

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA: QUALITY CURRICULUM DESIGNING AS A MISSING LINK IN EXPLAINING TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

Although pedagogical content knowledge for teaching is widely acknowledged as a central component of what teachers need to acquire, the designing of teacher education curriculum in colleges of education and universities seems to ignore the fact that prospective teachers need to master the relevant subject matter knowledge and skills in order for effective teaching to take place. This paper is based on a study which examined the English Language Teacher Education curriculum of a Zambian institute of higher learning whose curriculum was designed with little consideration of the relevant knowledge and skills that were necessary for teaching in secondary school. The study endeavoured to find out what happens to the products of a professional curriculum such as that of teacher education when it is developed without clearly identifying the relevant teaching skills for inclusion in the curriculum. Using data from interviews of ten lecturers and questionnaires that were administered to final year student teachers enrolled on an English Language Teacher Education programme, in this paper the researcher explains the importance of bearing in mind the teaching competences of a teacher at the beginning of teacher education curriculum designing process. The main findings from this mixed method study indicated that student teachers were not being fully prepared for their future job of teaching English language because they had not acquired relevant teaching skills since the teacher education curriculum that they followed did not expose them to the skills and knowledge found in the secondary school syllabus that they had to teach upon graduation.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, Curriculum Designing, Pedagogical Content Knowledge*

Introduction

It is acknowledged by most education scholars that teachers are one of the most critical resources in the provision of any formal education anywhere in the world. They play a very important role in the facilitation of the learners' acquisition of the desirable knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Teacher quality is, therefore, crucial and has been globally accepted to be significantly important in order for effective learning to take place in schools (Luangala and Mulenga, 2015). However, it should be acknowledged here that teacher quality is greatly determined by the teacher education regimen that a prospective teacher goes through. There is ample empirical research evidence suggesting that, if anything is to be regarded as a specific preparation for teaching, priority should be given to a thorough grounding of the student teacher in the knowledge and skills in teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goodlad, 1990; Goh, 2011). Thus, central to any discussion of teacher preparation is a judgement about what content knowledge and skills in teaching teachers should possess so that they are able to teach effectively. After all, if teaching entails helping others to learn, then the teacher's own understanding of the knowledge and skills to teach is a vital requirement in teaching.

Although there may be exceptions, Shulman (1986) reported that the overwhelming majority of courses for teachers and teacher education courses in general tend to have little bearing on the day-to-day realities of teaching and thus little effect on the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, teacher education curriculum designing in most colleges and universities which provide teacher education in America and Europe have been routinely criticized [as reported by scholars such as: Ball and Forzani (2009); Hammerness and Shulman (2005) and Hammerness (2006) and Lampert (2001)] for preparing

teachers based on courses that are unrelated to what is taught in classrooms. Furthermore, Pandey (2009) reported that a major problem facing teacher education programmes in India was the unrelatedness of what was taught at the colleges of education and classroom realities of schools. This divorce between the classroom realities a teacher has to face upon graduation and the teacher education programmes he/she has been exposed to was also expressed as a concern in the World Bank Report (1997). Additionally, Similar concerns were reported by the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER), which was conducted over a four year period in Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago, that initial teacher education curriculum knowledge and skills were linked quite loosely to the content in the school syllabus. (Lewin and Stuart, 2003).

Similar concerns about the quality of teachers graduating from colleges and universities in Zambia have been expressed in educational research in the recent past. Banja (2012 a & b), Chabatama (2012), Manchishi and Masaiti (2011) and Manchishi (2004), have seriously questioned the quality of the products of the Teacher Education curriculum in terms of the knowledge and skills that they possess for teaching. Although these researchers have questioned the quality of teacher education graduates, and also bearing in mind that there are so many factors to consider when referring to the quality of a teacher education programme and its products, this paper reports on a study that focused on pedagogical content knowledge of a particular teacher education institution in one teaching subject. It is thus vital from the onset of this paper to have a clear understanding of teaching education.

1. The Concept of Teacher Education

From the outset, we need to have a clear and commonly shared understanding as to what is meant by teacher education. Darling-Hammond (2005:1), an accomplished scholar of teacher education, started her chapter one of one of her famous books on teacher education, 'Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do', with this analogue;

To a music lover watching a concert from the audience, it would be easy to believe that a conductor has one of the easiest jobs in the world. There he stands, waving his arms in time with the music, and the orchestra produces glorious sounds, it all appearances quite spontaneously. Hidden from the audience especially from the musical novice, are the conductor's abilities to read and interpret all the parts at once, to play several instruments and understand the capacities of many more, to organize and coordinate the disparate parts, to motivate and communicate with all the orchestra members.

