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Research into curriculum development at ten theological institutions of reformed tradition in sub-Saharan Africa linked to NetACT

ABSTRACT

Between 2006 and 2013 an empirical study of the curriculum development (CD) of ten NetACT² theological institutions of Reformed tradition in sub-Sahara Africa was done. The researchers visited all the campuses and did curriculum development workshops (CDW) with the institutions. Questionnaires addressing worldview, value systems, missional direction, contextualisation and educational principles were used to get basic information. The research found positive learning environments on the campuses with dedicated lecturers and students. The curricula reflect that sufficient attention is given to modernism, secularism, urban and rural evangelism while a deliberate attempt is made to improve the analytical thinking skills of the students. HIV and AIDS courses are found on every campus and there is a new awareness of the importance of Community Development. However, the research also found that the curricula do not reflect emphasis on issues like poverty and children ministry. The majority of the institutions admit to discrimination against women. Nearly all institutions used curricula copied and adapted from Western institutions and added new material on an ad-hoc basis. In many cases there are no written outcomes for modules, no assessment plan and in general a lack of quality control. The success stories of the NetACT curriculum workshops are told and useful recommendations are made for the improvement of curricula.

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

NetACT formulated its mission and goals in 2001 in Lusaka (AGM Minutes 2001).³ From the very beginning curriculum development and the need for high academic standards played an important part in the discussions. NetACT's first curriculum committee meeting took place in Stellenbosch on 5 and 6 Dec 2002 (NetACT Curriculum Meeting Minutes 2002). Important direction-finding decisions were taken concerning curriculum development and academic quality. The term "curriculum" was taken to refer to more than a mere list of academic courses and knowledge. It should lead to a profound change in the learner. The committee set as its goal to contribute to the upgrading of the quality of theological education of the various

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2 NetACT is the Network for African Congregational Theology, founded in 2000-2001 and presently constituted by 15 theological institutions of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. <http://academic.sun.ac.za/teologie/netact.html> Assessed 31 Jan 2012.

3 NetACT's AGM Minutes, Mission and Goals, Constitution etc can be consulted and downloaded from their website <http://academic.sun.ac.za/teologie/netact.html> Assessed 31 Jan 2012.

schools with the ideal to establish 'Centres of Theological Excellence' in every Southern African country. It was also decided to offer workshops on curriculum theory and teaching methods. Under the guidance of prof. AE Carl, an educationist facilitator and author (Carl 2002, 2012), empowerment of lecturers played an important role right from the start (NetACT First Curriculum Meeting Minutes, 2002:1.2). These decisions were taken within the framework of NetACT's mission statement and goals and formed the bases for the empirical research into the curricula of ten NetACT affiliated institutions.

NETACT'S MISSION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

In August 2005 at Vila Ulónguè in North-West Mozambique the following key items were identified as being part of NetACT's mission:

- The Reformed tradition;
- The upgrading of academic standards and institutional capacity building;
- A holistic and contextualised theological development;
- The training of well qualified leaders as people with integrity.

The ideal was to promote servanthood leadership and leaders with compassion. (NetACT Minutes Vila Ulónguè August, 2005, NB 122, NB 123). The ideal of missional congregations was also stressed (Decision NB131).

At the 2005 meeting Kruger du Preez was approached by NetACT to do an empirical study of the curricula of the NetACT institutions. He was asked to suggest a curriculum development framework for the network where the above mentioned broad definition of curriculum and the mission statement of the network should be adhered to. The framework should be comprehensive and to a certain degree detailed and should contain, inter alia, values, didactic principles and guidelines for the evaluation of subjects (also according to Marsh 2009:38).

This article is based on research amongst the following ten NetACT institutions done between 2006 and 2013:

1. African Bible College (ABC, Lilongwe, Malawi),
2. HEFSIBA – Instituto Superior Cristão (Mozambique),
3. Instituto Superior Emanuel Unido (ISEU, Huambo, Angola),
4. Instituto Superior de Teologia Evangélica no Lubango (ISTEL, Lubango, Angola),
5. Josophat Mwale Theological Institute (JMTI, Nkhoma, Malawi),
6. Justo Mwale Theological University College (JMTUC, Lusaka, Zambia),
7. Murray Theological College (MThC, Morgenster, Zimbabwe),
8. Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS, Windhoek, Namibia),
9. Reformed Institute for Theological Training (RITT, Eldoret, Kenya);
10. Zomba Theological College (ZTC, Zomba, Malawi).

