

## REVISITING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

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### Abstract

*Initial teacher education is critical because it is the foundation of the teaching profession. The quality of education in schools reflects the quality of the teachers whose quality reflects the effectiveness of the institutions which prepared them. This paper sought to explore the implementation of school-based teacher education, specifically, the practicum. Data was collected through desk or library research. The information from the consulted was analysed and used to write this article. The analysis was guided by the Constructivist and reflective teacher education theoretical framework which recommends participatory teacher education in which, student teachers are participants as self-directed and self-taught while the teacher educators assume the role of facilitators. As regards the implementation of the school-based model, it was revealed that student teachers are right from year one in their programme attached to what are known as partner (cooperating) schools. First, they are required to observe lessons delivered by experienced teachers (mentors) before being engaged in actual teaching. In conclusion, the idea behind this mode is to ensure the professional development of future teachers by tapping into the expertise of experienced teachers in schools. It is in this vein that the authors are advocating for its implementation as opposed to the current model in use (college/university-based model).*

**Keywords:** *Constructivist and reflective teacher education, initial teacher education, mentors, practicum, teacher's competencies*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Initial teacher education is a crucial phase in the teaching profession because it lays a foundation for the teacher's career. It is during this period, that student teachers are provided with a 'toolbox' to be used in their professional journey. Hence, there is need for quality pre-service teacher education.

In Zambia, the Government through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology, is by far the biggest provider and custodian of teacher

education in Zambia. In addition, various colleges of education and universities are run by churches, namely, the Catholic Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the United Church of Zambia and the Brethren in Christ as well as private enterprises. In conjunction with the private sector, government offers diplomas and degrees in a variety of disciplines in teacher education. In Zambia the model being used in preparing teachers is a concurrent model, whereby subject content courses are taken at the same time with educational ones.

Kalimaposo (2010) has chronicled the development of teacher education in Zambia from 1964 to 2010. Kalimaposo (2010) records that the Zambian Primary Course was developed for teachers and introduced in 1967. It was replaced by the Zambia Basic Education Course (ZBEC) in 1975. From 1975 to 1997, the Zambia Basic Education Course (ZBEC) was offered with an emphasis on Science, Mathematics, Technology, Political Education and Production Units. Later in 1997, the Field-Based Teacher Training Approach (FIBATTA) for primary school teachers was introduced. Its major focus was addressing the shortage of trained teachers in the country. Barely three months after it was launched, FIBATTA was discontinued. It was replaced by the Zambia Teacher Education Reform Programme (ZATERP) which ran for three years, from 1997 to 2000. From January 2000 to 2007, the programme was offered in all existing ten colleges and was renamed the Zambia Teacher Education Course (ZATEC) in 2008/2000, upon which it was transformed into a three-year diploma offered in all colleges including the private colleges affiliated to the University of Zambia and other universities. It was for primary school teachers and was structured as follows; first-year was college-based while the second year was school-based.

In place of ZATEC, the *Teacher Qualification Reforms of 2020* introduced a Diploma programme in Education for Primary School Teachers. This is the current teacher qualification being offered in colleges of education. It is of three years duration and affiliated with the University of Zambia and other universities, both public and private. Apart from ZATEC which attempted to introduce reflective pedagogy, all the other reforms focused on training (teaching skills) instead of focusing on teacher education (professional teacher development).

This paper is structured as follows: After the introduction, the authors present a review of the literature which is followed by the theoretical framework, a segment that grounds the paper in the Constructivist and reflective theoretical perspectives. The fourth section presents the methodology used in couching the arguments of the paper; then the findings and discussion is presented with an emphasis on the fulcrum of the paper namely the proposed school-based practicum model. The paper ends with the conclusion and implications section.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Zambia, initial teacher education also known as pre-service teacher education is provided in both public and private colleges of education and universities. The purpose of a teacher education programme is to facilitate the preparation of quality competent teachers who are equipped with the required professional knowledge and skills (Banja, 2022). Teachers in Zambia are prepared in colleges of education and universities for all the subsectors, running from Early Childhood Education (ECE), primary school, secondary school and tertiary education. Qualifications for initial

teacher education are provided at diploma and degree levels in both colleges of education and universities. Generally, diplomas run for three years while degrees run for four years except for specialist degree courses such as those targeting in-service students that are given out after three years. Almost all colleges of education are affiliated with universities, both public and private.

Teachers with diplomas are prepared to handle junior secondary school classes (grades 8 and 9) while those with degrees handle senior secondary school classes (grades 10-12). In practice though, due to shortages of degree holders and system inefficiencies, it is not uncommon to find diploma-holding teachers teaching in senior secondary schools.

