much experience and does not need anybody as a mentor but rather act as a mentor to other junior facilitators. She reported that "I had a peer mentor when I started but now; I

have gained much experience to mentor myself and others” (Facilitator 4).

Theme 5: Monitoring and Evaluation of Program Coordinators

Regarding monitoring and evaluation, coordinators of the programs were also asked if they were being monitored by the manager or some senior colleagues at TLC, and their responses were positive, that they live by the gospel that they preach. The more senior and experienced facilitators monitor their junior peers and the program coordinators also monitor all the facilitators. The facilitators are monitored by the manager of the centre. One of the coordinators said:

I also have my SI and colleagues who also come and observe me and I submit annual report every quarter to the manager. This is another lens for evaluation which our own peer observation (Coordinator 1).

Similarly, the other coordinator accepted that “there are senior colleagues monitoring our activities, and the feedbacks that we get from the workshops are also a form of monitoring” (Coordinator 2).

DISCUSSION

The findings manifest that there is monitoring through observation which is usually undertaken being programs coordinators and feedback is usually verbal or written. That is, the coordinators use peer observation as an instrument of monitoring facilitators. Similarly, facilitators are trained on how to observe their peers, to help them improve on their facilitation skills. A facilitator who observes is expected to give feedback on the session to his/her peers on how the session was conducted and also learns from the session he/she has observed. There is usually a discussion after the session between the observer and the observed peer facilitators. Many criticisms have been levelled against observation as a mechanism of monitoring and evaluation of peer facilitators. Having seen the quality of some of the peer facilitators (undergraduates), it is doubtful if peer monitoring can be effective given the fact that some peers might not want to objectively provide a feedback of what they have observed. This is corroborated by Shah (2013) where it was found out in her/his study that students feel uncomfortable in peer

assessing their colleagues. In addition, program coordinators are expected to attend workshops organised by peer facilitators where oral feedback on their presentations is given to them. The monitoring here does not seem to be a powerful tool which can help in the improvement of the peer facilitators’ skills as nothing serious is documented. There is need for critical monitoring to mitigate what Park (2014) calls resistance to advice. The general studies, to provide the data for the present paper investigates that some students do not believe in peer facilitators. To counter this tendency, intensive monitoring and support of peer facilitators will enhance their role as peer facilitators and erase this pessimistic view of the doubting students

However, questions arise about the value and purpose of the traditional ‘peer observation’ process, and as a result a new voluntary system of ‘peer development’ needs to be introduced (Byrne et al. 2010). Miller et al. (2014: 178) proposed that to overcome some of the weaknesses of traditional peer observation, it is essential to engage in both sets of observations and post-observation discussions. The authors suggested that this should be facilitated by a protocol which could provide novice peer facilitators new ways to teach content, guide them on implementing pedagogical theory, and means to improve communications with students and classroom management skills. Maphosa (2014: 14) proposed a model of monitoring based on “teaching and learning project of the school or faculty.” He reiterated that “any support outside the teaching and learning program of discipline and departments is bound to be piecemeal, peripheral and ineffective. If this model is to be taken as ideal, it will mean that the monitoring of peer facilitators at the TLC of this university under study is piecemeal, peripheral and ineffective according to Maphosa’s (2014) viewpoint.

Attendance is considered as an important criterion for evaluation by program coordinators and this explains why facilitators are required to sign a form once they are on duty which enables the coordinators to know whether the one was on duty. As noted earlier, feedbacks from students receiving services from the TLC is also another instrument of evaluation. Students who go to the TLC for help are required to sign a form after consultation. This form is later used to evaluate the facilitator who attended to the student. In this respect, the facilitator is evaluated after

looking at the responses of the student to determine how successful the session was. This type of monitoring also has its own problems including the fact that students might be intimidated at the presence of the peer facilitators to give objective feedback about the help they have received. Any negative feedback from students might be perceived by the peer facilitator as an act of 'ungratefulness'. To ensure that peer facilitation is an innovative form of active learning that empowers students with direct ownership of the learning experience (Marvell et al. 2013), a critical re-appraisal of the current form of monitoring is necessary.