The University of Stellenbosch's Faculty of Theology in South Africa also forms part of NetACT, but was not considered for the final research as they turned out to be quite different from the other institutions as far as, inter alia, their position as part of a secular University, their advanced infrastructure, their extensive library and their emphasis on research are concerned. At the workshops where they participated and from the questionnaires that their delegation completed, it was clear that they often represented a different point of view compared to the other NetACT institutions. The researcher also took into consideration that the Faculties of Theology in South Africa undergo rigorous HEQC accreditation processes. The ideal of the NetACT institutions is that their diplomas and degrees will be accredited by the South African Universities and the HEQC. With this in mind, the researcher thought not to incorporate them in the research as it will lead to a distorted general picture of what is going on in the majority of the NetACT institutions.

The variance within the test sample that is being studied has an influence on the test sample error. The smaller the variance within groups, the bigger is the chance that the specific test sample statistics will not differ substantially from the parametric data; in other words, the chances of a test sample error will be less (Smit, 1983:180. KdP translation).

3. GOAL OF THE RESEARCH

The goal of the research was:

To empower staff to develop a curriculum framework in which all the theological institutions of NetACT will be able to develop their own relevant curricula that will be integrative, normative, missional and contextual and that will enhance high academic standards and lead to spiritual maturity.

This goal necessitated an empirical study in order to describe the state of affairs at the different institutions. The question that guided the research was to ascertain to what extent curricula were Reformed, integrative and normative, missional and contextual. The last part of the research was then directed towards the evaluation of general educational principles that should eventually lead to a respectable academic standards and spiritual maturity.

4. METHODOLOGY

The theological-methodological framework of the research is described in NetACT's first publication (Hendriks 2004:19-34). The research is done as Practical Theology but reflects aspects of Systematic Theology and Missiology. Curriculum development is a discipline linked to education and as such the work reflects an interdisciplinary study between theology and education. General educational principles for curriculum development were applied in the designing of the questionnaires.

4.1 Workshops and Questionnaires

The Executive Committee of NetACT organised curriculum development workshops at strategic places in southern Africa thereby enabling the ten theological institutions to attend.⁴

⁴ The programs, content and in some cases even the evaluations of these workshops are available on the NetACT website <http://academic.sun.ac.za/teologie/netact.html>. In many cases representatives from other seminaries also attended the workshops, especially the two held in Angola and at one of the workshops

The researcher was asked to be the main facilitator of these workshops and used questionnaires as well as guided group discussions to obtain more information and views from the delegates of the institutions.

Many of the questions were open-ended requesting the views of staff and church delegates on issues. As such most of the work was qualitative in nature.

The questionnaires covered subjects like: worldview, doctrine, missional orientation, contextualisation, administrative policy & practice, leadership functions, syllabus content, lecturer's effectiveness, professional development, teaching resources, facilities, and services offered. The questions provided information about the reality, the problems and the perceptions of the parties involved. The eventual goal was to empower them to redesign their curricula according to the norms and goals set by their institutions. The results of the answers to the questionnaires together with literature provided to institutions, analyses of their documents and personal guidance eventually led to the processes through which curricula were contextualized at the institutions. It is an on-going process.

