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ARE WE PRODUCING QUALITY TEACHERS? VIEWS OF GRADUATES ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN TEACHERS' COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out the views of graduates on the effectiveness of the teacher training programme in producing quality teachers in Zimbabwe. The multiple case study design was used and five teacher colleges participated in this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants included graduates from Teachers' Colleges and lecturers. Data were generated through focus group discussions for student teachers and interviews for lecturers. Data were analysed through interpretive study analysis. The study found out that lecturers had problems in covering syllabus content and there was a high student lecturer ratio. The study recommended that the. The study concluded that the teacher education programme had implementation challenges that needed to be addressed in the context of quality.

Keywords: Quality, Graduates, Effectiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

The teacher education programme in Zimbabwe produces diploma in education graduates and it is a four year training programme. The students are taught theory in the first six months of training, the student teachers are developed for one and half years of teaching practice. The final phase they exposed to more final theory and final examinations in the last six months. Within four years the teacher education programme is expected to produce quality teachers who are able to effectively teacher and ensure pupils learn. This research sought to find out the views of the graduates on the effectiveness of the teacher education programmes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher quality can be defined in terms of academic qualifications, academic knowledge pedagogical knowledge, classroom practices and teacher characteristics (Shulman, 1987, Darling –Hammond, 2000, Cockran-Smith, 2003).



Teacher quality is considered as a critical factor in educational quality and purposed achievement (Darling –Hammond, 2000), (Cockran-Smith 2003). Teacher quality is not easy to define since a number of variable come into play when you and define it. Ingvarson and Rowe (2007) conceptualised teacher quality in diverse ways. They focused on teacher knowledge of teaching.

Teacher qualification is a factor in determining teacher quality. A high quality teacher will possess either a certificate, diploma or degree. Different countries have different qualifications requirements for high quality teacher. The No Child Left behind NCLB (2001) law in the US specifies that a high quality teacher should have an undergraduate degree qualification. The major question raised by other scholars is does attainment of a qualification make one a high quality teacher? Other researchers have questioned the use of qualifications as a measure of quality majority of the researchers confirm that teacher qualifications is a key variable of teacher quality.

Teacher academic knowledge as an indicator of teacher quality. Shulman (1987) and Ingersoll (2003) found out that subject matter knowledge is positively correlatives for student achievement. Goldhaber and Brewer (1997) found out that students gained more from a teacher with subject content in mathematics than a teacher who is not a subject specialist. Academic content knowledge is a very important indicator of teacher quality.

Shulman (1987) identifies pedagogical knowledge as a critical element of teacher quality. A high quality teacher has the ability to present learning materials in such a way student learn and understand. Researchers in this area have been scarce because of the complexity of the teaching and learning processes. It is difficult to determine the contribution of various aspects of teaching knowledge such as psychology, sociology learning theories and it is difficult to isolate these or measure their impact on learning and teaching. Research however by Wilson et al., (2001) found that student taught by a certified teacher in mathematics scored higher in standardized tests than students taught by uncertified teachers.

Classroom actions are important indicators of teacher's quality. A research by Looney, (2005) found out those middle class teachers practices impacted positively to student achievement. Other researchers such as Cameron and Baker (2004) and Goe (2007) found teacher classroom practices as contributing positively to student achievement. Teacher characteristics are an indicator of teacher quality. Various indicators are used to determine teacher quality.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the views of student teacher on the quality of teacher education programme?
- What are the views of lectures on the quality of teacher training experienced by student teachers?
- How do lecturers rate the quality of candidates recruited by teacher training colleges?

4. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach was used to carryout this research. The multiple case study the teacher education programmes in five Teachers' Colleges which were the research sites.

4.1 Sampling Procedure

The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research found out that the candidates recruited for primary teacher training had passed ordinary level and others had passed 'A' level. An analysis of data on the passes attained by candidates at 'O' level, showed that candidates had



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low grades in Mathematics and English the common grade was “C” which were the compulsory subjects for entry into teacher training. The data showed that low performers in public examinations at high school level were being recruited to become teachers. Lecturers interviewed indicated that colleges were enrolling candidates with 5 ‘O’ level passes without considering the number of sittings or giving preference to candidates with ‘A’ level passes. In addition to ‘O’ level passes, candidates were accepted for training after passing a qualifying test or passing an oral interview organised by the college.

Some candidates were subjected to interviews and did not write the qualifying tests and these were candidates brought in by staff. Participants agreed that ordinary ‘O’ level passes were adequate and suitable for producing quality teachers while others preferred ‘A’ level as the minimum entry for production of quality teachers. Lecturers who participated in this study agreed that the quality of candidates currently recruited in the teaching profession were of low quality judging by their performance at ‘O’ level. The participant lecturers gave the following views about the quality of candidates recruited in teachers colleges that the teachers colleges were recruiting average performing candidates. One participant lecturer had this to say about the quality of candidates recruited into the teachers’ colleges.

‘ I cannot say they(candidates) are of very high quality because our basic requirement is five ‘O’ levels and how many times one sat for the ‘O’ levels is not an issue or how many certificates one has is not an issue or how you obtained them(O levels) over how long a period is not questioned at all. I think that compromises quality of candidates we take’

The quality of candidates was not high since we recruit candidates without considering how many sittings it is only five ordinary level passes. Colleges accept candidates who have passed the bridging course and they are not interviewed and this compromises quality. Generally the candidates are average since we do not attract high performers. Low since politicians impose candidates for training.

