



TEACHER EDUCATION DEADWOOD NOT CONSIDERED A HINDRANCE: REALITIES, A CASE OF 'HALF BAKED' PRIMARY TEACHERS

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Abstract:

Development initiatives affirm the critical importance of teacher education and the role played by well-trained reflective teachers. However certain aspects of effective teacher education are not closely aligned to the subjects offered in the primary curriculum. Today teacher education should adequately prepare trainee teachers for the exact subject content they will teach in schools. Currently there are challenges in preparing teachers toward subjects' specialisation. In making such observations qualitative research approaches were applied, mainly analysis of textual documentary sources of literature through constant comparison, note taking and coding data into themes, headings and subheadings. Research findings indicated that, all primary trainee school teachers in the 2.5. 2. programme specialise on a single major throughout their training, yet during teaching practice and after training they will be required to teach four-twelve subjects. This study concluded that, the current Zimbabwe teacher training programme is not adequately training primary teachers to be competent skilful teachers on all subjects offered in the primary school curriculum. Therefore there is a need to revisit the above concern. In alignment to the conclusion, this study recommends all primary teacher trainees to specialise in four major subject areas instead of specialising on a single major as currently prevailing.

Keywords: teacher education; deadwood; primary teachers

1. Introduction

All sustainable development change initiatives affirm the consequential relativity of teacher education and the critical role contributed by competent and well-trained-reflective teachers. Even though, the role of a teacher to national development is

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unquestionable, teachers are not an end to a sustainable education system. Several factors have been identified as influencing sustainable education such as good planning and management of education policies, socio-political-economic factors, pupil-teacher ratio, class-size, infrastructure, access to schooling and teacher quality (Nkabinde, 1997; Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg, 2005; Geoff, 2009; Petty, 2009). Of afore mentioned attributes teacher quality in this study is seen as the most highly correlated to sustainable education and national development. Based on the opinion that, innovative, skilful and competent teaching is consequential to critical thinking, good reasoning, literacy in its broad application and creative thinking (Korthagen, Loughran and Russell, 2006; Dymoke and Harrison, 2008; Johnson and Beinart, 2010; Sefa Dei, 2010; UNESCO, 2015) which are essentials and pillars for sustainable development. Therefore, if sustainable education goals are to be adequately met, one cannot overlook the relevance of training teachers as conduits and pinions of sustainable living.

Significance of teacher education based on production of teachers for sustainable development and living view is shared by many education researchers including (Loucks-Horsley and Matsumoto, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999; O'Donoghue and Cusack, 2008; De Raaf et al., 2016) even though in some developing countries like Zimbabwe teacher education is under estimated and inadequately funded. These scholars further noted that, teacher expertise is one of the most important factors in any sustainable development initiatives. Other contemporary researchers also concur that, virtuous teaching does matter (Darling-Hammond and LePage, 2005; Avalos, 2011; Burkill and Eaton, 2011; Makoelle, 2016). This study agree no less, in addition to the above views, it focus on how teacher education in Zimbabwe could be improved to fulfil its theoretical and practical expectations, what teachers should learn and be able to do, given current general criticism of not considering recruiting 'deadwood' a hindrance of prospectus teachers resulting in teacher training institutes producing 'half-baked' dunces.

Even though teacher education's relevance is not disputed, certain aspects of effective teacher education may not be considered by all offering teacher education. Hence progressivistic criticism and demands for improvement in preparing teachers in teacher education for a changing world (Johnson and Beinart, 2010). Criticisms are opinionated by an argument that thinks African schooling will not develop and be effective to meet current African developmental needs unless African teachers and teacher education curricula change its educational perceptions, strategies and pedagogical approaches that could be a solution to current and future African needs. Therefore, teacher education in Zimbabwe or Africa per say requires a paradigm shift to incorporate 21st century and beyond sustainable epistemologies, axiologies, and ideologies supported by a vision of seeing education as a path to learning to do, life-long learning and sustainable living. Furthermore, since most African countries no longer have acute teacher shortages there is now a growing recognition for training teachers and teacher professional development to see an integrated relation in all subjects offered in an education system and be prepared adequately to be able to teach those subjects expected to be taught with expertise. The above teacher education quality