4.2 Working in teams

The researcher, normally accompanied by Prof Hendriks, Executive Director of NetACT and Prof Carl (vice-dean Faculty of Education, Stellenbosch University), as well as knowledgeable people in the field, visited the different campuses of the institutions. We worked in teams. NetACT got hold of different specialists to assist the researcher in presenting the workshops. Amongst them were:

- Dr Douwe Visser, Theological Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches taught on *A Reformed curriculum*;
- Prof Nico Koopman, Dean Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, on *The curriculum should address the needs of the Church*;
- Prof Jurgens Hendriks on *Missional curricula and the influence of globalisation*;
- Prof Arend Carl on *Different elements of curriculum development*;
- Prof Dr Hendrik Bosman (Stellenbosch University) on *Curriculum development principles and the Old Testament*;
- Antoinette du Preez (HEFSIBA ICHE) on *Curriculum development and the need of good administration*;
- Dr Joe Simfukwe from ACTEA, Zambia and Dr Stephany Black from ACTEA, Kenya on *ACTEA and accreditation requirements*;
- Dr Manie Taute from Portugal (IBP) on *Analytical thinking and advanced theological studies*;
- Reverend Basilius Kasera from NETS, Windhoek, Namibia on *The accreditation process in Namibia* and
- Prof. Dr. Elna Mounton (Stellenbosch University) on *Women in the academic field*.

The essence of the research and eventual transformation of the institutions took place at these

held in Nigeria. It is clear that there is a dire need for this kind of workshop all over Africa.

workshops. The fact that the work was done in teams and in a spirit of cooperation in a sharing mode (not a “telling” one), made all the difference.

4.3 Visits to different countries

The Zambia visits took place during the Lusaka NetACT Annual General Meeting in August 2007 and during a personal visit by the researcher to Justo Mwale Theological University College in December 2010. South Africa and especially the campus of the Theological Faculty of the Stellenbosch University were often visited and the curriculum development workshop (from now on CDW) outside Stellenbosch on the 28th June 2009 was facilitated by the researcher and Prof Hendrik Bosman. At this occasion questionnaires were distributed and completed by participants from all the attending NetACT institutions.

During the extensive Angola journeys in 2004 and 2010, ISTEEL and ISEU were visited. A CDW was held on the campus of ISTEEL at Lubango from 25 -28 January 2011 and on 21 – 24 January 2013 at Caluequembe. On the way to Angola (2010) the researchers visited NETS in Windhoek, Namibia and had in depth discussions with the Academic Dean (Rev Simon Gilham) who took the lead and implemented a very thorough CDW process after which NETS were the first tertiary institution in Namibia to receive accreditation from their national Department of Education.

Vila Ulónguè Mozambique, where the researcher resides, is only 40 km from the Malawian border. Three of the selected institutions are in Malawi. As a result the researcher paid regular visits to ABC in Lilongwe, Zomba Theological College and Josaphat Mwale Theological Institute at Nkhoma. A fully fledged CDW took place on the campus of ABC in Lilongwe, Malawi from 13 –17 January 2011 with representatives of all the NetACT institutions under discussion present.

A curriculum development workshop was held at Morgenster in Zimbabwe from 13 – 17 March 2010 for the sole purpose of helping Murray Theological College (MThC). As with the majority of workshops, the researcher was assisted by his wife Antoinette du Preez who is qualified and experienced in the field of administration. From 16 – 20 August 2010, the RITT (Reformed Institute for Theological Training) campus outside Eldoret in Kenya was visited and a CDW held for the lecturers, personnel and alumni of the institution. The MThC and RITT CDWs were the most satisfying and effective. One could focus on their particular needs. (See in this regard No.7: The positive impact of the CD workshops).

4.4 Evaluating the CD orientation

The first presentation at CDWs was on the different curriculum orientations that an institution could follow. Institutions were asked to evaluate themselves. Were Traditional/ Technical, Deliberate/Progressive or Constructivist in orientation.⁵ Where would they like to be?

5 The definitions of the orientations are:

1. Traditional orientation: Schools need to return to basic education and high standards – back to the essentials. Schools must systematically teach basic knowledge and not be afraid to stress hard work and discipline. Knowledge consists of facts, concepts and skills that must be mastered through memorization and drill. Knowledge is generally regarded as an objective, impersonal, many times value-free commodity to be grasped. Outcomes are very specific. Lecturers are the technicians whose task is solely to follow the step-by-step instructions in their manuals
2. Progressive orientation: Emphasis is here on a relevant curriculum content. The progressivists see knowledge as more than a product that has to be mastered. Students, they believe, must interact with the world around them and interpret it. Questions that progressivists ask are: What should be the overall aims of education? How can education help humanity achieve a just and compassionate society? What is the

This turned out to be a very valuable exercise. It delineated the different educational orientations of the NetACT institutions and it served as a good starting point for the delegates to know the researcher's definition of curriculum development. It also motivated them to complete the questionnaires.

