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Critical Appraisal of Teacher Education Programmes in Achieving Curriculum Goals in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper makes a critical appraisal of teacher education programmes in achieving curriculum goals. Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community. Although ideally it should be conceived of, and organized as, a seamless continuum, teacher education is often divided into several stages, especially in Kenya. This paper, therefore, makes a critical evaluation of teacher education programmes in the Kenya school curriculum. It develops an understanding of the concepts in teacher education and the diversity of curriculum for teacher preparation at the respective stages from the neophyte or pre-primary stages to continuing education. It further examines the educational trends of post-independent Kenya in respect to teacher preparation as well as the diverse global perspectives. A comprehensive landscape of teacher education in Kenya is provided, drawing from the history. Finally, the paper dissects the emerging challenges of teacher education in Kenya in the realm of attainment of Kenya's Vision 2030 and makes recommendation of the prospects in this field associated with this kind of education in the attaining of the overall goals of education in Kenya

Keywords: Teacher Education; Curriculum Goals; Teacher Quality

1. Introduction

1.1. The Concept of Teacher Education

Teacher education is an important component of education. Through it, school teachers who are considered mentors of young people are prepared and produced (Lucas 1972). Normally, it is designed, developed and administered to produce school teachers for established system of education (Kafu, 2003). Its importance in human life has been recognized for a long time and hence, teacher education is the main pillar of any established system of education and custodian of the society's culture. The government of Kenya identifies the critical role of teacher education in Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988 stating that there is an urgent need to develop and promote teacher education programme, if the administration of education in the country is to succeed and national

development is to be accelerated (Republic of Kenya, 1988). Teacher education is construed to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, the school and the wide community (Wong, 2004).

Teacher educators put together programs of course work and experiences with the goal of educating teachers whose knowledge, skills, and habits of mind will intermingle to create pleasing patterns of practice called quality teaching. Unfortunately, neither decades of research nor volumes of policy documents on quality teaching and teacher education have yielded a definitive way to make those patterns consistent across contexts with different students, teachers, subject matter, and curricula, among other characteristics (Murnane & Steele, 2007; Kafu, 2002; Otiende & Sifuna, 2004).

Teacher education programs are traditionally not developed based on one well-formulated, concrete, and unified conception of quality teaching (Sykes, Bird, & Kennedy, 2010). Rather, teacher education programs typically form beguiling patterns composed of disparate bits of course work and experience. Instead of providing clarity of purpose, these various notions further complicate the transformation of teacher education programs into purveyors of quality teaching.

From the perspective of quality teaching as cognitive resource, some teacher education programs focus on changing prospective teachers' beliefs through engaging them in reflections about their own learning and teaching experiences and challenging them with alternative ideas and models of teaching (Kennedy, 1991; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Research on the effects of such teacher education practices on engendering prospective teachers' conceptual transformation has shown mixed and weak results. A number of countries and states have put in place comprehensive systems of support to help beginning teachers during their first years in the profession. Elements of such a programme can include mentoring or the allocation to each beginning teacher of an experienced teacher, specifically trained as a mentor; the mentor may provide emotional and professional support and guidance; a peer network for mutual support but also for peer learning ; input from educational experts to help the beginning teacher relate what he or she learned in college with classroom reality and finally support for the process of self-reflection that all teachers engage in. Such that such programmes can: increase the retention of beginning teachers in the profession and improve teaching performance; promote the teachers' personal and professional well-being (**Ashby, et al., 2008).**

1.2. Background and Context of Teacher Education

For decades, addressing the problem of teacher shortages has been one of the most critical policy concerns in teacher education (Murnane & Steele, 2007; Kafu, 2002; Otiende & Sifuna, 2004). This shortage has been driven in part by the costs of preparing to teach through a traditional route, coupled with modest salaries as compared with

other professions, and the possibility of poor working conditions– each a barrier for those who would otherwise want to teach (Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991). The *traditional route* to teaching is that prospective teachers complete an undergraduate or graduate teacher-education program prior to becoming certified to teach, and then, they teach full-time (Dangel & Guyton, 2005). Typically, therefore, teacher certification programmes consist of two to four years of preparation prior to teaching depending on the level in respective countries. In Kenya, teachers trained to teach in primary schools normally take two years while those trained to teach secondary schools take three to four years.

