

PHYSICS STUDENT TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS AND
PERFORMANCE IN BASIC ELECTRONICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
ZAMBIA

By

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the conceptions and performance of student teachers of physics in basic electronics. The objectives were to: determine the misconceptions student teachers of physics have about basic electronics as they finish their teacher training programme, determine the correlation between these misconceptions and performance of physics student teachers in basic electronics content, establish ways in which misconceptions affect physics student teachers' teaching of basic electronics in senior secondary schools and investigate the effect of the 'BE' Education resource on physics student teachers' misconceptions and performance in basic electronics when used as a supplement to traditional instruction.

A *mixed-methods approach* was employed to investigate the issues involved. Consequently, the *concurrent nested strategy* was used to mix qualitative and quantitative methods, with the latter methods being dominant and thus guiding the study. The basic correlation research design and the true experimental design of the type pre-test-post-test control group were used for data collection. Data were captured using: a questionnaire, test on basic electronics, observation schedule and a likert scale. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data were analysed using the constant comparative method.

The study revealed several misconceptions held by student teachers of physics in basic electronics, the common ones being that: Cathode rays are electromagnetic waves that travel at the speed of light (38%), Half Wave Rectification results in an output which is partly DC and partly AC (38%) and that a Capacitor discharges completely when it is disconnected from a circuit (33%). Secondly, the study revealed, a correlation of - 0.8 (significant at 0.01, $df = 58$, 2-tailed) between physics student teachers' misconceptions and their performance in basic electronics content. Thirdly, the study revealed that misconceptions negatively affected teaching by physics student teachers in terms of: formulation of lesson objectives, lesson introduction, lesson development, use of resources, use of questioning technique and other teaching strategies, attention to individual needs, summarizing of the work done, evaluation of the work done and giving of class notes. Lastly, the study revealed that the 'BE' Education resource (with the learner centred teaching approach imbedded in it), minimised the misconceptions held by student teachers of physics and simultaneously enhanced their academic performance on basic electronics. The findings implied that pedagogical strategies used by physics educators should help identify and minimise learner misconceptions in order to help steer the student teachers in a direction that will lead to academic growth.

From the results it was concluded that student teachers of physics in Zambia have several misconceptions about basic electronics which affect their ability to demonstrate high level understanding of this section of physics and to teach basic electronics at senior secondary school effectively. In view of these findings, the study recommended that:

- The Department of physics at UNZA should identify physics student teachers' misconceptions in Electronics at every level and take appropriate measures to alter or dislodge them.
- Physics education courses at UNZA should not only focus on pedagogical strategies but also relevant physics content to enhance physics student teachers' understanding of fundamental physics concepts.
- Further research should be done to investigate the effect of the 'BE' Education resource on performance of physics student teachers in basic electronics.

DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to my late father Mr. Jonas Kafimbwa and my late mother Janet Menso Kaulu, who together worked hard to make me what I am, though both did not live long enough to see the results of their efforts. It is further dedicated to my wife Maurine and my children: Byrne, Janet, Einstein and Paul, who were so patient and always encouraged me to work hard, regardless of any situation the family went through during the study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Copyright	
Declaration	
Certificate of Approval	
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 Background and context.....	1
1.1 Statement of the problem.....	5
1.2 Purpose of the study.....	6
1.3 Objectives of the study.....	6
1.4 Research questions.....	7
1.5 Null Hypotheses.....	7
1.6 Significance of the study.....	7
1.7 Definition of key terms.....	8
1.7 Structure of the Thesis.....	10
CHAPTER 2: THE ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND VALUE OF ELECTRONICS TO OUR SOCIETY.....	13
2.0 Introduction.....	13
2.1 The Origin and Development of Electronics.....	13
2.2 Advances in Electronics.....	17

