

Quality Teacher Education in Botswana: A Crucial Requirement for Effective Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This paper posits that there is a strong relationship between quality teacher education and the quality of teaching a teacher exhibits in the classroom. It discusses the indicators of quality teacher education and how effective teaching and learning matter. The paper examines the efforts made by Botswana government to improve the quality of teacher education, and also strategies being adopted by tertiary institutions in Botswana in terms of teacher education. Quality teacher education should involve a long preparation in terms of contact hours, curriculum design, planning, comprehensive preparation skills and competencies in real classroom teaching.

1. Introduction

Botswana is a landlocked country situated in the Southern African region. It has a population of about 2 million inhabitants, and a land area as big as France. Education in Botswana is driven by the fact that an informed and educated society would result in a productive, prosperous and innovative nation [6]. Government provides free basic education to the learners for ten years, and this covers, seven years of primary education and three years of junior secondary school education. In terms of quality and scale, enrolments, teachers and schools, Botswana's education system has grown tremendously, and far larger than what it was at independence from Great Britain in 1966. Education development is accorded a high priority by Botswana government as evidenced by the budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, which amounts to a lion's share of about 30% of the total national budget.

The main objectives of Botswana's Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 are: to highlight science and technology in the education system; increase access and equity in education and training; effectively prepare students for life, citizenship and the world of work; develop a responsive and relevant training geared to the needs of the economy; improve and maintain the quality of the Education System; enhance the performance and status of the Teaching System and to attain competence in the field of education [19].

Government efforts towards making education available to all citizens of Botswana, was further reinforced by the country's vision 2016, which

emphasised on making Botswana a well educated and informed nation by the year 2016 [6]. Education is viewed as a vital tool for empowering Botswana in economic and social participation. The goals of the RNPE and the ideals of vision 2016, envisage school products that can contribute to economic growth and employment creation through quality education and enhanced productivity. The objectives and vision of making Botswana a well educated and informed nation cannot be realised without quality teacher education. This is because, most schools have diverse group of students, which demands that teachers should be knowledgeable in the subject matter and the application of the required teaching methodologies to enhance teaching and learning.

This paper therefore stands on the premise that quality teacher education in Botswana is a crucial requirement for effective teaching and learning. It goes on to discuss the programs, policies and structures that are in place for enhancing quality teacher education in Botswana. The role of Botswana's tertiary education institutions in ensuring quality teacher education is also examined. The paper concludes by identifying the main issues that emerge from the discussion.

1.1. The Growth of Teacher Education in Botswana

Botswana gained political independence from Great Britain in 1966 and has been highly rated as a shining example of democracy in Africa. At independence in 1966, Botswana inherited an education system which was modeled along the same line as that of its ex-colonial master-Great Britain. The education system then, emphasized basic numeracy and literacy, and did not necessarily meet the peculiar needs of the Botswana [5]. This rudimentary system of education was a contributing factor to the low quality of teacher development in Botswana.

The 1951, Bechuanaland Protectorate's (present Botswana) Annual Report indicated that in 1950, out of 487 primary school teachers, only 195 were trained/qualified. Majority of the teachers were expatriates who were recruited from South Africa. With the emergence of secondary schools, such as St. Josephs College, Seepapitso Secondary School and Moeding College, the need arose for the recruitment of more trained and qualified teachers. Hence, in 1966, more expatriate teachers came to

work in Botswana. However, with the establishment of the University of Botswana, and its faculty of education in the 1980s, the supply of qualified teachers improved tremendously. The establishment of two colleges of education in the 1980s also helped to speed up the supply of teachers in Botswana [18]. Presently, there are five colleges of Education in Botswana offering diploma certificates in primary and secondary education. There are faculties of Education at the University of Botswana, Botho University, Limkokwing University and Baisago University College. These institutions offer programmes ranging from post graduate certificate/diploma in Education to Doctorate in Education.

Given that the number of teachers in Botswana has improved tremendously due to the number of teacher training institutions in the country, this paper focuses on the provision of quality teacher education provided by the Botswana education system. It examines the attempts made by Botswana's tertiary education institutions towards educating the educators. Do people see teaching as a profession, where they could step in and step out when it suits them? Are teachers in Botswana trained in such a way that they are effective and efficient to enter and stay in the profession? What efforts are being made by the government to ensure that quality teacher education is provided at the tertiary level? These are the questions which this paper attempts to answer.