To eventually help the institutions to develop a relevant curriculum framework one needs to have a good understanding of the specific context of every institution and the existing curricula and curriculum development practices. The questionnaires helped in this regard.

4.5 The questionnaires

4.5.1 The distribution of the questionnaires

Some of the curriculum development workshops were conducted at the annual meetings of NetACT. As such it provided an opportunity to do the research when all the institutions were present. The researcher was involved with NetACT from the beginning which created trust. Even so, it was stated that the data and personal comments gathered will be handled with discretion and confidentiality and that the names of the institutions will not be directly linked to the published comments except with their permission.

4.5.2 The different questionnaires

Of importance were especially the first and fourth questionnaires:

The first questionnaire was called the Value Questionnaire and was distributed between the 1st and 4th August, 2006 in Windhoek, Namibia during a Annual General Meeting (AGM) of NetACT. Values of the International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education (ICAA) in their "Manifesto" were taken as a point of departure and delegates were asked to evaluate their institution on the following: Worldview; Missional Orientation; Cultural Appropriateness; Attentiveness to the church; Theological Grounding; Holistic Curricularising; Spiritual Formation; Service Orientation; Creativity in Teaching and Assessment.

right (moral) thing to do? They consider curriculum just to be a general guide. They see human beings as important subjects rather than mere objects. Rather than "mastering" knowledge, students establish meaning for their lives through understanding and interpretation. Curriculum involves interaction between teachers and learners, between learners and learners and between learners and curriculum content. The focus of teaching is more the making of meaning through learning than the transmission of concepts and skills.

The basic consumption is that no one has all the truth. Human nature and human learning are seen as complex. Curriculum documents are only seen as general guides. Lecturers use their professional and considered judgement in determining what is best for a particular situation. As in the case of Paul Freire, progressivists oppose "banking education" and "narration sickness" by which teachers deposit information into the passive minds of their pupils. Students should not only be active participants, but in doing so should develop a critical consciousness.

3. The Constructivist orientation: The Constructivist orientation goes even further than the Deliberative/ Progressive orientation and through social and environmental interactions, students progressively build up and restructure their own views and schemes of the world around them and try to make sense of it all. Here one will typically get a lecturer entering a classroom without a list of objectives or content but with one or two potentially big ideas or problems which the students have to investigate. Students should not only be active participants, but in doing so, should develop a critical consciousness according to them (Du Preez 2013:45-46).

The fourth questionnaire, known as the Curriculum Checklist Questionnaire, was the most extensive one (205 questions). This questionnaire was contextualised from the Checklist Questionnaire of Tanner & Tanner (2007). This Questionnaire was first distributed at the Stellenbosch CDW on the 28th July, 2009. Then followed the Murray Theological College CDW at Morgenster, Zimbabwe from the 28th March to the 1st April 2010. Some questionnaires were distributed in Lubango at the ISTELEL campus in Angola on the 27th June 2010. This questionnaire was distributed at the RITT CDW at Eldoret, Kenya from 16 – 20 August 2010 and then followed the Lilongwe CDW at the ABC campus in Malawi from 13 – 17 January 2011. The Lubango CDW at the ISTELEL campus in Angola lasted from 25 – 28 January 2011 where the questionnaire was distributed in the Portuguese language. The last time the Questionnaire was distributed was at the Caluquembe CDW in Angola which lasted from the 21 – 24 January 2013.

