What Mismatch Challenges are there between What Teacher Education Institutions Teach and What is Expected at Work Place? Retrospective Views of Secondary School Teachers from Tanzania and Malawi Studying in China

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Abstract

This study sought to establish what mismatch challenges, contradictions and tensions novice pre-service teachers faced as they started teaching in secondary schools in Tanzania and Malawi. Using the qualitative approach, through snowballing methodology, 19 teachers were interviewed using purposive non-random probability sampling in universities in Chin. These were students who had gone through pre-service teacher education and had been teaching in Tanzania and Malawi. All the participants had their first degrees in teacher education and were then studying in China. The results from their retrospective reflections revealed that these teachers experienced lots of perceived mismatches, contradictions and tensions as beginner teachers. The mismatches include different expectations between the schools and the college supervisors, difficulty to apply theories learned, and dissatisfactions with restrictions on the courses they were compelled to learn as education students.

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The study suggests that there should be a 're-think' about what happens to pre-service teacher education with reference to when novice teachers enter into teaching in order to help them smoothly 'initiated' and adapt to the teaching profession.

Key terms: mismatch; teacher education; pre-service education; novice teachers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background information

Review of extant literature shows that pre-service secondary school teacher education in Tanzania and Malawi is similar in many ways [1,2,3,4]. For instance, teachers learn content courses (that is the subjects that they would teach) and many other education foundation courses, that are supposed to help teacher-trainees developed into good teachers. What is common among education foundation courses include Psychology of Education, Philosophy of Education, Curriculum Studies, Educational Administration and Management and so many other courses. However, a snapshot view from extant literature shows that somehow credit hours differ in terms of percentages of education courses across the different bachelor's degrees in education from country to the other [5,6,7]. But the common assumption is that the package of courses in the training makes students become good teachers and that all the courses and training package are useful for students. On the other hand, literature shows that beginning teachers face a lot of challenges in the begging part of their teaching career. Literature shows that among the challenges are that often students fail to see the link between what they learn in college with the real situations they meet. Sometimes, putting theory into practice becomes difficult as students mostly learn differently from how they are expected to teach in schools [8] No wonder studies globally show that there is "an alarming number of teachers are leaving the profession in the first three years after graduation from a pre-service program" (9). The difference has been partly attributed to increased number of students in colleges and limited space and time which make lecturers hurry off to finish the syllabus. But most of these studies have not been done in Malawi or Tanzania. It was hence found a niche to find out mismatches, tensions and contradictions pre-service trained teachers faced, as beginner teachers, with reference to what they were taught in college and what their job entailed.

1.2 Problem Statement

Universally, there is a plethora of literature which strongly confirms that novice pre-service teachers face a lot of mismatches, contradictions and general challenges to adapt to the teaching profession. But most of these studies were conducted in the developed world, NOT in countries like Malawi and Tanzania [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19]. Hence despite that there is some literature indicating that in Malawi and Tanzania beginner teachers also face a lot of challenges and mismatches between what and how they are taught to teach and what is expected at the real teaching situation, not much is known about secondary school teachers in Malawi and Tanzania [20, 21, 22]. Further, the mismatch challenges are not significantly studied between the two countries as evidenced by difficulty to access literature on this topic.

The extension of the problem is that we do not have significant feedback from the teachers about their early

teaching experiences so that we can tell what works best from what does not from teacher education. Further, in both Tanzania and Malawi, literature shows that most trained teachers leave their job in the early years of their employment which could be partly due to frustrations from challenges they face [22, 23] In other words, we could not tell, without a study, about what perceived mismatch challenges teachers from these countries faced in adapting to the school set-up. It was, therefore, decided to establish this information in order to help fill the gap and influence academic debate, research and policy.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine what mismatch challenges students who did pre-service education faced in real world of work as beginner teachers.

