

A Perspective of the Challenges Facing (Basic School) Teacher Training, Recruitment and Quality in Zambia

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1. Introduction

Bishop (1985) cited Fafunwa as having stated that “of all the educational problems that beset African countries today, none is as persistent or as compelling as the one relating to the training of a competent teacher”. This comment, made in 1967, still remains true about teacher training in Africa generally and in Zambia in particular today. Indeed, teachers have an indispensable role to play in our education system. If we are to have quality education we need sufficient teachers who are well trained and motivated professionals. Professionalism is one of the most important characteristics that should identify teachers..... particularly primary school teachers who are the subject of discussion in this paper. This paper will attempt to give a perspective of the challenges facing basic school teacher training, recruitment and quality in Zambia. The paper will pay particular attention to how primary colleges recruit students, the nature of training offered, the deployment of the students, and the effects of the challenges on the quality of education in Zambia.

2. Background

The government is the main provider of education and training, even though privately owned schools, run by churches and, especially, community schools also play an important role. The Ministry of Education is the main provider of basic, high school and tertiary education. The country’s 14 teacher colleges also fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Ten of the colleges train teachers for the basic school sector.

The education system consists of nine years of basic education (grades 1-9), three years of high school (grades 10-12) and, after that, tertiary education. The system is currently in transition from seven years of primary education to nine years of basic education. Some secondary schools still offer education at grades 8 and 9 in addition to three years of high school. The rationale behind this transition was that in a country where most secondary education was provided by boarding schools, it would be more feasible to meet the objective of nine years of basic education for all if each of these nine years was actually provided at local basic schools (World Bank, 2006).

Zambia was a relatively rich country at independence in 1964. However, it was hit hard by the world economic crisis of the 1970s and its economy collapsed between 1975 and 1990. In the 1980s and 1990s, economic developments and a heavy debt burden forced the Government of

Zambia to cut budgets for education. As a result, there was little growth in the education sector. Enrolment rates in basic education decreased even though the school-age population was growing fast. In the same period, Zambia experienced a sharp decline in the number of teachers. The total number of teachers fell from 40,500 in 1997 to 35,000 in 1998 and 33,000 in 1999. Low enrolment and low quality demanded investment in schooling and the training of teachers, infrastructure and provision of education materials.

At the end of the 1990s, the Government of Zambia implemented an ambitious plan, the Basic Education Sub-Sector Plan (BESSIP) for 1999 -2002 to improve access and quality of basic education. As a result of this investment there was a significant increase in enrolment of learners between 1999 and 2006. In the basic education sector the number of schools offering grade 1 - 9 increased from approximately 5,300 in the year 2000 to 8,195 in 2007. Over the same period the number of classrooms increased from 25,000 to 35,000. Under BESSIP, the Ministry of Education recruited and trained large numbers of new teachers using a new teacher training package called the Zambia Teacher Education Programme (ZATEC). The programme consisted of a 'one year in college – one year in the field – graduate'. As a result of using this programme the total number of teachers increased by 35%, from 37,000 in 2000 to 61,811 in 2008.

The Zambia Teacher Education Course (ZATEC) was set up in order to double the teacher output of the existing ten government primary teacher training colleges. One of the ways to accomplish this goal was by reducing the residential programme from two years to one. The second year being a practical year in which trainee teachers teach in schools under supervision. The total number increased from 1,850 graduates in 1998 to 3,815 in 2002. Approximately 4,000 to 5,000 trainee teachers graduate from colleges each year. The annual increase in the number of teachers employed is significantly lower due to high teacher attrition and budgetary restrictions. The total number of teachers in basic schools grew from 37,000 in 2000 to 50,000 in 2005. The vast majority of these (68%) had a primary teacher certificate. In 2007 the number increased to 57,000. However, the growth in the number of teachers was insufficient to keep up with the growth of enrolment.

After public service wages had been increased in April 2003, the Ministry of Education (MoE) was forced to impose a hiring freeze in 2003 and 2004 to avoid exceeding the wage bill limit set within the context of the Highly Indebted Poor countries (HIPC) debt relief. As a result, large numbers of new teachers who had just graduated from one of the teacher colleges in 2003 and 2004 became unemployed. By September 2004, the MoE merely employed 97% of the total number of teachers of September 2002. Moreover, a number of the teachers who had recently retired remained on the payroll because the Ministry of Finance was unable to pay their terminal benefits (World Bank, 2006, Annex 2, p.3). It was not until 2005, that the Ministry of Finance authorised the recruitment of 7,000 new teachers after the retirees had finally been removed from the payroll.

3. The Challenges

There have been many challenges facing basic school teacher training in Zambia. These range from lack of legislation, recruitment procedures, teaching and training resources, clear curriculum, ICT, sufficient training periods, and deployment of graduates. These will now be presented.