The Questions were categorised under the following subsections: philosophy and doctrine; administrative policy and practice; curriculum renewal; climate for curriculum renewal; leadership roles and functions; lecture effectiveness and classroom climate; curriculum development; professional development; teaching-learning resources; facilities and services. Under the subdivision: philosophy and doctrine, questions were asked to establish the worldview and doctrine, the missional direction, the inclusiveness, the human rights, the involvement in ecology issues and the community involvement of the institutions. Questions were also asked about the spiritual lives of the students.

With every questionnaire participants were given the liberty to write comments. These comments revealed a great deal about the situation at the different theological institutions and were incorporated in the conclusions below.

The results of questionnaires, especially questionnaires 1 and 4, will now be attended to. The idea is to display the results in a narrative way with some critical remarks and evaluation.

5 RESULTS AND CRITICAL REMARKS DERIVED FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRES

The results are divided into four sections; the results that deal with the basic theology that operates on the campuses, the missional focus of the curriculum, the degree of contextualisation and in the last instance a reflection on the extent of compliance with the current educational principles.

5.1 Results referring to the theological approach and worldview

The NetACT institutions, to a high degree, pride themselves in being Reformed but agree that they should think more thoroughly about the theological foundations of their curricula. It is indeed of concern for the researcher that there is not always a deliberate theological framework in which to develop curricula. He proposes a reformational, African, missional framework for curriculum development for the NetACT affiliated institutions. The Angolan institutions do not use the term Reformed to describe their theology and feel more comfortable with a “Kingdom orientated” theology. According to the general evaluation of all the institutions the curricula should model and promote much more effectively a holistic biblical pattern of thought; that is a more comprehensive, Reformed based worldview. They are in agreement that salvation in Christ should transform or renew the whole of creation and indicated that this principle is to a certain degree reflected in their curricula. In line with a Reformed worldview the institutions agree that life should not be divided into a sacred and secular realm and that this dualism has a negative result on public life.

It is indeed worrying that the majority of the institutions accept publically the status quo of the political life and decisions of the Governments in sub-Saharan Africa out of fear to be marginalised. The researcher witnessed how a Government was referred to as “our beloved Government” by the principal of a NetACT institution when the Government officials were present, whilst the same principal is rather critical of the governing political party. In Angola the delegates to a workshop openly said that they cannot afford to question decisions of the Government and do not have the courage to do so in public. Democratic principles are held in high regard according to the questionnaires, but there is an admittance that justice and human rights are not sufficiently emphasized in curricula which result, as indicated, that the student’s public and prophetic voices are not heard in their societies as it should when they became spiritual leaders.

There is a healthy emphasis on the spiritual growth of the students and they are encouraged to participate in all the spiritual activities offered on campus and in the church. Spiritual maturity, however, is not the point of departure and main end of the curricula. The researcher proposes a framework where the whole curriculum is written with spiritual, emotional and intellectual maturity as the main goal.

The Biblical principle of caring for the marginalised and the poor is adhering to but just to a certain limited extend. An inclusive approach towards disadvantaged students and HIV and Aids infected people is prominent but the same cannot be said about women and gay people. Some theological institutions still do not allow women to study theology, one of the reasons being that the main supporting churches do not allow women as pastors. On the other hand, it is encouraging to find some of the most prophetic voices for women rights in sub-Saharan Africa coming from some of the lecturers of NetACT affiliated institutions. The most extreme negative results from all the questionnaires were in relationship to gay and lesbian rights and their acceptance in the church. It is clear that a theology of inclusion is not applicable as far as gays and lesbians are concerned. The researcher proposes an inclusive, theological approach to form the foundation of the whole curriculum and more informed debates/workshops on these sensitive issues which may curb the exclusive, judgmental prevailing approach.

Quite alarming is the fact that poverty is not part and parcel of the core curricula of the institutions. The researcher finds this strange given the extreme poor countries and societies in which the majority of the NetACT institutions find themselves. Church leaders will not be able to contribute towards the economical upliftment of their countries and towards community development if the biblical position towards the poor, the causes of poverty, the ethic of work and wealth distribution etc. is not being studied scientifically.

Although the institutions are in favour of a servanthood ethos in leadership training, they admit that there is no deliberate effort to make it a central part of the training. It is therefore not strange that “abusas,” the word used for pastors in the Chewa language and used in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, as well as synodical committee members, General Secretaries etc. are often seen as little kings following an autocratic leadership style.