1.4 Research questions

This study was guided by the following questions in order to answer the main purpose of the study:

a. What kind of challenges did you face during Teaching Practice that could be said to be a contradiction between what the college taught you and what the school expected from you?
b. What do you think caused these challenges?
c. What was the effect of these challenges on your professional development as a beginner teacher?
d. What issues did you learn in college that you did not apply as a teacher?
e. What would you have liked the pre-service education to teach you that they did not? Why?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study combined use of Grounded Theory (GT) and Diffusion Theory (DT) in its operation. Grounded Theory is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data [24]. In other words, using this qualitative approach, we were not sure of which answers would come out and so it was felt better to develop theoretical understanding within the study process [25]. On the other hand, we used Diffusion Theory, as initially propagated by Everett M. Rogers [26], because we had visual understanding from the theory that technology adoption is similar to adapting to the new environment which generally falls into three main areas with the beginning as the most difficult [27, 28]. How teachers adapt to the new environment and how people adopt new ideas were seen as important in understanding and analysing the experiences of novice teachers. Hence, a model from Diffusion Theory was determined suitable to help understand tensions and contradictions that novice teachers pass through at the first stage of the model.

This two-waged theoretical approach helped us to frame the responses, analyse them and then interpret them into a direction not pre-conceived but directed by data. In the diagram below, we demonstrate how technological adoption by people is similar to the level of challenges beginning teachers face. In this case, 1 stands for the early part when adoption of new ideas is slow just like it is difficult for beginner teachers to adapt to the new teaching environment. Numbers 2 and 3 show steady improvement in adoption and adaption to new ideas and environments. This diffusion theoretical paradigm suggests that in understanding challenges of novice teachers,

we need to understand challenges that they face as they enter into teaching for the first time as at number 1. See below for details of the diffusion model as adapted from [27].
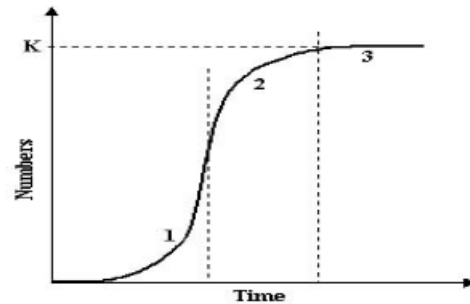

Figure 1: diffusion model as adapted from [27].

2. Literature review

Literature review of various studies shows that there are many mismatches between what pre-services teachers learn in university or teachers' colleges and the actual teaching in work places. For instance, a PhD thesis of Mtika in Malawi shows that pre-service secondary school teachers face a lot of contradictions, tensions and indeed mismatches between what they learned in college and what they meet in schools as they begin their teaching career [29] In a similar study, Banda's study shows that, beginner teachers face so many challenges to adapt into the teaching profession [30].

Other studies in the region and across the globe give the same picture. For example, [31] found out that there was "a theory-practice divide', i.e. student-teachers acquired some progressive ideas about teaching, but they remained conservative in their actual teaching. Although they accepted some sound ideas and theories (e.g. student-centred teaching), they failed to make their ideas work in practice" This situation appears similar with that in Tanzania education as there are reports of mismatch between the teaching methods learned and the ones used in real teaching. For example, findings of another study show that there was a mismatch between theory and practice to student-teachers from university of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania [31]. The findings particularly showed that when student-teachers from university of Dar- es Salaam in Tanzania go for teaching practice in secondary schools, they demonstrate weak abilities in the preparations for classroom teaching in terms of long-term (schemes of work) and short plans (classroom learning plans) for classroom teaching. They also showed limited competence in designing high quality evaluation instruments, inability to facilitate the students to construct lesson notes and improvisation of teaching materials. Their preparation indicated use of the traditional teacher cantered approaches whereby the lesson notes prepared by them were from textbooks and teaching manuals determined students learning while in university they taught them to use student-centred methods in teaching. Therefore, these findings provoke surprises as to why student-teachers fail to implement what they learn from University in real-life situation at work. But what appears common from various studies is that challenges that novice pre-service teachers face greatly influence their dropping the teaching career in their early

years of teaching [32-36] However, there is insignificant research based information connecting the mismatches between what pre-service teachers learn in colleges and what they meet as they begin teaching for Tanzania and Malawi. Further, it was not clear which mismatches novice teachers faced in the two countries. This study was therefore seen as unique and relevant to add value to our current understanding of mismatch challenges between pre-service teacher education and the real world of teaching work with reference to Tanzania and Malawi.