2.3 Further Advances in Electronics (generations of silicon Integrated Circuits (SICs)).....	19
2.4 Two types of Electronics.....	22
2.5 The triumphs of Electronics in various sections of our society.....	29
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	32
3.0 Introduction.....	32
3.1 Kelly’s constructivism (commonly known as Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory).....	32
3.1 .1 The fundamental postulate of Kelly’s personal constructivism.....	34
3.1.2 Four corollaries emanating from Kelly’s fundamental postulate.....	34
3.1.3 Use of Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory in science learning.....	37
3.1.4 Criticisms of Kelly’s Personal Construct Psychology.....	38
3.2 Radical constructivism by David von Glasersfeld.....	40
3.2.1 The Theory.....	40
3.2.2 Application of Von Glasersfeld’s (radical) constructivism to classroom situation....	43
3.2.3 Criticisms of Glasersfeld’s radical constructivism.....	45
3.3 Important things emanating from Kelly’s constructivism and Glasersfeld’s Radical constructivism.....	49
3.4 Implications of the cognitive constructivist theory.....	51
3.5 Chapter Summary.....	52
CHAPTER 4: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	54
4.0 Introduction.....	54
4.1 What misconceptions do student teachers of physics have about basic electronics, as they finish their training?.....	54
4.1.1 Physics student teachers’ misconceptions about basic electronics.....	55
4.1.2 Physics student teachers misconceptions about Electricity.....	59
4.1.3 Physics student teachers’ misconceptions about Waves, Sound and Light.....	61
4.1.4 Physics student teachers’ misconceptions about other areas of ordinary level physics which apply to basic electronics.....	64

4.2 What is the correlation between such misconceptions and performance of physics student teachers in basic electronics content?.....	69
4.3 How do these misconceptions affect the teaching of basic electronics by student teachers in senior secondary physics?.....	70
4.4 What effect does the ‘BE’ Education Resource and Teaching Approach have on physics student teachers’ misconceptions and performance in basic electronics?.....	71
4.5 Summary of literature reviewed.....	73
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	75
5.0 Introduction.....	75
5.1 Description of the Research Design.....	75
5.2 The Basic Correlation Research Design.....	81
5.3 The True Experimental Design of the type Pretest-Posttest Control Group.....	83
5.3.1 Internal validity of quantitative research.....	84
5.3.2 External validity of quantitative research.....	89
5.4 Study area.....	93
5.5 Study population.....	93
5.6 Sample size.....	94
5.7 Sampling procedure.....	95
5.8 Instruments used for data collection.....	96
5.9 Validity and Reliability of the instruments used in the study.....	96
5.9.1 Validity of instruments used in the study.....	96
5.9.2 Reliability of the instruments used in the study,.....	97
5.10 Validity and Reliability of qualitative research.....	98
5.10.1 Internal validity of qualitative research.....	98
5.10.2 External validity of qualitative research.....	99
5.10.3 Reliability of qualitative research.....	99
5.11 Validity of findings.....	100
5.12 Data collection.....	101
5.12.1 Negotiating access to research sites.....	101
5.12.2 The Pilot Study.....	101

5.12.3 Procedure for data collection.....	102
5.13 Data analysis.....	103
5.13.1 Analysis of quantitative data.....	103
5.13.2 Analysis of qualitative data.....	106
5.14 Limitations of the study.....	108
5.15 Delimitation of the study.....	109
5.16 Reflection on ethical issues.....	109
5.17 Chapter summary.....	110

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS ON THE MISCONCEPTIONS HELD BY PHYSICS

STUDENT TEACHERS..... 111

6.0 Introduction.....	111
6.1 Misconceptions held by physics student teachers in Basic Electronics.....	111
6.2 Chapter summary.....	124

CHAPTER 7 : FINDINGS ON THE CORRELATION BETWEEN PHYSICS

STUDENT TEACHERS' MISCONCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

IN BASIC ELECTRONICS CONTENT.....125

7.0 Introduction.....	125
7.1 Correlation of the experimental group before the treatment.....	125
7.2 Correlation of the experimental group after the treatment... ..	128
7.3 Correlation of the control group before the treatment.....	130
7.4 Correlation of the control group after the treatment.....	133
7.5 Correlation of both groups before the treatment.....	136
7.6 Correlation of both groups after the treatment.....	137
7.7 Chapter summary.....	139

CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS ON STUDENT TEACHERS' TEACHING SKILLS.....