In the same way that conducting looks like hand-waving to the uninitiated, teaching looks simple from the perspective of students who see a person talking and listening, handing out papers and giving assignments. Invisible in both of these performances are the many kinds of knowledge, unseen plans and backstage moves that allow a teacher to purposefully move a group of learners from one set of understandings and skills to quite another over a space of time. All these competencies are a result of an effective teacher education curriculum that a successful teacher should undergo. Given what we know about curriculum designing and curriculum theories for teacher education, a question that may be asked is how we can create a teacher education curriculum that is effective in enabling teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills that will prepare them to succeed in teaching. In the study of teacher preparation, two terms seem to be used interchangeably. These are teacher education and teacher training. Let us look at each one in turn and explain how they inform the arguments in this paper.

2. The Zambian Education Policies on Teacher Education Curriculum Designing

The early years of the development of western education in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, had no proper and co-ordinated education programmes for teachers. Snelson (2012, 1974) and Mwanakatwe (2013, 1974) both acknowledge that teacher education, was a responsibility of different missionary societies, and was haphazardly done. Like the education standards of teachers, their professional training was also mediocre. There were no proper colleges of education mainly due to lack of funds among missionary societies, and partly due to their different doctrines and rivalries among themselves over spheres of influence and the latter made it difficult for them to put their limited resources together in order to establish proper colleges of education for their teachers (Snelson, 2012). Thus, as early as 1918, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) had expressed concern about the critical shortage of qualified teachers, and passed a legislation called the Native School Proclamation. It gave guidelines on the professional qualifications of teachers. It stated that:

No person shall be a teacher in any school unless duly qualified, and no person shall be deemed to be qualified unless he produces to the administrator such certificate of efficiency... as the administrator may by regulation prescribe (Snelson, 2012:130).

In 1921, another legislation was passed. It emphasized the need for well educated missionary teachers to be in charge of their schools at the mission stations. In the same year, missionaries agreed at the second General Missionary Conference to pull together various missionary resources to establish schools for the training of their teachers. At this conference, the part-time inspectors of schools, who had been appointed by the BSA Company, told the missionaries that “such schools would be invaluable since the greatest obstacle to progress was the absence of qualified teachers” (Snelson, 2012:130).

When the British Government took over the administration of the territory in 1924, there was an increased interest in the education of teachers. The 1925 Memorandum on Education Policy suggested, among other things, that initial education of teachers should be followed by refresher courses, and that there should be visiting teachers who could bring some new ideas, inspiration and encouragement to village teachers. When Latham was appointed as Director of Native Education in 1925, one of his priorities was to improve the education of teachers. He explained that:

The teacher must not only know the subjects which he has to teach, but he must be imbued with knowledge of teaching methods... Four years of boarding school under the required character forming influences after he has already mastered the mechanical business of reading and writing in the vernacular as the minimum of training required for turning out a teacher in anyway worthy of the name and little enough can be expected of this. It will, however, be a great advance on what prevails at present (Snelson, 1974:136).

Matching his words with action, Latham committed the few funds the government made available for African education towards the establishment and improvement of teacher education facilities in the territory. Since education for Africans was the responsibility of missionaries, the funds were to be given in the form of grant-in-aid to missionaries, whom he urged to stop the mushrooming bush schools so that they could redirect their resources to the programme of educating their teachers in an efficient manner. Needless to say, all these efforts were being directed towards the improvement of primary school teacher education.

Consequently, by the eve of independence, the academic and professional qualifications of African teachers in primary schools had slightly improved although African schools had a lot of untrained teachers. Secondary school teacher education, on the other hand, was very much neglected in the years before independence (Kalimaposi, 2010). In all the details that most scholars such as Mwanakatwe (2013, 1974), Snelson (2012, 1974), Kelly (1999), Carmody (1999; 2004), Kalimaposi (2010) and Manchishi (2013) give regarding teacher education from the times of early missionaries to independence, of paramount importance to this study was the fact that after independence there was a great need for the education of teachers for secondary education. If that was the case it would then be interesting to review the guidelines

that the education policies had been giving regarding teacher education curriculum designing since political independence in 1964 to date.

At the time that this paper was being written, Zambia has had three major educational policy documents since independence, and these are; the *Educational Reforms in 1977*, *Focus on Learning in 1992* and *Educating our Future in 1996*. These three documents have tried to give guidelines to the development of education in Zambia. Let us look at each one of them in terms of the guidelines for the designing of the teacher education curriculum.