3. Methodology

This study generally used the qualitative research paradigm. It is important to note that, in qualitative research it is not about how many/much interns of sample but how deep and well the subject is understood (Creswell & Plano Clark, 4th Ed.2011). Given the limited time (as students) and means to collect data from students that the researchers did not have full knowledge of about their location, Snowballing sampling techniques was used to identify and sample the research participants. By definition, in "sociology and statistics research, snowball sampling (or chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, referral sampling) is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances"[37].

Using this approach, 11 teachers from Tanzania and 8 from Malawi, were sampled and these constituted 19 participants. These were from universities in China with their first qualification in pre-service secondary school teacher education. There were 6 females and 13 males indicating suggesting that more men find foreign education opportunities from the two countries. In-depth interviews were conducted using a question guide in order to find out what mismatches they faced as beginner teachers. From the 19 participants, 5 were interviewed using social media (Wechat, Whatsapp and Skype) because they could not be reached physically. Data were then analysed by using the thematic approach based on the questions and the general themes coming from the responses. To increase content validity, responses were peer-reviewed to avoid missing the big picture of the responses from myriad and rudimentary details. The researchers were aware that using this approach has a limitation in terms of random sampling and that sometimes including social media in qualitative data collection minimises awareness of paralinguistic features and general non-verbal communication elements which are both critical in getting an in-depth understanding of the problem. Nevertheless, responses from the five participants through social media did not prove to be a serious problem and since the approach wanted an in-depth understanding of the problem, randomization of sampling was not understood to be relevant for this study. As [38 & 39] agree, qualitative analysis is a systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing and synthesizing and interpreting data without much focus on numbers but in-depth meaning.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and makes interpretation of the findings based on the researchers understanding, the available literature and similar findings from different studies. After analysing data, this study found that there were many similarities in what the teachers considered as mismatches between what they had learned from their colleges and what they experienced as beginner teachers. We hereafter outline these issues and attempt to interpret them based on the themes that come out of the analysis.

4.1 Teaching Methods

Almost all the respondents stated that during training, their lecturers insisted on using methods that were called participatory like group work, pair work and others. But they were all quick to mention that they had difficulties in implementing the strategies taught. For instance, one said "*Maybe because our classes were too large, but mostly the teaching methods used by lecturers made it difficult to use to understand because they taught us learner-centred approaches while they used lecture methods and yet they expected us during TP to use group work*". This is in tandem with Mtika's research finding that "some pedagogical tools that student teachers had learned in college were not always easily used in the schools" [40]. In a similar study from Cambodia, Brodie, Lelliott, and Davis in 2002 found that most teachers who wanted to adopt child-centred methods faced challenges as they used group work and other strategies but they failed to elicit and engage with learners' ideas and interests in order to develop new knowledge [41].

4.2 Feedback from Teaching Practice

On Teaching Practice, most participants said that teaching practice was very important for their learning to teach but they also pointed out some challenges for beginner teachers. On this theme, key issues that pre-service teachers found as a cause of tension were about class management and teaching assessment by college supervisors. "*It was only when the bell rung indicating end of the class that I realised that I had over-planned*", said one of the respondents. In other respondents views, teaching practice (TP) helped them build self-confidence; self-image and helped them to adjust to realities outside the planning desk. For others, TP was not used as a learning experience because they claimed that little time was dedicated for feedback. This was said to be because some respondents felt that they did not have enough time and fair time to helpfully discuss their experience because their supervisors did not have enough time for them. Others even stated that they did what they did during teaching practicum because it was for assessment not necessarily for their professional development. For instance, one who said is no longer a teacher said: "*All I remember about my TP is that I got an A+, but I do not know why because all my supervisors came late to observe me teach and they had little time for sharing with me about my teaching experience that time*". This agrees with others studies which show that "novice teachers often appear to yearn for, yet seldom receive, meaningful feedback on their teaching from experienced colleagues and administrators [42]. In summary, the respondents stated that TP was very powerful for their professional development but time for it was short and that they faced many tensions and contradictions in their carrier as beginner teachers.