1.2. Indicators of Quality Teacher Education

Teacher education involves the policies and procedures that are designed to arm prospective teachers with the attitudes, behaviours, skills and knowledge they need to carry out their duties effectively in the school and wider community. An important contribution of modern education lies in its development of teachers' abilities to examine teaching from the perspective of learners who bring diverse experiences and frames of reference to the teaching and learning environment [11]. Teacher education should aim beyond just giving teacher training to prospective teachers and awarding them certificates after a period of 1-4 years programme.

Effective and quality teacher education programme should be geared towards a redesign of teacher education to strengthen its knowledge base, have a well defined set of professional standards, carefully designed rigorous curriculum, comprehensive and continuous assessment of learning outcomes, rigorous entrance process for the students, connections to both theory and practice, problem – based methods, long teaching practice experiences, continuous professional development and support for faculty members, and the development of powerful teaching methodologies in the student teachers [13][10].

Quality delivery should involve features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs, be exceptional, meets the stated purpose, be efficient and effective, and ensures the delivery of agreed educational standards [9][14]. There is no doubt that quality teacher education and recruitment demand a lot from the education system, in terms of curriculum design and planning, research development, infrastructure and learning resources, student support services and curriculum delivery. Curriculum delivery plays a pivotal role in quality teacher education. It is not enough to design policies; the implementation realities play a major role in the success of any policy.

So, it could be argued that the extent of teacher involvement and commitment, interest and motivation in the teaching preparation process, connections between theory and practice, the use of feedback and involving student teachers in planning activities that involve them, would contribute to quality teacher education. The notion that anyone can teach, or even learn to teach while on the job cannot be substantiated with enough concrete evidence. While it is possible for one with a good knowledge of the subject matter to pick up a teaching job and go to teach, the issue of the pedagogical competence comes to the fore. So, quality teacher education which includes knowledge of subject matter, teaching methods, curriculum development and delivery are crucial requirements for effective teaching and learning.

Teacher educators should be well qualified in the theory and practice of education, to be able to produce effective teachers. Student teachers should be made to recognise the importance of critical thinking, inquiries that involve research activities, conference presentations and attendance, workshops, seminars, case studies, action research and reflective practice. The teacher preparation process in the colleges and universities should expose the student teachers to the demands of the teaching profession, and the need to understand that this profession deals with human beings who have individual differences. The ability of any teacher to recognise the complexity in the characteristics of the learners they teach, make things easier.

1.3. How Effective Teaching and Learning Matter?

Effective teaching and learning could mean different things to different people. While some teachers believe that effective teachers are teachers who are able to cultivate thinking skills, stimulate interest and motivate students to learn, students on

the other hand believe that effective teachers are teachers that are approachable, helpful, knowledgeable and present materials well [15]. An efficient and effective teacher should be equipped with the knowledge and skills that are needed to impart knowledge on the learners for effective and desired learning outcomes to take place.

In planning lessons/lectures, effective teachers apply their research knowledge and the nature of learning that encourages powerful teaching. They put into considerations, the materials to be learned, the socio-economic and cultural background of their students, individual differences in the learning needs of their students, and the environmental conditions under which teaching and learning will take place. The effective teacher does not teach for the sake of teaching, he/she teaches for effective learning to take place.

Effective teaching and learning allows for active involvement of the learners in the learning process, the learners are motivated and benefit from taking responsibility for their learning, the teachers should be knowledgeable in both the subject matter and methodology of instruction, be able to provide a variety of learning activities to engage the learners, the learning resources should be modern and useful, and use of constructive feedback should be encouraged for the learners and teachers. Shernun suggests that learning is enhanced in an atmosphere of cooperative and collaborative learning, and that experience usually improves the quality of teaching. One might argue that experience alone will not guarantee effective teaching and learning to take place. Teachers need to continuously update themselves through research and professional development. They should be involved in workshops, seminars, conferences and journal publications, to keep abreast with the current trends in education.

Effective teaching goes beyond being knowledgeable and sound in one's area of specialization. It requires a lot of commitment and passion for the profession for one to be an effective and super teacher. An effective teacher is the one who combines both pedagogical competence and love for the vocation to go the extra way in helping the learners attain desirable and engaging learning experience. Teaching is a noble profession, and demands a lot of tolerance and patience from those engaged in the profession to make learning a worthwhile experience. An effective teacher makes the learners to acknowledge the fact that their success is his/her priority. The learner should be made to understand that, no child is a failure, if properly taught and guided. The teacher should be able to identify learners who need special attention and know when an incident is significant, be aware of the learners' problems and offer help or even advice. Problems abound in the teaching and

learning process. Some learners may exhibit deviant behaviours. It takes a super teacher, to know how to handle the situation. Children like attention and recognition, and a very different child could be made better if given the attention and love that he/she seeks. This however, does not mean that teachers should over pamper their learners for effective learning to take place. A good combination of positive reinforcement and discipline will go a long way in bringing about good teaching and learning experience.