Teachers’ colleges were attracting low performing candidates while high performers were not attracted to the teaching profession. The quality of the candidates recruited impacted on the quality of the teachers produced by an institution. The findings of this study concur with McPherson’s findings (2002) who found teacher educations attracting low performing candidates from high schools in Australia. The study found Teachers’ Colleges in Zimbabwe having other routes for recruiting trainee teachers. These include candidates who are automatically accepted to train as teachers after passing the mathematics bridging course offered by the relevant college and candidates did not go through the interviews or write qualifying tests. The question of whether interviews were objective and reliable as way of selecting the best candidate was not interrogated and hence more research should be done in this area.

Participant graduates were asked questions in relation to their views on the quality of training they experienced during their training. Asked on how they rated the quality of subject matter the college equipped them with they considered it to be inadequate but of low quality. The reasons cited were that they did not get in-depth content in most areas related or relevant to the primary school curriculum except the content received in main subject area. Other graduates however considered the content to be very high because they were doing challenging work and they considered their lecturers to be highly qualified. The results show that the graduates gave conflicting views on the quality content the college taught the students.



Participant graduates were asked to give their views as the quality of pedagogical knowledge they received during training. Participant graduates rated the quality of pedagogical knowledge to be very high. They believed they were equipped with pedagogical theory. These included child psychology, human development theories, classroom management skills, managing children with special needs, teaching from the known to the unknown, and a variety of teaching methods which are child-centred. Data revealed that during training, however, lecturers tended to use the lecture method with little demonstration of student-centred methods; hence students had nothing to copy from the lecturers in terms of lesson child centred teaching methods.

Participant graduates viewed teaching practice to be of high quality. Graduates gave a different view concerning the quality of teaching practice since they considered it to be of high quality while others considered it to be of low quality. Graduates who considered teaching practice to be of high quality indicated that they had been equipped with adequate theory related to teaching, use of media and how to ensure children actively participated in the learning process. Graduates also indicated that teaching practice provided opportunities of applying the theories learnt in college and as well as build the confidence of the student to teach children without fear.

On the other hand some graduates rated teaching practice to be low quality citing the following reasons. The student teachers were not able to scheme and plan at the start of the teaching practice period. They did not have the basic theory to understand things they were doing in class only to be exposed to the theory in the final semester in college. Some graduates did not find teaching practice beneficial because their mentors were ineffective and did not provide opportunities for students to implement what they had learnt in college. Participant graduates rated the quality of teaching practice assessment to be low quality because of lack of standardisation or subjective assessment by the college lecturers who gave conflicting comments. School heads rarely assessed student teachers on teaching practice and where supervision was done it was superficial with the mentor or deputy head or head filling in the supervision form without lesson observation or scrutiny of record books.

6. DISCUSSION

Candidates joining the teaching profession in Teachers 'Colleges had 'O' Level certificates for entry into the programme. The teachers' colleges attracted candidates who were average performers in high school. The criteria used to select candidates for teacher training were oral interviews, writing of qualifying tests and those who were accepted because they studied "O" level supplementary Mathematics and English with the colleges and other candidates were brought in by government officials but did not go through the interviews or write the qualifying tests. However, there is lack of substantive research to show that those who pass the interviews perform better than those who do not during teacher training. The same goes for the qualifying tests which are not standardised. The recommended students and those who pass the bridging course are not subjected to the entry tests or oral interviews. These are potential low performing candidates who cannot make it through the rigorous process of interviews writing of tests. Lecturers were not trained in the area of conducting interviews to select teacher trainees. It is not clear if the interviews were an effective way of selecting candidates or writing of test as a way of ensuring selection of high quality entrants. This research found out that the quality of candidates entering teacher training were rated to be average by lecturers. An analysis of the ordinary level certificates shows that the majority of the candidates had passed with "C" grade in Mathematics and English.

Quality of the teacher education graduates was compromised by the quality of external assessment. The research found that inexperienced lecturers and not experienced in primary teaching yet they were assigned to assess subject areas they were not conversant with. College's lecturers were concerned with the criteria used to select external assessors. External assessors tended to give conflicting comments from year to year creating mistrust between external and internal. Criteria for selecting external assessors were not transparent.



7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following

- High performing candidates in high school should be recruited for teacher training these are candidates with advanced level passes
- Student teachers should be equipped with more content knowledge during teacher training
- Lecturers in Teachers' Colleges should adopt use of student-centred teaching methods to improve the quality of delivery.
- Lecturers in teachers' colleges need special training in assessment of teaching practice
- There is need for capacity building of mentors to improve their effectiveness

8. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the teacher education institutions were producing low quality teachers. Quality of graduates was negatively affected by the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of external assessment and the quality of candidates recruited into the teaching profession. The system of teacher preparation needs to be reviewed in the context of quality. The graduates highlighted inability to effectively scheme and plan during the first period of teaching practice reflected the ineffectiveness of micro-teaching hence the student teacher relied on the expertise of mentors. The study also found that the mentors were not trained or motivated to assist the student teachers. Lecturers did not effectively supervise teaching practice and the curriculum was overloaded and students could not cope.

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