3.1. Lack of legislation on education provision

The education sector is guided by an out dated Act of Parliament of 1966. There have been many developments and policy pronouncements which have been made by the Zambian government in the education sector as indicated in the background above since 1966 which are not grounded on any legislation. The Ministry of Education (2008:13) reported that “it succeeded in facilitating the finalization of the Education Bill in 2008 which later was submitted to Parliament”. The Bill was tabled to the Legislative Committee of Cabinet on 14th June, 2008. However, the consideration of the Bill by Cabinet has been delayed because of the provisions in the Bill for the devolution of basic education to Local Authorities, the subject which is still pending a decision by Cabinet through the approval of the national Decentralisation Plan.

3.2. Uncoordinated teacher training programmes

The table below shows teachers in basic schools by Certification and gender:

	Male	Female	Total
Advanced Diploma	122	53	175
Certificate in Special Education	225	196	421
Diploma (Basic or Secondary Teachers)	4,992	4,349	9,341
Education Bachelor’s Degree	171	139	310
Master’s Degree	39	10	49
None	4,363	2,345	6,708
Other Bachelor’s Degree	28	25	53
Pre-School Certificate	355	1,380	1,735
Primary Teacher Certificate	18,429	21,082	39,511
Special Education Degree	20	21	41
Special Education Diploma	385	332	717
Unknown	1,860	890	2,750
National	30,989	30,822	61,811

(Ministry of Education, 2008)

The table shows that there are a number of institutions which provide primary teaching programmes. There are seven Government–run Colleges of Education running a certificate programme; two Government –run In-service Colleges of Education (Chalimbana provides a Primary Diploma by Distance Learning and the Zambia Institute of Special Education provides a Special Education Diploma); University of Zambia runs

a Bachelor of Education (Primary) Degree programme; and there are private-run colleges running certificate programmes. All the certificate courses are certified by the Examinations Council of Zambia while the Diploma programmes are certified by the University of Zambia. The institutions just like the programmes they run are not coordinated and their programmes do not reflect what basic schools practice.

3.3. The Zambia Teacher education Course (ZATEC)

The introduction of the ZATEC may have solved one problem (deficit in the number of teachers) but it created many challenges. ZATEC was a fast track programme which was not meant to last. Since it has, it has compromised quality in teacher training. With the introduction of ZATEC the concept of teaching student teachers in demonstration schools ended. In other words, the partnership between the colleges and Demonstration schools ceased to exist. Without these schools of teachers, training is done in a vacuum because colleges do not link what they teach to what is happening in schools. In fact, it should also be a requirement for lecturers to periodically teach in the demonstration school.

3.4. Recruitment and attitudes of student teachers

Candidates are subjected to oral interviews which include questions of why one wants to be a teacher, his or her family background, where one would want to serve after graduating (i.e. rural or urban) and what sporting activities the candidate is interested in. The interview is not graded and is not used as a basis for selection. Recruitment is based on results at the Grade twelve level. Earlier, three credits or better were the acceptable results for a candidate to be considered for training. However, there have been changes from the MoE requiring that the results for consideration should be five credits or better which should include English and Mathematics.

Entry requirements are therefore high which is good because there is no specialization at the primary level. On paper, colleges get candidates who are capable of delivering quality education. The biggest challenge is how to inculcate in the student teachers a sense of pride in being primary school teachers. The student teacher comes to college with an internalized negative attitude of being a primary school teacher. The attitude comes from the society which does not hold a primary school teacher in high esteem. This negative perception of a primary school teacher also affects the college lecturers who see themselves as being less skilled and knowledgeable than their secondary college peers despite having the same pre-college qualifications.

3.5. The quality of student teachers

Colleges receive their candidates for training from secondary schools within the country. The candidates are required to have five credits or better including English and Mathematics. However, despite the good results of admitted students, their performance

is generally poor. Many exhibit poor writing, spelling skills and have generally poor performance in Mathematics and Science.

3.6. Teacher Training

(i) Training Period

Looking at the content for training a teacher to teach competently, the period within which the training of a basic school teacher is conducted in Zambia is too short. At its inception the ZATEC was a two year course. One year in the college and another in the field. Currently the ZATEC Course has been transformed into two years with the first and second year in college and teaching practice in the second term. Despite this change the curriculum has remained the same. Changes in the program should entail changes in the curriculum for teacher training. This is a big challenge. The change remains worthless as long as the curriculum for the old ZATEC remains.

(ii) Training and learning resources

Another challenge of teacher training is the lack of training and learning resources. The Ministry of Education (1996:40) recognises that:

Quality education requires the availability and use of textbooks and other educational materials. Without these aids to the learning process, effective teaching and learning in the modern sense cannot take place. Suitable materials enable pupils to acquire and apply knowledge, to learn at their own pace and to assess their own progress.