2.1. The 1977 Educational Reforms

The 1977 Educational Reforms policy was as a result of the review of the whole education system, which was necessitated by a strong feeling for change in the education system among Zambians who felt that the education system then was too academic and not practical enough to meet the country's challenges. Therefore, between 1975 and 1977 it was decided that a national review of the whole education system be conducted. On teacher education curriculum designing the 1977 Reforms stated that:

The curriculum should concentrate on enabling trainee teachers to understand the objectives of the school curricula and the underlying principle of learning in the choice and use of teaching materials (MoE, 1977:67)

The Reforms, according to the quotation above, recognised the fact that the teacher education curriculum should be aligned to the school curriculum for which the teacher is being prepared. Earlier the Reforms had specifically referred to the teacher's competencies by stipulating that:

The teacher should communicate knowledge in a manner that helps children and young people to develop both the desire and ability to learn. The teacher should, therefore, have good command of the subjects he teaches and be resourceful in translating his knowledge into effective learning experiences for his/her students (MoE, 1977:61)

What the Reforms were referring to could only be possible if the teacher had acquired the right knowledge and skills for the job of teaching in schools. Thus, it was clear in the minds of those who were behind these reforms that in order to have a well prepared teacher, there was a need for designing a curriculum which was relevant to what was in schools. In this context, the reforms defined the teacher's role by saying:

The teacher cannot play his various roles successfully from a position of mediocrity. Good teaching demands the teacher to possess correct attitude and adequate knowledge of the subjects he teaches keep abreast with developments in those subjects and in the objectives and methods of teaching (MoE, 1977:61)

Thus of relevance to this paper is the fact that, as early as 1977, the education system in Zambia had it clear through the Educational Reforms of 1977 that teacher education curriculum should produce a teacher who is well prepared in the subject matter and in the methods of teaching in relation to what was relevant for schools. Fifteen years later, another educational policy called *Focus on Learning* was drafted resulting from the influences of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand.

2.2. Focus on Learning: Strategies for the Development of School Education in Zambia

As a follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All, at which Zambia participated, a national conference on 'Education for All' was convened in 1991. This conference culminated into the second major educational policy document, *Focus on Learning: Strategies for the Development of School Education in Zambia*, which replaced the 1977 Reform. While the 1977 Reforms were broad in the coverage of the

education system, to the contrary, *Focus on Learning* took a narrow approach by stressing only one sub-sector, primary education. This was in line with the Jomtien , World Conference on Education for All which explained that completion of the primary education would help in alleviating poverty, ignorance and in promoting economic and social development. No wonder Focus on Learning was mostly very critical of Teacher Education for the primary education curriculum while for secondary education it only described the challenges of supply and retention of teachers. However, a closer look into the document reveals that the policy, Focus on Learning, gave some general guidelines about the expected quality of teachers graduating from colleges and universities. It stated that:

The quality of Zambia's schools reflected the quality of the teachers manning these schools, while the quality of the teachers reflects the effectiveness of the institutions that train them. The focus of concern in an effective teacher education institution is on transforming its students into competent and committed teachers. The programme for teacher education, therefore, must be kept under constant review to ensure that it responds to the real needs of Zambia's schools (MoE, 1992:97).

Thus in the 1992 education policy document, teacher education curriculum in Zambia was expected to be designed in such a way that it prepared teachers who would have knowledge and skills that were relevant to their job description in their different subject areas. In 1991 the country, Zambia, embraced a multi-party democracy system of governance whose ideologies necessitated the need for a new educational policy document. Thus in 1996 a new policy document on education known as *Educating Our Future* was issued.

2.3. Educating Our Future

In 1996, the Ministry of Education gave new and further educational guidelines through publication of *Educating Our Future*, a national policy on education. On teacher education, although the policy did not explicitly address the aspect of curriculum designing, it recognised the fact that:

The quality and effectiveness of an education system depend heavily on the quality of its teachers. They are the key persons in determining success in meeting the system's goals. The educational and personal well being of pupils in schools hinges crucially on their competence, commitment and resourcefulness (MoE, 1996:107).

Educating Our Future was, in other words, saying that a teacher's essential competencies that are required in every teacher are mastery of the material that is to be taught and the skill in communicating that knowledge and skills to learners. This is only possible, as it has been continuously stressed in the previous sections, if the teacher education curriculum is designed in such a way that the knowledge and skills in it are aligned to what is taught in the school curriculum.

On the whole it has been noted that the educational policy documents that had guided the Zambian education system had tried since the 1970s to give some guidelines regarding teacher education curriculum designing although not in very clear terms. However, the issue of having a relevant teacher education curriculum which can eventually produce a teacher who can competently teach what is prescribed in Zambian schools had been emphasised. The extent to which this had been implemented in institutions that were preparing teachers is the issue that this paper is partly reporting on.

3. An Exploration into theory of Teacher Education Curriculum Designing

Central to any discussion or study of teacher preparation is a judgment about what it is that teachers must be prepared to do. Thus, the curriculum content of any teacher preparation programme is one of