The nature of teacher education in Zambia, especially the challenges inherent therein, has been discussed ably by many scholars. Pre-service teacher education in Zambia is beset with many challenges such as weak partnership with schools (Manchichi & Banja, 2023), and inadequate funding, courses that are narrow in scope; in some universities for example, at the University of Zambia, subject content courses are offered by other faculties instead of the faculty that is responsible for preparing teachers (Mulenga, 2015). This has resulted in some cases of student teachers being offered courses which might not be of value to them as teachers (Manchishi & Masaiti, 2011). With a specific focus on the practicum, challenges include the lack of specialization of the lecturers observing students doing their practicum (Muzata, 2018); inadequate duration due to financial constraints (Banja, 2022); inadequate visits to the student teachers during practicum by their lecturers; academic assessment rather than professional development and teaching purposes; and scheduling challenges leading to conducting their practicum at the end of the final year of study. With all these challenges, it seems teacher education programmes are not adequately preparing teachers with appropriate knowledge and skills (Luangala, 2001). And yet initial teacher education is a crucial phase because it is the foundation of the teaching profession and as such, it should be solid. This calls for action beyond the box of the traditional teacher preparation model. This is critical because teachers provide learning experiences to lead their learners from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge (The Concept of Teacher Education <http://archces.mu.ac.mywe.testeacher.ed.pdf>).

All the shortcomings deny the student teachers the opportunity to review their work and performance with their lecturers, issues arising from the practicum. Because of all these shortcomings, Manchishi and Banja (2023) proposed a revision of the initial teacher education programmes in Zambia covering both coursework and practicum based on the conviction that the current arrangement was inadequate. The proposed revision would take on board trends affecting teacher preparation in Zambia which have generally been at the economic and professional levels as described below:

- a. From a professional perspective, educational qualifications of teachers and teacher educators have been raised in the last decade. Higher qualifications are expected of teacher applicants. Two year certificate courses have been discontinued altogether while two-year diploma courses have been elongated to three-year diploma courses.

- b. Under economic trends, there has been commercialization of teacher education. There is a lot of focus on entrepreneurial/commercial outputs at the expense of quality especially in private institutions. Competition among players for students has led to the lowering of admission standards; low caliber applicants are not only admitted but are subjected to low academic rigor in order to raise the pass rate of the concerned programmes and institutions. To save on labour costs, there is heavy reliance on secondary school teachers and retired teachers who are often engaged as part-timers as well as on those with no teaching background.
- c. Similarly under economic trends, it has become commonplace for teacher education to be offered by non-teaching institutions with little expertise and experience of teacher preparation. Just like in 2 above, there is heavy reliance on secondary school teachers and retired teachers as well as non-teachers in these institutions. This has led to huge compromises in teacher education.
- d. From a professional viewpoint, the creation of the Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ) as a regulatory body has helped the Teaching Service Commission as a Practice Commission to further enhance the economic, and non-economic status of the teaching fraternity.
- e. Professional trends have also resulted in a shift from the 'Training' of Teachers to the 'Education' of Teachers. However, this change seems to have had minimal impact and remains only on paper.

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This paper was guided by the Constructivist theory as applied in reflective teacher education. Constructivism is a branch of cognitive revolution propounded by Piaget (1896-1930) and is defined as a process in which learners construct their meaning or knowledge. This implies that the learner is in the driver's seat while the teacher assumes the role of a guide. Knowledge can only be constructed through reflection on one's past or present actions or experiences. Experience alone does not result in learning. It is a reflection on the experience which leads to learning. Reflection is a natural process that facilitates the development of future action from the contemplation of past and/or current behaviour. It involves critically examining and refining practice. Through reflection, learners develop critical thinking which culminates in effective professional growth. Some activities which enhance reflection are discussion, preparation of a portfolio and action research. Thoughtful discussion, for example, can be conducted among the student teachers on how they learnt and the impact of that experience on them. As for the portfolio, it involves tracking their progress through building narratives of their work. In the case of action research, student teachers can be given topics involving problem-solving to research and then provide a summary of the study. Reflective practice and constructivism, if properly handled, as Knowles, Cole and Presswood (1994 cited in Concept of Teacher Education) postulate, can enhance critical thinking, problem-solving and greater awareness about the students' experiences. In addition, it can also help them to adapt to new challenges. This is the goal of pre-service teacher education.

The above vision of constructivism and reflection is in tandem with Dewey's ideas on education that education is not only an act of receiving information but an active and constructive process between two people (Miller, 2019). This assertion is also in tandem with Freire's notion (Freire, 1970) in which students are viewed as critical thinkers with a thirst for knowledge rather than receivers of knowledge from their teachers. Hence, both are appropriate as frameworks for pre-service teacher education.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This article was written using data which were collected through desk or library research, that is, through secondary sources. It relied on data collected and published by others. The authors first identified the topic of discussion and proceeded to consult a variety of sources that would provide relevant information. This means that the authors did document analysis to select relevant information which was later used in the writing of this paper. The sources included academic theses and dissertations, websites, government reports, reports by UN agencies and other organisations, surveys, academic journals, newspapers and books.