While the coordinators are evaluating the facilitators, the manager also evaluates the coordinators to ensure proper delivery of services to students. Also, the manager is evaluated by the director of the TLC. The director is also evaluated through her performance contract which she signed with the university management. However, monitoring is not just for the sake of it because it has more to it. In this light, Kadalie (2013) is of the view that there is a need to interrogate mentoring and personal engagement with students at higher education institution. Kadalie accepts that monitoring and evaluation is an administrative tool to determine whether an organisation is achieving the aim for which it was established. Thus, it involves all tiers of administration and all levels of management, from the lowest to the highest.

In the same light, Hayes and Scott (2007) state that many higher education institutions have put into place a mentoring system to help improve student's academic performance. Example of some of the mentoring programs are monitoring attendance; making students aware of support service; third year students volunteer to provide support for first years and identifying at-risk students so that they can get additional support. Findings of the study show that some of the aspects are not being put in practice (example, identifying at-risk students). The researchers believe that this aspect should be integrated in the Supplemental Instruction and Language and Writing Advancement programs. Better still, all academic support programs should integrate these aspects into their programs or adopt Maphosa's (2014) model.

Regarding support, the findings as presented under this aspect show that the majority of the participants do receive support from pro-

gram coordinators which is very useful in helping them carry out their duties as SI and LWC at the TLC. This support is necessary as the question of implementation of such programs is under scrutiny from university and the TLC authorities. Such support and availability of program coordinators to provide the necessary support can go a long way to help the facilitators to effectively provide the assistance that their peers seek from the TLC. Given the fact that some of the facilitators are still expressing doubt and expressing inability to review or effectively help peers might stem from little or no experience and insufficient training. Constant and regular support can help to fill this vacuum and mitigate claims or description of peer-tutoring as being premature evidence-based practice (Kalef et al. 2013). In the same breadth, Topping et al. (2013) believed that the more support that is given to tutors or peer facilitators, the more the learning opportunities for them. Some writers have suggested that learning by tutors should be "supported by discussion and explanation, revisiting fundamentals, making links between conceptual areas, testing and clarifying their understanding, and reorganising and building ideas, rehearsing them, and working through them repeatedly, to secure their understanding" (Galbraith and Winterbottom 2011: 321).

Much has been written on support to peer facilitators and students involved with peer facilitation and its importance. Hodgson et al. (2013) investigated that one of the key factors influencing the success of the peer assisted program includes the provision of structured and unstructured student support. The importance of peer support was perceived as superseding other support according to Boyle et al. (2012). Studies have shown that peer facilitators perceived the need for support around teaching (White et al. 2014) and the centralization of teacher support predicts changes in students' peer academic reputation (Hughes et al. 2014). Students need great assistance to develop the peer support networks that could assist them in pursuit of their educational goals (Di-Tommaso 2012). In this light, the researchers strongly hold the view expressed by Leung et al. (2013: 227) that "there is a compelling need for reconceptualising peer support into academic and social domains in terms of domain specificity", especially given the weak support structure and mechanisms at the TLC.

However, the views of some facilitators who expressed dissatisfaction with the support provided by the program coordinators need to be given due consideration. A more likely explanation to this dissatisfaction might be that facilitators are overloaded with so many issues to handle once they start working as facilitators. These include things like conducting sessions, consultations, reviewing assignments, presenting workshops and administrative duties. This might be overwhelming given that they too are students and have to study and do their own assignments amongst their other social and academic imperatives. More-so, there is considerable number of undergraduate students who are serving as peer facilitators, some of who are also academically weak students. That might account for the reason why Buissink-Smith et al. (2013) believe that peer facilitators should come from postgraduate courses and disciplines and might not be undergraduate students.

Peer monitoring and evaluation is a good way of letting more experience facilitators to mentor the less experience one as there are only two coordinators who are overwhelmed with work at the TLC. These coordinators cannot mentor all the peer facilitators effectively because of their numbers. More-so, it is a learning curve for the more experienced facilitators who might one day become coordinators or lecturers. This has actually been observed at the TLC where there is some sort of shifting and replacement of coordinators by those who once served as team leaders of peer facilitators. Without this experience of mentoring others, it would not have been easy for them to assume coordinators' positions at the TLC.