8.0 Introduction.....	141
8.1 Findings from Peer Teaching sessions before the 'Treatment'.....	141
8.2 Findings from Peer Teaching sessions after the 'Treatment'.....	148
8.3 Findings from the Experimental Group about the 'Treatment' they had (The 'BE' Education resource).....	155
8.4 Chapter summary.....	159

CHAPTER 9 : FINDINGS ON THE EFFECT OF MISCONCEPTIONS ON PERFORMANCE OF PHYSICS STUDENT TEACHERS IN BASIC ELECTRONICS CONTENT.....

9.0 Introduction.....	160
9.1 Pretest misconceptions for both groups.....	160
9.2 Posttest misconceptions for both groups.....	161
9.3 Pretest scores for both groups.....	161
9.4 Posttest scores for both groups.....	163
9.6 Chapter summary.....	166

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....

10.0 Introduction.....	167
10.1 Discussion of findings concerning physics student teachers' misconceptions in basic electronics.....	167
10.1.1 Thermionic emission is loss of heat by materials.....	167
10.1.2 Cathode rays are electromagnetic waves that travel at the speed of light.....	169
10.1.3 Conventional current has no specific direction.....	170
10.1.4 Applications of cathode rays are similar to those of electromagnetic waves i.e. X-rays.....	172
10.1.5 X and Y plates of a cathode ray oscilloscope is a single pair.....	173

10.1.6 In a Cathode Ray Oscilloscope, the heater produces light, which is deflected by X and Y plates.....	173
10.1.7 Intergrated circuits, amplifiers, logic gates and transformers are some of the basic components in electronics.	175
10.1.8 All band values must be added to find resistance of band resistors.....	175
10.1.9 A potentiometer acts as an ammeter, detects resistance and measures resistivity of wire.....	177
10.1.10 Half Wave Rectification produces an output which is partly DC and partly AC. Full Wave Rectification produces an output which is completely DC.....	177
10.1.11 A Thermistor changes heat energy to electrical energy and also detects temperature.....	179
10.1.12 Light Dependent Resistor (LDR) depends on light to measure resistance.....	179
10.1.13Capacitor discharges whenever it is disconnected from a power supply/circuit....	180
10.1.14 A reed switch operates on the principle of induced current and regulates voltage.....	181
10.1.15 A reed relay uses temperature changes to control current.....	181
10.1.16 Bipolar transistor is made up of two transistors: When one is on, the other is off; so it acts as a switch.....	182
10.1.17 Bipolar transistor is made up of two transistors; This enables it to amplify.....	182
10.1.18 In all cases NAND outputs are opposite to NOR outputs.....	183
10.1.19 Astable circuit has one stable state.....	184
10.1.20 Computer hardware as wares that are external while computer software are wares that are stored in the computer.....	184
10.1.21 Summary of Section 10.1.....	185
10.2 Discussion of findings in Chapter 7, concerning the correlation between physics student teachers' misconceptions and performance in basic electronics content....	185

10.2.1 Discussion of findings from the Experimental Group.....	186
10.2.2 Discussion of findings from the control group.....	187
10.2.3 Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation for pre- and post-test scores.....	188
10.3 Discussion of findings in Chapter 8 about physics student teachers’ teaching skills in basic electronics.....	189
10.3.1 Discussion of findings from peer teaching sessions for participants in the experimental and control groups before the treatment.....	189
10.3.2 Discussion of findings from peer teaching sessions for participants in the experimental and control groups after the treatment.....	193
10.3.3 Discussion of findings from the attitude (Likert) scale.....	195
10.4 Discussion of findings in chapter 9 about the effect of the ‘ BE’ Education resource on misconceptions and performance of physics student teachers in basic electronics.....	198
10.5 Theoretical implications of the current study.....	199
10.6 Implications of the current study for practice.....	201
10. 7 Chapter Summary.....	201
CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	203
11.0 Introduction.....	203
11.1 Conclusions.....	203
11.2 Recommendations.....	204
11.3 Recommendations for further research.....	206
REFERENCES.....	206

LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A. QUESTIONNAIRE ON BASIC ELECTRONICS.....	230
B. TEST ON BASIC ELECTRONICS.....	238
C. OBSERVATION SCHEDULE.....	247
D. ATTITUDE SCALE.....	252
E. RESULTS FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS.....	255
F. CONSENT FORM.....	301
F. PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE EDUCATION.....	303

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
5.2.1 Scores obtained by participants in the Experimental and Control Groups in basic electronics content.....	81
5.2.2 Scores obtained by participants in the Experimental and Control Groups in the teaching of basic electronics.....	82
6.1.1 Summary of physics student teachers' misconceptions as revealed by the study.....	120
7.1.1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for pre-test scores, for Experimental Group.....	127
7.2.1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for post-test scores for Experimental Group.....	129
7.3.1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for pre-test scores for Control group.....	132
7.4.1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for post-test scores for Control Group.....	135
7.5.1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for pre-test scores for both groups.....	136
7.6.1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for post-test scores for both groups.....	138
7.7 Summary of coefficients.....	140
8.1.1 Findings from peer-teaching sessions for participants in the Experimental and Control Groups before the treatment.....	141
8.1.2 Summary of total scores per 'Lesson Element' for each group before treatment.....	145
8.1.3 Cross tabulations.....	146
8.1.4 T-test for pre-test scores in teaching basic electronics.....	147
8.2.1 Findings from peer-teaching sessions for participants in the experimental and control groups after the treatment.....	149
8.2.2 Summary of total scores per 'Lesson Element' for each group after the Treatment.....	152
8.2.3 Descriptive statistics.....	153
8.2.4 T-Test on the post-test scores of the two samples.....	154
8.3.1 Responses from participants in the Experimental Group about the treatment (lessons in basic electronics).....	155

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
2.1 Maltese cross tube.....	14
2.2 Crooke’s tube.....	14
2.3 The Fleming valve.....	15
2.4 Lee Deforest Triode.....	15
2.6 Silicon integrated circuit.....	20
2.7 An alternating waveform.....	24
2.8. An amplitude modulated signal.....	24
2.9. A simple diode detector circuit.....	25
5.1 Concurrent Nested Mixed Methods Strategy with Quantitative Methods Dominant....	79
6.1.1 Number of times a misconception appeared Vs Topic Number.....	123
7.1.1 Pre-test misconceptions Vs Pretest scores for Experimental Group.....	126
7.1.2 Correlation for Pre-test Results for the experimental group.....	126
7.2.1 Post-test misconceptions Vs Post-test scores for Experimental Group.....	128
7.2.2 Correlation of Post-test Results for the experimental group.....	129
7.3.1 Pre-test misconceptions Vs Pre-test scores for Control Group.....	131
7.3.2 Correlation of Pre-test results for the control group.....	132
7.4.1 Post-test misconceptions Vs Post-test scores for Control group.....	134
7.4.2 Correlation of Post-test results of the control group.....	134
7.5.1 Correlation of Pre-test results for both groups.....	136
7.6.1 Correlation for Post-test results for both groups.....	138
7.7.1 Summary of coefficients.....	140
8.1.1 Score by Experimental Group Vs score by Control Group in teaching basic electronics before treatment.....	148
8.2.1 Score by Experimental Group Vs score by Control Group in teaching basic electronics after the treatment.....	153
8.3.1 Participant responses Vs statement number.....	158
9.1.1 Pre-test misconceptions for Experimental and Control groups.....	160
9.2.1 Post test misconceptions for Experimental and Control groups.....	161

9.3.1	Pre-test scores for Experimental and Control groups.....	162
9.4.1	Post test scores for Experimental and Control groups.....	164
9.4.2	Line graphs of post-test scores for Experimental and Control groups.....	164

ACRONYMS

PCP	Personal Construct Psychology
CDC.....	Curriculum Development Centre
ECZ.....	Examinations Council of Zambia
MSE.....	Mathematics and Science Education
TER.....	Traditional education resource
TI.....	Traditional instruction
BE.....	Basic Electronics
STE.....	School Teaching Experience