However, Colleges of Education do not have enough textbooks and other training and learning resources necessary for the moulding of teachers. The libraries in Colleges of Education are ill equipped. In most cases, the few books available are too shallow to mould a teacher's skills. Books that are found are those written by the Ministry of Education e.g. pupils books and teachers' handbooks. But books that talk about theories and approaches of teaching cannot be found in the colleges. If there are any, they are either obsolete publications or only one textbook which is not easily accessible to students. In addition, colleges no longer produce materials such as rulers, axes, hoes and other tools during training. The Industrial Arts section for instance is almost dead though on paper and in theory, it exists. The Industrial Section lacks tools for students to use to develop skills that they can in turn impart onto their learners when they go to teach. The section gives assignments to students to make dusters, rulers etc, but instead of students using the industrial laboratory to produce the materials required, students instead go to buy finished materials from shops. This is not training at all. The products are not made by the students and so

no skills have been learnt at all. In Expressive Arts, the same scenario occurs. Students have to buy their own materials to produce what is demanded of them in the form of assignments. This makes lecturers omit certain activities that they know students cannot access.

(iii) The college curricula

The many components in the curriculum make for omissions and inadequacies in covering the desired curriculum content to train teachers. Primary Colleges of Education offer various subjects in what are called “study areas”. The study areas hide several other vital subject areas. For example, the Education Studies study area includes Sociology of Education, Educational Psychology, Education Management, Philosophy of Education and Special Education. Not all sections are adequately covered. In the Mathematics and Science study area, Mathematics, Environmental Science and Agriculture Science are taught. Expressive Arts study area consists of Music, Art, and Physical Education. Spiritual and Moral Education study area has Religious Education, Social Studies and Civic Education. In the Languages Education study area, English and Zambian languages are offered. The Technology Studies study area has Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Woodwork, and Metal work. In all these study areas, HIV and AIDS education is integrated, and cross-cutting issues such as drug abuse and environmental education to mention but a few are also taught. The lumping together of subjects into study areas makes the identity of subjects difficult and as a result some very important subjects are not taught or are taught scantily in Colleges of Education. The situation is made worse by the limited time of training. For example, wood work and metal work are almost nonexistent though there are members of the teaching staff for the two subjects. At some point, Physical Education became almost extinct until political pronouncements were made to revive it in schools.

The other aspect of the curriculum challenge is that the ZATEC programme is not effective in the way it is set up and the way students are supported during their year in the field. Large numbers of incoming graduate ZATEC teachers require substantial content upgrading in all subjects. In addition, college curricula fail to adapt to changes in the primary school curricula and consequently, teachers are not sufficiently prepared to teach particular subjects. In short, teacher education is not planned properly (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).

(iv) ICT equipment, skills and knowledge

Technology as regards the use of computers and internet is a very important resource for teaching and learning in Colleges of Education. However, though there have been efforts for colleges to buy computers and install internet service in the institutions, knowledge of how to use computers and internet as a resource for

teaching and learning is still scanty among lecturers and students. Many lecturers and students only know computers as typing and printing tools. Educational programmes involving video/audio lectures, soft copy textbooks (e.g. encyclopaedias) and programmes that improve students' language abilities and general learning are not installed on computers. Most colleges do not make available internet services for students. Internet, which is a very important resource is either not available or is restricted for use to lecturers, many of whom may not know how to use it to make learning resources for their students and train the learners effectively.

(v) Teaching about teaching versus training to Teach

The training of teachers is theoretical. There is a need to shift the mind set of all involved in the training of teachers. Training of teachers is a practical enterprise. It should be hands on. Trainees should not postpone implementation of teaching to the future. Certain methodologies which do not produce results ought to be dropped and new ones embraced. Students must be challenged to experiment in primary school classes and implement what they are learning. This is one way the primary school can produce scientists. Scientific thinking does not have to start at secondary or high school.

3.7. Deployment of trained teachers

Deployment of trained teachers depends on funds allocated to this exercise in the national budget. The number of teachers is determined by the amount allocated to the Ministry of Education. There has usually been a delay in deployment since 2003 and the delays have affected the delivery of quality education because teachers walk the streets for too long and lose the methods they learned in college. They degenerate to the level of an untrained teacher.

The deployment of teachers is also characterised by a strong discrepancy between urban and rural areas. Most teachers prefer to work in urban areas, which cause an enormous shortage of trained teachers in the more remote areas. Bonuses for teachers in remote rural areas are clearly not sufficient to compensate for the hardships and lack of appropriate housing they are facing. Lack of housing is a major obstacle to teacher recruitment and retention in the rural areas (World Bank, 2006, p.29).

4. Conclusion

There cannot be quality training in Colleges of Education without overcoming the challenges discussed above. Indeed, the challenges which this paper has presented are not insurmountable. In fact, they are a 'wake up' call for the Ministry of Education to implement the lofty goals it set for itself some 14 years ago in the Educating Our Future document:

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 children in schools hinges crucially on their competence, commitment and resourcefulness. In view of this, the calibre of teachers and of the teaching profession is of paramount importance. The Ministry of Education has the important task of sustaining the quality of individual teachers and of the profession as a whole. It will accomplish this by attracting suitable persons to take up teaching as a career, equipping them with initial professional education, and providing for their subsequent in-career development. Running parallel with this, it also has responsibility for rewarding their services and sustaining their morale through satisfactory terms and conditions of service (Ministry of Education, 1996: 104).

There cannot be quality training in Colleges of Education without overcoming the challenges discussed above and without the MoE set on implementing the lofty goals it set for itself some 14 years ago.

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