There is a need for the teacher training curricular to emphasise the use of guidance and counseling in handling learners at all levels of education. Quality teacher education which emphasises on the number of years teachers should be trained, the theory and practice of teaching will help enhance effective teaching and learning.

This paper therefore argues that quality teaching is essential for effective learning and teachers at all levels of education must be appropriately trained and qualified, for effective teaching and learning to be realised in Botswana schools. This paper posits that the quality of teacher education in Botswana is a crucial requirement for effective teaching and learning to be actualized in Botswana schools. Quality teacher education is a major step towards taking Botswana on the road to becoming a well informed and educated nation that will be able to meet the technological challenges of the 21st century.

2. Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature and it involved the use of various interpretative methodologies. The use of the qualitative research approach was necessitated by the need to understand how the respondents will give meaning to and interpret the phenomenon which is being researched from their own subjective position. As Marshall and Rossman put it, qualitative research "offers opportunities for conducting exploratory and descriptive research that assumes the value of context and setting, and allows the researcher to experience a deeper understanding of the participants"[17]. The proposition that quality teacher education in Botswana is a prerequisite for the attainment of vision 2016, can best be researched by the use of a qualitative approach, which allows for an in depth and detailed description of events. Focus group discussions, interviews and document analysis were used as instruments of data collection. This paper was informed by the lecturers in the Faculties of Education and student teachers in three tertiary institutions I visited during my teaching practice supervision. The teaching practice exercise was done between 15th January to 10th February 2014, and the data was collected during this period. Due to time and financial constraints, the institutions

I visited were limited to the ones located in the areas in which I was assigned by the faculty of Education and Continuing studies of Botho University, Botswana, where I teach.

In each of the three institutions, two lecturers in the department of education were interviewed. A total of six lecturers were interviewed using a structured interview format. The interview questions centered around the need for quality teacher education in Botswana and government efforts at ensuring quality teacher education in Botswana. Through the use of focus group discussions, 4 student teachers were interviewed from each of the three tertiary institutions used in the research. Altogether, 12 student teachers were interviewed. The focus group discussions focused on how long, teacher education should take to produce quality teachers. The essence of this question was to find out from the student teachers, who are pursuing Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, if the 1 year fulltime teaching programme is enough to produce quality teachers in Botswana schools. Documentary sources from vision 2016 pamphlet, Education policies of Botswana 1997 and 1994, Books and Journal articles helped augment the source material.

3. Results

Findings from the study are reported in three sections. Section one focuses on the need for quality teacher education in Botswana, while section two focuses on how long teacher education should take ideally, and section three discusses government efforts at ensuring quality teacher education in Botswana.

3.1. The Need for Quality Teacher Education in Botswana

The extent and quality of teacher education is crucial for teachers' effectiveness and efficiency. The quality of teachers is mostly determined by those who are attracted to enter the profession and the type of training they received. The community expects teachers to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the subjects they teach and proficient in pedagogy [1][2][11].

The respondents were of the opinion that quality teacher education in Botswana determines the quality of primary, secondary and tertiary education that exists in the country. This is attributed to the fact that quality teacher education results in a good foundation for students' education. Teachers have a very big role to play in the realisation of Botswana's vision 2016 and post 2016, of being a well informed and educated nation. One of the most effective ways of improving students' learning outcomes is through quality teaching. Quality teaching can only be

delivered by a teacher who has received quality teacher education and is able to use the right teaching methodologies to motivate and facilitate quality teaching and learning.

Botswana needs teachers who are not only well trained to deliver quality teaching to the learners, but also passionate about teaching. It needs those who are ready to step into the profession and remain in the profession. As indicated earlier, teaching is a noble profession, and should be accorded the recognition and respect that it deserves.

Teachers who have the capabilities to develop unique qualities of individual learners, treating every student with respect and recognizing that individual talents abound among learners, are some of the attributes of a competent teacher. Teaching quality is essential, both in the way the teachers use their methodologies and the curriculum aspects of teaching. A good teacher should be able to use various teaching methods and activities and also establish creativity in the teaching and learning process, to bring out the best in the learners [8].

A key problem in teacher education institutions lies in attracting high quality [6][19]. The quality of teachers is to a large extent determined by who are attracted to enter the profession and how they are trained. Every community expects teachers who are knowledgeable in both the subjects they teach and competent in the delivery methodologies. This also is applicable to the teachers' caring skills which is characterised by the teacher's unconditional acceptance and recognition of individual students' needs.