The vision and mission statement of the NetACT institutions are indicated as a point of departure for curriculum development but is surprisingly not well known by the leadership. Attention should be given to the writing of a vision and mission statement that reflects the ethos of the institutions and of which lecturers should take ownership. This should then indeed serve as a guiding line when writing curricula.

5.2 Results referring to a missional approach

Although the NetACT institutions are in favour of a holistic missional approach as an integral part of their curricula, they admit that their curricula cannot be described as missional orientated. This becomes inter alia clear when one discovers the little attention that unreached people groups are getting in the curricula. On the campuses little is done to use the facilities to reach the surrounding community. The practical work of the students is directed towards outreaches within congregations, is receiving the due attention and is well monitored.

It is heartening to see that the study of traditional religions in Africa and the planting of new churches or congregations are high up on the priority list of the institutions. The prominence of Community Development in nearly all the institutions reveals a commitment to be involved in community affairs. The researcher questions though the practical and contextual content of some of these materials.

The ideal is that a deliberate effort should be made to write the curriculum of every subject with a missional focus in mind.

5.3 Results referring to the process of contextualisation

The fact that, with one exception, NetACT institutions admit that their curricula are copies of Western orientated theological institutions makes contextualisation more complex and more challenging. The adoption and implementation of pre-packaged, segmented, instructional programs are popular and as such are not contextualised. Deliberate efforts are though made to contextualise material in the classrooms. Although contextualisation is very high on the priority list of the institutions, the curricula and study material are not sufficiently contextualised. The inclusion of rural and urban evangelism in curricula reveals a deliberate effort towards contextualization.

Institutions, when designing their curricula, do not always take the ministerial needs of their churches into account. One should think that the basic point of departure should be to consult the churches about their pastoral needs before one decides on a curriculum and the content of books. This is apparently not always the case and should get serious attention. One suggestion is for students to distribute questionnaires during their practical work to church elders and church members to establish the real needs of which the curricula should take close notice.

In line with a more field orientated approach students get enough time to converse in groups in class situations and the teaching of diverse preaching styles reveals a deliberate effort to be relevant and contextual.

Nearly all the students are receiving their training in their second or even third language of choice. The researcher proposes that one should try to at least compile a dictionary with the theological vocabulary in all the indigenous languages of the students to contribute to the contextualisation of theology.

It is a worrying aspect that youth and especially children ministry is lacking in some curricula and in others it forms a small section of Practical Theology. It seems as if the institutions in general do not have a vision for children ministry and do not see the wonderful future of the church with dedicated and enthusiastic children and youth. There are exceptions. At one institution students are doing two years of practical work amongst the children and accompany the children on evangelistic campaigns in the villages.

5.4 Results referring to the educational principles and practices

Nine of the institutions regard themselves as still traditional in their general orientation but with a desire to move towards a progressive educational system. Since the start of the curriculum workshops there is a notable effort at some institutions to be more progressive in their orientation.

There is a desire to motivate students towards independent thinking. It is reported that lectures have generally advanced from just giving information to the phase of facilitating ideas. The awareness of teaching to improve the analytical and critical abilities of the students is a welcoming trend. This is done by utilising open answer questions, as well as class and group discussions, assignments and guest lecturers. Although the institutions are all in favour of the principle of developing higher thinking skills, only a few are deliberately designing their test and exam questions accordingly. Only one institution uses the taxonomy of Bloom (1956) or the revision (Anderson, et al. 2000) as a basis for assessment and setting questions. The latter taxonomy was being promoted at all the workshops facilitated by the authors of this article.

The lecturers are of the opinion that their post-graduate theological studies at universities in other countries, especially at the University of Stellenbosch, the University of the Free State and the Northwest University, encourage them to think more analytically and it is reflected in their lectures.