### **4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 The Teacher as the Most Important Determinant of Educational Quality**

The teacher is key in any educational system. It is, therefore, very critical to prepare a quality teacher. This is so because the learners' achievements depend on the competencies of a teacher. Emphasising the importance of the teacher, the Zambian Ministry of Education (1992) asserted that teacher education is central to the effectiveness and efficiency of the total education system. The quality of Zambian schools reflects the quality of the teachers manning these schools while the quality of teachers reflects the effectiveness of the institutions that trained them. This is in agreement with Makinde (2015) who postulated that education scholars the world over recognise that the teacher is the most important determinant of educational quality. They are therefore decisive to the learners' outcomes because it is the teachers' competencies which impact their achievement. Initial teacher education is critical because it is expected to prepare teachers who are going to provide learning experiences to lead their learners from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge.

#### **4.2 The Proposed School-Based Practicum Model**

As indicated earlier, in addition to the course work, future teachers are also required to teach in schools. This component of teacher preparation is known as the practicum (school experience) whose purpose is to avail the student teachers a chance to test the theories they learnt at college/university. As alluded to earlier, there is no doubt that student teachers are not adequately prepared for the practicum and that the practicum itself does not adequately prepare a teacher. The organisation and implementation of the practicum in Zambia is beset by many shortcomings. Because of this, the authors propose a practicum to be implemented regardless of the coursework adopted in a particular teacher education programme. This is the college/university-school partnership model.

In any teacher education programme anywhere in the world, practicum is a vital component. The professional versatility of the teachers that a programme produces is largely determined by the quality of this hands-on-the-wheel experience. It is for this reason that the authors are advocating for a college/university-school partnership model also variously known as internship or apprenticeship to improve pre-service teacher education in Zambia. In this model, partnership with schools is vital. To start with, some neighbouring schools should be selected to serve as cooperating schools (partner schools). The student teachers right from year one of their programme are attached to partner schools (cooperating schools). They start their experience by first observing experienced teachers (mentors) before they are engaged in actual teaching. The reason for this is that the expertise to teach resides in the minds of the experienced teachers (Cabbold, 2011).

In the partnership, the role of cooperating schools would be to supervise the practical study, monitor and assess student teachers' performance and above all, offer them guidance and support. In Zambia while on attachment which is about a school term [three months] students are visited by their lecturers to assess classroom performance. This would continue to be done through experienced teachers in the various teaching subjects formally appointed as mentors after relevant orientation/training in mentorship. This would be an upgrade to the existing arrangement where experienced teachers in the schools are requested to observe and assess student teachers. Mentoring as opposed to supervision of student teachers is envisaged to better enrich personal and professional experiences for students. Mentors could be motivated through a reduction of their class teaching hours. To strengthen the collaboration further, the mentors should be incorporated into the Universities/Colleges of Education practicum committees.

During the duration of the practicum, the student teacher should be allowed to get involved in the school activities and the community. As Ingvarson *et al.* (2004) postulate, schools are required to provide a full range of experiences for their students.

The purpose of this model is multi-faceted; firstly to integrate academic course work and practical study; secondly, to develop a clinical experience for students to develop and strengthen skills; and thirdly, to avail students of the practical opportunity to understand the teaching profession and working conditions associated with it. To sum up, the model attempts to ensure the professional development of future teachers through tapping into the expertise of experienced teachers in schools. We believe this is a much better model than the one currently in use in Zambia where students suddenly wake up on a day to find they have to wear the mantle of a teacher for three months with little prior preparation.

In summary, the following structure is being advocated depending on whether the programme is a three-year programme or a four-year programme:

#### **4.3 Proposed structure for a 3-year diploma/degree programme:**

- Year one (observing experienced teachers and reflecting on the experiences in tutorials)
- Year two (a bit of teaching starts period per week reflection continues)
- Year three (actual practicum reflection continues)



#### 4.4 **Proposed structure for a 4-year degree programme:**

- Year one (observing experienced teachers and reflecting on the experience in tutorials)
- Year two (observation and reflection continue)
- Year three (a bit of teaching starts one period per week)
- Year four (actual practicum).

In both the 3-year diploma/degree programme and 4-year degree programme, the attachment goes up to the end of the programme, hence the term school-based. Under the proposed structures (5.2.1 & 5.2.2), the student teachers are provided with early field experience through observation of lessons delivered by their mentors and reflecting on them through discussions in tutorials. This is intended to help the students familiarise themselves with schools' classroom policies, procedures and teaching before taking up full responsibility of teaching. The model attempts to ensure the professional development of future teachers by tapping into the expertise of experienced teachers in schools.

#### 5.0 **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

There is a need to broaden the curriculum so that it is in tandem with the educational dynamics of our time. In this vein, the teacher preparation institutions are encouraged to introduce lectures and tutorials as a preparatory component part of the practicum so that students broaden their perception of the hands-on-the-wheel experience. This entails time tabling the practicum just like other courses.

The authors are, therefore, advocating for a participatory teacher preparation in which, student teachers will play an active role in the training process in which they will become participants as self-directed and self-taught learners. They should be in the driver's seat while the teacher educators assume the role of a guide to ensure learning takes place. There is nothing permanent except change so institutions preparing teachers should be ready to revisit the way they are currently training future teachers so as to be up to date with the educational dynamics.

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