Kenya currently has twenty-two public universities offering initial teacher training courses, whilst there are 21 public teacher training colleges offering certificate courses for training in primary teaching and 3 public teacher training colleges offering diploma level training. There are several private institutions offering a similar range of programmes (Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Board, 2014). Teacher education in Kenya is provided for the following levels: pre-primary (certificate level), primary (certificate level), secondary (diploma level) and secondary (graduate level). Programmes of study are also offered at university level (for secondary school teachers) and teacher training college level. Pre-primary and primary teacher training courses focus on pedagogy and, where appropriate, subject knowledge content. Secondary teacher training courses concentrate on subject knowledge in two subject areas and the pedagogy on the teaching thereof. In addition, students are required to follow courses in education theory.

The balance of time allocated to theory and practice is a matter of debate, with the argument now moving towards a greater emphasis on teaching and teaching methods, leaving the more theoretical aspects of education to be addressed in post-graduate programmes. Researchers have pointed to the questionable impact of much teacher training, arguing that working habits acquired by persons who become teachers in the early stages of their own schooling tend to stay with learners to some degree throughout their learning or teaching careers. The hardest element to change and the major challenge facing the profession concerns changing instructional practices towards greater collaborative relationships between teachers and learners. Researchers who have conducted learning assessments for lower graders in Kenya have recently confirmed that there is ineffective teaching in schools, which leads to low levels of achievement. Teaching and learning are what ultimately make a difference in the mind of the learner, and thus affect knowledge, skills, attitudes and the capacity of young people to contribute to contemporary issues. Therefore, action needs to be taken to improve teaching and learning processes in Kenyan schools so as to develop an appropriately skilled human resource for the country.

By contrast, in the United States, prospective teachers who choose a fast-track *alternative route* typically receive 4 to 8 weeks of preparation prior to beginning full-time teaching (Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2005), and their teacher training then continues part-time during their first year(s) as full-time teachers. This more rapid entry into the profession has the potential to be more attractive to prospective teachers than even direct monetary incentives (Liu, Johnson, & Peske, 2004). Twenty percent to 30% of new teachers are drawn from alternative certification (AC) programs (National Research Council, 2010). According to the *National Center for Alternative Certification*'s annual survey, this proportion is vastly larger than it was 20 years ago, when virtually all new teachers completed traditional programs and only a few thousand were alternatively certified (Feistritzer, 2007).

As generally described, these programs differ from traditional certification (TC) programs in the following ways: They often seek to fill specific geographic or content area teacher shortages, they seek to enlarge the teaching pool by recruiting a diverse group of prospective teachers, and AC program participants can become full-time teachers after as little as a few weeks of pre-service training. There are several reasons for the dramatic increase in the number of AC programs. First, AC programs were originally developed in the 1980s to address teacher shortages by facilitating the entry of individuals into the profession (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Second, critics of traditional university based teacher education argued that local teacher preparation programs, run by school districts, could supply teachers better matched to the needs of school districts (Grossman & Loeb, 2008). A third reason for the increase is that prospective teachers value the incentives associated with AC programs, in particular the opportunity to bypass most certification prerequisites, such as coursework, and quickly begin teaching (Johnson & Liu, 2004). However, differences between the training experiences of teachers in TC and AC programs could have implications for teachers' feelings of preparedness, their persistence in the teaching profession, and ultimately, student outcomes. Thus, to understand the first link in the chain that connects teacher preparation to student outcomes, it is necessary to ask whether program features play a role in determining feelings of preparedness among alternatively certified teachers.

The general consensus is that teacher education in Kenya has not kept pace with developments that have occurred throughout most developed countries. Policy framework for teacher education is absent while at the same time teacher education and the teaching profession are not well defined as teachers do not have a clearly defined career development plan. To make matters more complicated, few teacher educators have teacher training qualifications and even fewer have recent and relevant primary or secondary school teaching experience.

In the face of resource constraints, there is neither policy for the recruitment and career development of teacher educators as a specialist cadre within the teaching

profession, nor is there a clear career and professional route to becoming a teacher educator. It has been acknowledged that at the subsector levels, the teacher education curriculum for ECDE, primary and secondary school teachers is outdated, overloaded and very theoretical in nature.

There is a weak link between teacher training colleges and higher education institutions, especially universities who train them. Neither teacher education nor teaching has been professionalized in Kenya. Currently, the minimum entry grade to primary teacher education is 'C Plain' (at KCSE) while at secondary level, students entering teacher training at universities are not the highest qualified students. Furthermore, there is no adequate screening of applicants for pre-service training to ensure that only those who have an interest in teaching join teacher training colleges.

2. Curricular Strategies for Quality Teacher Education

In the existing literature, teaching quality is neither a widely agreed upon nor uniformly accepted concept. Instead, it is defined very differently or is grounded in different assumptions. These differences can be seen in at least three perspectives associated with teachers' cognitive resources, their performance, and their effect (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). Empirical support for the conception of quality teaching for each of these is often weak, inconsistent, or even contradictory. Quality teaching from a cognitive resource perspective is related to the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions teachers bring into the profession. Several notions that appear central to policy debates related to teaching are adduced.