Curriculum designers at NetACT institutions often meet with resistance when curriculum changes are proposed and additional subjects and content are therefore often included on an ad-hoc basis without the necessary thinking processes. Lecturers do take ownership of the content of the subjects that they are lecturing, that is according to questionnaires, but are not involved in the curriculum development processes and the choice of content which is a stumbling block in the empowerment process of the lecturers.

The institutions regard strategic flexibility of their curricula as important and the majority of the respondents are in favour of curricula to nurture church leaders for various roles. There is, however, agreement that the current curricula do not cater for this need.

In only five of the ten NetACT institutions under survey outcomes have been written for modules. It is clear that this need urgent attention also to promote analytical and critical thinking. In the majority of countries lecturers are complaining about the lack of analytical thinking and the ability of first year students to analyse material. This is mostly due to a 'parrotting' system in secondary schools.

There are by far not enough books nor up-to-date journals in the libraries of all the NetACT institutions. This is especially due to a lack of funds and hinders the whole process of accreditation at, for example an institution like ACTEA (Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa). ACTEA expect at least 5% of the income of an institution to go to the buying of new books and theological journals. As far as the researcher could establish it is not happening at the NetACT institutions and should become the ideal. Internet access for students remains a big problem in the majority of the NetACT institutions and prevents thorough scientific research.

It is clear to the researcher that quality control and continuous assessment need much more

attention at the NetACT institutions. An Internal Quality Evaluation Committee is suggested to help in this regard. Old students and other educational external experts could also form part of this body. In four of the institutions no official evaluation of lecturers is done. Some institutions leave it to the Academic Dean to do the evaluation while, in rare cases, students are asked for their opinion of the lecturers and their classes. In general, the NetACT institutions were unable to present deliberate assessment policies. Continuous assessment is receiving attention, although not nearly enough.

Lecturers confess to a lack of creativity and variety in their teaching methods. Little is being done to provide in-service training in this regard. A two hour session on one Saturday per month is suggested to bring lecturers up to date with the newest administration policies and pedagogical principles also regarding curriculum development. This is especially useful to temporary lecturers that often feel themselves on the periphery of decision making as far as curriculum matters are concerned. Lecturers are complaining that no orderly planned induction orientation of new lecturers is taking place at NetACT institutions.

The lack of research by lecturers outside that of their formal studies at universities has been proven by the results. Some lecturers are just lecturing on material in the manuals without any further research or wider knowledge of the study material.

It is evident through the questionnaires but also the personal observation by the researcher that there exist good relations between lecturers and students and this contributes to a productive learning environment. Students uphold high moral values and are eager to learn. Lecturers generally teach with enthusiasm and are role models. Principals are generally positively evaluated by the lecturers. They are involved and supportive of curriculum development. The NetACT goal to involve the professional staff and church leadership more in curriculum development is promising.

According also to the research done by Hendriks et al (2012:27), the ratio of lecturers to students at NetACT theological institutions are 1:8. This is a very healthy educational ratio but the question of financial sustainability is another perspective that needs consideration. The researcher recommends the establishing of other faculties to make the institutions viable. At NetACT institutions where this is the case, like HEFSIBA in Mozambique where the researcher is lecturing, the Faculty of Psychology and the Faculty of Management and Economics do not only provide good income but serves also as vehicles of Christian witness to the community.

Good academic administration is not always getting the attention that it deserves as is for example clear that job descriptions are not in place at all the institutions. There was an improvement in the quality of official documents of the institutions also due to NetACT workshops that addressed this issue. There is, however, room for improvement at some institutions concerning their annual calendars, student and lecturer guides, curricula content publications etc.

5.5 A general evaluation of the results

Theron (2012) quotes Du Preez about the kind of curriculum that should be envisaged for theological institutions:

It should be value-driven according to Reformed principles; it should reflect a holistic and integrated, but also inclusive approach; it should be written according to outcome-based

principles where the affective outcome should be prominent; it should be missional in nature and contextualised within the Sub-Saharan African context; and it should comply with high academic standards with emphasis on the enhancement and development of higher thinking skills.