The findings presented here reveal that all facilitators in the TLC including their coordinators are being monitored and evaluated in order to ensure that they do their work well and effect improvement whenever and wherever necessary. It can also be observed that peers monitor their fellow peers which enable them to learn different strategies from one another. These mentors assist them in areas they do not understand and provide suggestions for improvement. This idea is corroborated by Tangwe and Rembe (2014a) who stipulated that at the university level, the coordinators of support programs should always arrange for peer observations where peer educators observe the sessions of each other. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation is a continuous

process, which takes into consideration several aspects. Wagner et al. (2005) postulate that monitoring and evaluation is not a one-time event, but an exercise involving assessment of differing scope and depth carried out at several points in time in response to evolving needs for evaluative knowledge and learning during the effort to achieve outcomes. According to these writers, peer educators have direct experience in the role and can share suggestions from their experiences.

Heavy workload of program coordinators could pose problem for the peer academic support programs to be evaluated and also if there are large number of peer facilitators (Arendale 2014). Latino and Ashcraft (2012) voiced that little attention is paid to evaluation of the work done by peer educators and as such, evaluation efforts should be diverse and multifaceted. More so, evaluation should be through triangulation of assessments (Wang and Reeves 2007). This view is agreed by Ponitz et al. (2009) and Marsh et al. (2010) who believe that questionnaire system of evaluation is too simple and standardized and as such ignore specific issues such as content and delivery; hence the need for triangulation of methods. Similarly, others have suggested that different methods should be used in the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of peer academic support programs. Accordingly, this will help all stakeholders to have a detailed and a balanced picture of the programs (Altrichter et al. 2008). The impact of these programs, according to Latino (2008), should be on students served, the peer educators themselves and the overall success of the programs and this should be an integral component of the reform process. The evaluation of these programs could reduce what Paton (2008) terms the reduction of uncertainty about decisions that have to be made. Thus, monitoring and evaluation should not be a one-time event, but something that involves differing scope and depth.

CONCLUSION

There are enough peer academic support programs put in place to help improve students' academic performance at the university. These are Language and Writing Advancement (LWAP) and Supplemental Instruction (SI) programs. Academic support programs are very important in enhancing student's academic per-

formance especially with students from previously disadvantage universities like the one under study. Besides, without the adequate support of students, facilitators, coordinators and lecturers from different departments, it will be difficult for these programs to achieve their objectives. The importance of monitoring and evaluation of these programs cannot be overemphasised. Hence, the quality of the monitoring and evaluation needs much to be desired, especially with peer monitoring and evaluation with the provision of feedback. Most of the facilitators are undergraduate students who themselves are struggling with their own academic load. In addition, with only two coordinators with many peer facilitators, it is not an easy task to effectively monitor and evaluate what each of them is doing; hence, problems arise with the implementation of such programs.

Although there are mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of peer facilitation at the TLC, some of them such as unannounced visits to facilitators during sessions can be embarrassing and intimidating to both the students and the facilitators. This is because an external person such as program coordinator will defeat the peer facilitation's principles and purpose as it is argued in some quarters. It is worth mentioning that there is no single standard instrument that is used for monitoring and evaluation of peer facilitators at this university to be used by different program coordinators at different times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study reveal that there is some level of monitoring and evaluation of peer academic support at this university under study. Nonetheless, in order for peer academic support programs at this university to operate successfully, the following are recommended (these are not exhaustive):

1. All peer facilitators should be post-graduate students especially from Master's level since they are not restricted to do any class work and are mature in handling academic problems, especially when it comes to monitoring and evaluation of their peers
2. More coordinators of the programs, at least two should be recruited for SI and two for LWC for each faculty to enhance effective monitoring and evaluation.
3. Announced visits to facilitators' sessions should be encouraged. In addition, facilitators

tors should be given written feedback to help them reflect on their area of weakness.

4. There is need for a standardised instrument that can be used by different program coordinators at different times to monitor and evaluate peer facilitators.

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