An effective teacher needs to be competent not only in the proper handling of instructional process, but, should be able to develop strategies that will cater for varied learning experiences and those relevant for students with special needs.

Quality teacher education entails academic programmes that will help student teachers exhibit qualities, such as commitment, involvement, being steadfast, friendly without being too lenient, collaborative efforts, technical and professional competence, and the promotion of individual and team success.

3.2. How long should Teacher Education Take to Ensure Quality?

Quality teacher education is a very labour intensive process. Provisions need to be made for both large and small groups, and individual attention. For effective teacher education to take place, some training requires the use of laboratories, information and communication technology and spacious lecture rooms [19].

In Botswana, the main pathways for initial teacher education are the three year diploma in primary education obtained from primary colleges of

education; the three year diploma in secondary education obtained from secondary colleges of education; the bachelor of education degree obtained from the universities; and one year post-graduate diploma in education, for graduates who do not have teaching qualifications [7].

The interviewees generally expressed the following opinion: while the number of years a student teacher spends to receive training as a teacher counts, in terms of content and methodologies of instruction learnt, there is a need for student teachers to spend more time to practice what they have learnt in theory. Teaching is about imparting knowledge, and a good teacher is the one who is able to put into practice what has been learnt in theory. Student teachers need at least three years of training, coupled with good and long teaching practice to be able to do well on the job. The current six weeks teaching practice in some institutions in Botswana is not enough.

In South Africa, the balance of time devoted to teaching practice throughout a four year B.Ed course is adequate. Students spend six weeks on teaching practice in schools for each of the first three years and six months in the final year [19]. This approach could be used in other countries, including Botswana, to ensure that we produce quality teachers who will lead the country to realise the vision of a well informed and educated nation beyond 2016.

Student teachers should acquire good teaching skills to make them competent teachers, and teacher education should be geared towards helping the trainee teachers apply theory to teaching practice in the classroom setting. There should be adequate practice so that pre-service teachers can engage in hands-on-practice before gaining employment in the teaching profession. The extent and quality of teacher education are important factors for teachers' effectiveness and development, as well as for the promotion of powerful teaching [11][13].

Darling-Hammond reiterates that, for teaching practice to be effective, student teachers need to spend at least 30 weeks of supervised practicum and student teaching opportunities in the field [12]. This might be considered a daunting task, considering the fact that for some trainee teachers, a great deal depends on the nature of school to which he/she is assigned, the quality of the school's leadership, the interest of the internal staff-supervisor, and whether the school is a good example of good practice [19]. Some student teachers have not had it easy in terms of the attitudes and teaching styles of the teachers in the practicing schools, who are meant to be their internal supervisors.

3.3. Government Efforts at Ensuring Quality Teacher Education in Botswana

Botswana is committed to the education of all children, and to the course of making Botswana a well educated and informed nation. To this end, the government believes that the quality of instruction is one of the most important determinants of the learning environment. Teachers as agents of curriculum implementation are therefore, central to the education system and can make or break the system [19].

Government sees the enhancement of the status and motivation of teachers as a national priority, in order to enable them carry out their duties effectively. Efforts have been made to improve both pre-service and in-service training for teachers. A teaching qualification is required for one to get and retain a teaching job in Botswana. The quality and training of teachers is being improved, and the expansion of training capacity is seen as an urgent priority[6].

In its efforts to improve the quality of teacher education in Botswana, the government has:

- Raised the entry requirements of primary school teachers to a minimum of Cambridge Secondary Certificate level (COSC/ O level) and the minimum teacher qualification is now a three-year diploma programme. University of Botswana, which is the country's premier university, now offers a bachelor's degree in primary education. Botho University which is the first indigenous private university in Botswana will be starting a bachelor's degree programme in primary education anytime this year, upon approval from the Ministry of Education and Skills Development.
- Remodeled primary schools teacher preparation to provide subject specialization at the primary school level, in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. New innovations such as guidance and counseling, special education, remedial teaching and innovative methods of reading have been included in the teacher training programme at the primary school level.
- Offered primary education school teachers the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications to a minimum level of diploma. This could be done either through part-time or full-time training. The government policy initiatives have helped tremendously to increase the number of teachers with diploma qualifications by 54.7 percent, that is, from 3 822 in 2005 to 5 912 in 2008 [7]. Government's efforts to encourage quality teacher education at the primary education level are very significant, judging from the fact that the primary school level is the foundation of basic education. It is important that primary school children be exposed to a good and solid foundation in education, to enable Botswana realise the vision of being a well educated and

informed nation by 2016, and even beyond 2016.