Reflecting in general on the results and critical remarks derived from the questionnaires, one could conclude that the curricula of the NetACT affiliated institutes in general comply with the requirements of being value-driven according to Reformed principles. There is, however, a lack of a well-thought through holistic and integrated curriculum at some institutions which lead to a fragmented curriculum and an *add-on* tendency with ad hoc decisions about curricula. If cognitive, emotional and spiritual maturity is seen as the main goal one can overcome part of this problem. There is room for improvement as far as inclusive thinking is concerned. The lack of this approach sometimes lead to decisions taken in a rather legalistic and fundamentalistic way where women, children and homosexual people often turn out to be the victims. Few institutions adhere to the good practice of writing outcomes for every module and where it is done the affective outcomes are neglected. Although it is evident that the churches that send their members to study for becoming pastors are quite missional by nature, the researchers are of the opinion that not all the modules are written with a missional scope in mind. Often it is left to a discipline like missiology to address the need for a missional approach.

There is a genuine desire and attempt at all the NetACT institutions to be contextual within the sub-Saharan African environment. The problem is that it is often left to the initiative of the lecturers in the classrooms to contextualise the material. More serious attempts should be made to make use of already contextualised material. It is startling to observe that obvious things like children and youth as well as poverty, are not by far getting the attention it deserves in the curricula.

Taking into account that in many countries where NetACT institutions are located, the parrot system of teaching was followed, it is rewarding to see the level of abstract thinking of some of the senior students at the majority of institutions. A lot more can be done to stimulate higher thinking skills by making use of more comprehension type of questions in the classes and in the tests and exams. The researchers are of the opinion that Bloom's taxonomy, as also taught at the different curriculum development (CD) workshops, when used effectively, can make a positive contribution in the development of more analytical thinking.

6. THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE CD WORKSHOPS

Evidence of the positive impact of the workshop was, inter alia, given by Rev. Henry Murray the Principal of Murray Theological College at Morgenster in Zimbabwe. At the NetACT Curriculum Development Workshop on the ABC campus in Lilongwe, Malawi on the 14th January 2011 in a report with the title: *The changes that the NetACT curriculum workshop brought to Murray Theological College (MThC)*, he elaborated on the drastic changes that took place at their institution in a short period of time after the CDW. An Academic Committee was formed and an Academic Dean appointed, job descriptions for the Principal, vice-Principal and Academic Dean came in place, as well as for administrative staff. A credit system and coding of subjects was invented. An assessment system for lecturers as well as for students was launched. A professional Study Guide and Prospectus was published. The Academic Committee is evaluating now the contents of each subject on an ongoing basis and committees were formed for each aspect of curriculum.

In his conclusion statement Murray appealed to the other NetACT institutions:

Go for it! CD will change and improve your institution. Be willing to change and be changed. It will take much time and energy, you will have to adapt, but you will grow. CD is like conversion; not a once-off but a continuous process.

Although the empirical study was done amongst ten theological institutions linked to the NetACT, the researchers are of the opinion that the findings should be applicable to many church owned theological schools in sub-Saharan Africa. Curriculum development is indeed a challenge all over our continent.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations need to be considered by NetAct and theological schools: It is recommended that:

1. curricula are developed and written from a value-missional-contextual approach;
2. use is made of Bloom's taxonomy in order to enhance the development of higher thinking skills in their students
3. internal Quality Control committees are formed and established;
4. accreditation with their Educational Departments, as well as with other organisations like ACTEA is sought and to use ACTEA's self-evaluation guide in the process;
5. regular workshops on curriculum development is held;
6. lecturers are motivated to do quality research through "Communities of Practice." and that Wenger's (2000: 230-232) social theory of learning in 'communities of practice' is consulted in this regard. A research community could be a research team or a group of colleagues who work together within a research unit or it can be a group of researchers from different institutions and different countries.
7. Institutes of Christian Higher Education are established within current theological training institutions as it can have a positive impact on the society as a whole and help the institution to be financially more independent.

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KEY WORDS

NetACT

ACTEA

curriculum development workshops

curriculum framework

worldview and values

missional approach

contextualization

traditional, progressive and constructivist orientations

educational principles

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