considerations are argued not to be currently prevailing in the Zimbabwe 2.5.2 (2 terms in College learning theories of education, 5 terms of teaching practice and 2 terms completing theories of education) teacher education programme.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is in agreement with the following scholars' perceptions (Parrot, 1992; Ghaye, 2011; Vargas, 2013) who see teacher education and teaching as a scientific process that marks the most perfect and intimate union of science and art conceivable in human experience. They go further summarising that teacher education and teaching should be characterised mainly by five actions "*Informed action-why teach? Committed action-what is to be achieved or expected to be achieved? Intentional action-being clear about the purpose of teaching or being a teacher, Sustainable action-how to be competent and up-to-date with teaching or teacher education demands and Positive action-acting to serve, strengthen, build resilience and enhance human flourishing*". These actions I think should be complemented by reflective axiologies such as, values of how to act, expectations on what ought to be done, context of what is actually possible to achieve, decisions to justify actions taken, options on doing things better, innovatively or differently, judgement of how to be successful in teaching, strength of self-criticism and accepting external-criticism for future utility, curiosity to find out who has learnt what? And above all knowledge of what and how to do what ought to be done. True in theory but most often not practiced.

Considering the above characteristics and axiologies that ought to guide effective teacher education and skilful teaching, teacher education should be transgressive underpinned by a perspective that sees teacher training as having potential to bring wanted development and changes within any given education system, shaping and promoting wanted knowledge and skills of current or future generations. To this end teacher education institutions are expected to serve as key change initiators and agents in transforming society by producing a teacher equal to contemporary demands and politics. It is therefore, vital that during training student teachers should be given time and opportunity to reflect on what the teacher's task and responsibilities are? Hence there is a strong need to provide sufficient professional, academic and pedagogical motivation and cultivation for trainee teachers. This could make them open-minded about what is expected of them and also be well-versed with diverse subject areas taught in the curricula of the level they will teach. This study seeks to also question the adequacy of preparing primary trainee teachers' capabilities, to be versatile and teach effectively.

3. Discussion

3.1 The Concept of Teacher Education

The assumption behind wanting to have trained teachers manning schools is based on the thinking that, trained teachers are more effective than untrained teachers or the

thought that one can become a better self after some duration of certain training. In other words trained teachers are assumable fully 'baked' while untrained teachers are 'half-baked or raw' so to say. But there are some circumstances where some people could pass through a teacher training facility only to come out 'half-baked'. There is also a complimentary assumption to the one above that argues that, teacher training institutions do carry out their expected responsibilities of training teachers but face diverse challenges in producing an effective, competent and innovative teacher who is versatile and capable of teaching those subjects they would be expected to teach.

In other words the primary purpose of professional teacher training is to produce a teacher who possess those specialised techniques, skills and dispositions that will facilitate effective learning in any given educational scenario (Koster et al., 2005; Luttenberg and Bergen, 2008 Struyven and De Meyst, 2010). Primary teacher education's responsibilities are to produce a multi-literate practitioner who can teach all the subjects related to his/her specialisation. Also to produce academically motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom expert who understands and appreciates the integratedness of the curriculum at all levels of learning, encourage and inculcate further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in the trainee teacher. Assumedly, if teacher education focuses on the above and more, education can be an innovative and effective national development catalyst through acknowledging the pivotal role of innovative teaching in sustainable development and the importance of quality teaching in achieving diverse national developmental needs including both character and technological design, invention education.

The above assumptions are correct in theory however, not yet practically achieved in the current Zimbabwe teacher education. A contemporary teacher both in theory and practice should be trained to be a critical, reflective classroom practitioner literate in embracing and adopting educational changes, considerate to curricular reforms and even initiate reforms. Teacher education must identify and teach specific behaviours that demonstrate superior teaching performance and a training programme must enable trainee students to gain the competencies and intelligences needed for successful teaching. Considering what effective teacher education is all about, the current Zimbabwe teacher education may require innovation and a change in focus.

4. Findings

4.1 Challenges in Teacher Education

Considering what has been discussed and from observations one immediate challenge that confronts teacher education in Zimbabwe to achieve resoundingly the above mentioned expectations, perhaps the whole of Africa, is lack of adequate planning and funding of the future and deliberate planning for change. Teacher education in Zimbabwe since independence has remained almost the same in terms of focusing on an increased emphasis of producing a teacher literate in theories of education, use of technology based media and majoring in one or two subjects, at a time when it has to focus on producing a critical-and-reflective teacher, inquiry-oriented, expert decision

maker and higher-order-self-reflective person capable of contextualising theories of education to African contemporary situations. The current Zimbabwe teacher education is not radical enough to produce a teacher who understands how technologies are invented but focuses on teaching teachers how technologies are used in teaching. Teacher education should currently aim at producing a teacher who is holistic, multi-literate, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and a teacher who is well versed and appreciative of researched and evidence based knowledge creation. The current primary teacher produced is seem not to be well versed and trained to teach effectively all the subjects found in the primary curriculum.