4.3 Planning and Record Keeping

On planning, many respondents felt planning was important for teachers. But they were quick to say that the whole issue of writing Lesson Plans every day was one of the de-motivations from becoming teachers. Some even claimed that one does not need to write down everything in a format given by the school in order to teach well. They also argued that in some cases, schemes and records of work (SRW) plus Lesson plans (LP) were done differently between colleges and the schools they taught at. To confirm one of the differences between expectations from the college supervisors and the school supervisors, one said, "*I used to write two sets of*

schemes and records of work, one for Head of Department and one for college. I was confused because they had different formats". This part of the findings was different from Heeralal and Bayaga findings about pre-service teachers in East London in South Africa at the *School of Initial Teacher Education* where planning was highly seen as crucial (Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011). This suggests that sometimes there is no good understanding between what the teacher education does and what the real schools use.

4.4 On College Courses

There were mixed reactions on what the participants thought about the courses that they learned in colleges teachers. Many felt bitter that they learned almost all content courses just like their friends with degrees without an education component but that they also learned many courses like Philosophy, Psychology and Administration. However, by being named education students, they were deemed inferior to those who, they claimed, only studied the same content subjects which they also did. In other words, they contended that as education students, they studied almost all courses that other students from other programmes did but their specialisation was always seen as demeaning and of second class.

Others said that they do not see the value of some of the education courses that they learned. In general, the respondents raised many issues about their college training as follows:

4.4.1 Limited choice

Some respondents worried that their training made them overspecialised in education which made job changing difficult hence they had to do different courses later due to frustration with their lack of competitiveness

- Some respondents felt they were forced to take some courses they did not want to because their colleges demanded so
- They wished they studies courses that were more marketable while still training as teachers and the courses mostly featured were Economics, Marketing, Social Sciences, Engineering, Accountancy Project Development, Monitoring and Evaluation, Strategic Management, Business Administration.

4.4.2 Inferiority

Some respondents said they have lived very inferior lives among peers because peers from other professions underrate them due to their areas of specialisation.

4.4.3 Relevance

Some claimed that one does not need to pass through all those courses to be become a good teacher. They felt teaching career is too demanding in training for little hope.

4.4.4 Surprise finding

There were about no real differences between responses from Tanzania and Malawi even by gender. Further,

almost all respondents showed that they have faced these challenges, tensions and contradictions about becoming a teacher from college to the industry BUT they generally don't talk about them because they do not see a clear opportunity to share their experiences so as to improve the situation for other beginner teachers. This suggests that there are no clear mechanisms for mentoring and sharing feedback from teaching practice as Mtika's study also found out.

5. Recommendations and conclusion

5.1 *Recommendations*

Based on the findings, this study recommends the following considerations:

- ❖ There should be good coordination between the TE institutions and the real school environment (job-market). This could include interface between schools and colleges so that what is expected from novice teachers is consistent, not confusing.
- ❖ Teacher educators should be more practical in their teaching so that learners don't have problems in using the theories in practice as they start teaching.
- ❖ Teacher Education institutions should not over-restrict students on the courses they take, as it is about their life. Otherwise, they will continue to seek new knowledge elsewhere leading to dumping teaching.
- ❖ Colleges should rethink and test what kind of training really makes optimal value to beginner teachers
- ❖ A fully-flagged more comprehensive study should be done to give a better picture of the mismatch situation

5.2 *Conclusion*

This study aimed at establishing mismatch challenges, contradictions and tensions that beginner teachers faced as they started teaching in secondary schools. Using qualitative approach, 19 participants were purposefully sampled through snowballing in universities in China, but the participants were student who had been teaching from Tanzania and Malawi. They all had their first degrees in education. The results from their retrospective reflections show that the sampled teachers experienced lots perceived mismatches, contradictions and tensions as beginner teachers. This agrees with Diffusion Theory as to what happens at the beginning to adopt new knowledge and skills. The mismatches include different expectations between the schools and the college supervisors, difficulty to apply theories leaned and tensions about restrictions on the courses they were compelled to learn as teacher learners. Using grounded theory, it can be theorised that because there is inadequate feedback, there are a lot of mismatches, tensions and contradictions that novice teachers face which may not be known without effective feedback. The paper, therefore, recommends that there should be improved platform for teachers to share their college and early employment experiences; there should be better coordination and feedback between teacher colleges and the schools; and that 're-thinking' should be done about the flexibility of student-teachers to choose some courses of their liking while doing their training in college.

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