In addition to the above initiatives by government towards improving the quality of teacher education in Botswana, a number of projects have been introduced to improve the quality and competencies of teachers. For instance, the Entrepreneurial Education popularly known as; “know your business” has been introduced in collaboration with the International Labor Organisation, for trainers and teachers in secondary, vocational and higher education. The purpose of this laudable programme is to equip the youths of Botswana with skills and knowledge needed to prepare them for the world of work, and which will lead to the realisation of the vision 2016 pillar of a prosperous, productive and innovative nation [7].

The Department of Teacher Training and Development undertook two important studies on further training of teachers to ensure quality at the primary and secondary education levels. The aim of the studies was to inform policy initiatives, and the development of a ten-year Master Plan for training teachers. The study will also go a long way in helping the Ministry of Education and Skills Development to align teacher education to the needs of the education system, based on the aims of the 1994 Revised National Education Policy and Vision 2016 of producing a well informed, productive and technologically innovative citizens.

There is an ongoing Teacher Education Programme to determine how well the programmes are responding to the needs and aspirations of Botswana. The exercise will in particular, examine curriculum to determine their effectiveness and usefulness in producing teachers with desirable qualities, who will lead the country to the realisation of vision 2016 and beyond. At the Tertiary Education level, the credentials and qualifications of lecturers will be reviewed. The aim is to determine their levels of competence in facilitating acquisition of content, professional attitudes, skills and knowledge by student teachers. A teaching qualification is now a requirement for one to get a full time teaching job in Botswana. At Botho University College where I teach, lecturers without teaching qualification (s) are encouraged and sponsored to acquire a post-graduate Certificate/Diploma in Higher Education. Botho University uses demonstration teaching as the main method of interview in the recruitment process of lecturers. The reason behind this is to ensure that the lecturer-to-be is competent enough to teach at the university. Botswana government has also greatly improved the recruitment procedures of teachers in order to get suitable and quality teachers, for instance, screening, short listing, interview and candidate performance form the basis of selection and appointment.

4. Conclusion

Quality teacher education is needed for Botswana to be able to realise its own vision of being a well informed, educated and innovative nation by the 2016 and beyond. Findings from this study indicate that Botswana government is determined to produce teachers who will be able to drive the students towards the realisation of vision 2016 and beyond. Teacher education is carried out through various institutions of higher learning in the country such as, Colleges of Education for both primary and secondary school teachers, government and private universities which have faculties of education that train teachers. A teaching qualification is now a compulsory requirement for one to get a full time teaching job in Botswana schools. The post-graduate diploma students that I interviewed indicated that they learnt a lot from the one year teaching programme. They admitted that the course was relevant and appropriate enough to equip them with the methodologies of instruction.

Teacher educators are one of the major stakeholders in the business of educating the educators. They play a vital role in promoting reforms and improving the quality of teaching at the teacher training institutions and universities. They have a part to play in the implementation realities of quality teacher education, to produce teachers who are knowledgeable and possess critical thinking skills, and creativity to foster effective teaching and learning in Botswana schools.

This research is important in generating primary data in quality teacher education in Botswana, which is one of the least researched areas in the country. The findings will be useful in helping policy makers to know where and how to improve on the existing scenario/system/situation.

The question to be addressed however, is the period of teaching practice availed to student teachers in Botswana teacher education institutions. If quality teacher education is to be a successful venture in Botswana, teacher training institutions and universities should increase the duration of teaching practice to a minimum of three months. This is very important in order to enable student teachers practice effectively what they are taught in theory. In South Africa, which is a neighbouring country to Botswana, students spend six weeks on teaching practice in each of the first three years, and six months in their fourth year of Bachelor of Education programme. This is worthy of emulation by other countries in the region, including Botswana. A good combination of theory and practice will go a long way in producing teachers competent enough to help Botswana realise quality teaching and learning.

There is a strong relationship between quality teacher education and the quality of teaching a

teacher exhibits in the classroom. Quality teacher training should therefore involve a long preparation in terms of the contact hours, curriculum design, planning, comprehensive preparation skills and competencies for real classroom teaching. The teacher educators should employ interactive and participatory approaches in teaching to encourage constructive learning among student teachers. Teacher educators should constantly strive to improve in their profession, by engaging in educational research beyond their local and institutional issues, so as to equip themselves with new perspectives in the teaching profession. If those involved in educating teachers deliver quality teacher training to their students, their products will be good enough to offer quality teaching, which will help Botswana become a well educated and informed nation by 2016 and beyond.

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