In addition to the above mentioned challenges the 2.5.2 primary teacher training education does not require a primary student teacher to major in four compulsory subjects (Science, Mathematics, English and Vernacular) that form the core of the current primary education system curricular, yet on teaching practice and after training there are expected to teach them and other additional subjects with expertise. In other words teacher education to be adequate and relevant should train teachers exactly what they are likely, if not more than what they will meet when completing training. Zimbabwe primary teacher trainees are academically not prepared to effect much needed teaching strategies that could contribute to national development. One could also argue that there is need for primary teaching and primary teacher education to focus on specialisation in order to have an expert teaching a subject of interest where they would have invested intellectual authority. Specialisation will also attract experts in their respective fields of study and have an opportunity to contribute their expertise, this in return could increase children's interest and will to learn. Specialisation in primary teaching could be seen as good for both the learner and national development, for specialisation could increase more experts being trained and deployed to execute their responsibilities. This radical shift in primary education may be effective however, it may bring challenges of funding and construction of supportive infrastructure.

There is also the challenge of dissatisfaction with the calibre of a teacher currently being produced by teacher education programmes. The dissatisfaction has been flamed by an observation that argues for teacher training institutions to set higher standards for entry into the profession, for relevant authorities to consider motivating both trainee teachers and qualified teachers by offering competitive remuneration. Of special interest to this study is the finding that, all these challenges were predictable and can be prevented or resolved.

Teacher education is faced by diverse qualitative and quantitative challenges, of much concern here is the discovery that current Zimbabwe teacher education is facing a challenge of how to set higher standard for entry into teacher training and produce high quality teachers. Teacher education is the only professional field in which 'deadwood' has never been considered a hindrance. To some extent that some people in the 1980s thought an ordinary level school leaver could be thrown into a classroom to become a teacher. As a result, it has unwittingly harboured enough uncommitted students who wrote ordinary level more than once to get five ordinary level subjects required for entry into a teacher training programme. These students sometimes seriously hamper

even the best designed teacher education programme. The fact that teacher training programmes survive and in fact expand is a perplexing but not totally unexplainable phenomenon. The future wife getting her job-security, people rejected in medicine, engineering and other strict professions, the undecided child and the relative ease of becoming a professional in this field all contribute to an unsustainable growth. Now that a surplus of teachers has been officially recognised nationwide, it is about time teacher education programmes focus on targeting production of quality instead of quantity.

4.2 Teacher Professional Development

Because of accepting 'deadwood' complimented by inadequate academic preparation of trainee teachers quality is compromised, teacher training programmes also end up producing dunces. The long-term consequences of these dunces are surely going to produce thousands upon thousands if not million more dunces in schools where they will teach, which becomes detrimental to national developmental aspirations. To avoid production of idiotic teachers, high quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education. Teacher education in Zimbabwe need to be a systematized effort to bring about change in the calibre of teachers produced in terms of the way teachers practice, in their attitudes and beliefs in learning. Teacher education should focus on outcomes of students driven or underpinned by their academic excellence and rigorous training.

5. Conclusion

Even though teacher education disorganisation is certainly one of the crucial challenges facing sustainable development and education reforms in Africa, it can be improved to bring about sustainable development and consequential education. There are two major challenges that hinder Zimbabwe teacher education to be a pinion of sustainable development and need immediate attention for teachers to be a contributive force for socio-political and economic development. Teacher education programmes to meet development expectations should require higher standards for entry into teacher training programmes to avoid enrolling 'deadwood'. Teacher education should also consider broadening the subjects of specialisation their graduates study to teach in schools. In some cases teachers do not study adequately for the subjects they will end up teaching after training. During training there is also a need for teacher training institutes to focus among other considerations cultivating a student who is idealistic in terms of appreciating the integrated nature of curriculum and capable of teaching all the subjects expected to teach. Despite the above mentioned challenges confronting teacher education, with determination and deliberate planning teacher education can still be salvaged from its apparent impending collapse. The poor quality of teachers produced can be mitigated or diluted to an insignificant level by advancing research on the complex process of teacher education and bring together a host of different elements

that have been adapted and used in developed countries or to come up with new dove-tailed teacher education programme for African circumstances.

6. Recommendations

- Teacher education should set higher entry standards;
- During training student teachers should specialise in the four major subjects which form the core of the current primary curricular (Mathematics, Science, English and Vernacular);
- Teacher education should introduce compulsory subjects like Technology and Design;
- There is need for a radical paradigm shift in primary teacher education in terms of what is taught and how long teacher qualification should take to suit contemporary needs.

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