First, quality teaching is linked to one's competence as demonstrated on academic and professional tests, and such competence is presumably one of the central predictors for how effective a teacher becomes. This competence as evidenced by test high scores in national examinations such as Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCSE) and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

Secondly, quality teaching is associated with the credentials one holds for teaching. This notion surfaces especially during discussions of whether all students have been taught by teachers who hold licenses in the fields that they are teaching. It is also a factor in debates about whether or not the teaching profession needs to be opened for easy entry (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Another notion about quality teaching from a cognitive resource perspective assumes that teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions are central predictors for quality teaching (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Shulman, 1987). Indeed, enhancing teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions has been the focus of numerous teacher education and professional development offerings over the past 20 years (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). However,

empirical support for the above conceptions of teaching quality from a cognitive resource stance is often weak. Wayne & Youngs (2003) found the evidence of the influences of teachers' test scores, course work and degrees, and certification status on student achievement gains to be minimal and, in many cases, conflicting. Other research on the effects of teachers' content knowledge on their students' performance also showed either a weak or insignificant relationship (Kersting, Givvin, Sotelo, & Stigler, 2010).

A third perspective on quality teaching is that of performance—what teachers do in their practice (Silvestro, Freeborne, Hunsberger, Lake, & Mackey, 1993). We see this perspective in prevailing notions about quality teaching. For example, it is assumed that the particular things that teachers do in their classroom teaching contribute to expected student learning. This has been a central assumption underlying the process–product research on teacher effectiveness (Brophy, 1989). The observation of teachers' classroom performance is also an important factor in evaluating and certifying teachers (Ladson-Billings & Darling-Hammond, 2000)

Teacher's experience has been linked with teacher performance to quality teaching; both in and outside of their classrooms. Comprehensive teacher mentoring programs and long-term professional collaborations and supports for teacher learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) are based partly upon this notion. In such programs, teachers are engaged in learning and refining different kinds of teaching activities in and outside of classrooms supported by teaching models, resources, logistical changes, emotional assistance, and collegial culture (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002).

Scholars contend that no one pedagogical or managerial behavior is effective for teaching all types of students (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; García, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010). Thus, the features of quality teaching differ depending on who the students are, what they bring into the learning context, and how these factors are related to the content knowledge that they will learn. With this conception of quality teaching as a base, culturally responsive teaching was proposed to teach students with differing cultural and racial backgrounds or socioeconomic status (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and subject-specific pedagogy was developed for teaching different subject content (Ball & Bass, 2001; Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee, 2005). However, empirical support for each of these notions of quality teaching from a performance perspective is scant.

A meta-analysis of research on teaching effectiveness (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007) showed that the culminating effect size of the influence of general classroom teaching behaviors (e.g., time use, structured teaching, cooperative learning, feedback, reinforcement, and differentiated instruction) on student learning outcomes was very small. Quality teacher education can be enhanced from the perspective of quality teaching. As a cognitive resource, teacher education programs should focus on changing

prospective teachers' beliefs through engaging them in reflections about their own learning and teaching experiences and challenging them with alternative ideas and models of teaching (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998).

Research on the effects of such teacher education practices on engendering prospective teachers' conceptual transformation has shown mixed and weak results (Richardson, 1996). Other programs evidence a cognitive resource perspective by focusing on the development of prospective teachers' subject and pedagogical content knowledge and engaging students in thinking and analyzing the situations of teaching where such knowledge is put into practice (Ball & Bass, 2001). Indeed, enhancing pedagogical content knowledge enhances the subsequent effectiveness of teachers (Ball et al., 2008; Grossman et al., 2005). However, there are certain measures that warrant further review. For example, teacher education researchers may want to incorporate whether new teachers envision teaching as a long-term career or a short-term one (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001), whether they are motivated by the chance to do meaningful work and their life histories and predispositions related to childhood and schooling (Chin & Young, 2007; Thomas, Friedman-Nimz, & Mahlios, 2005). Moreover, given that alternatively certified teachers are recruited to teach in high schools in Kenya, additional research that incorporates an extensive analysis of school context and how that context interacts with personal background and with preparation program features is needed.

3. Conclusions and Further Research

This paper has argued that in the wake of dearth of rigid structures and systems of teacher education in Kenya, there is great need to professionalize teaching and teacher education. One way is through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers and teacher educators. This can be achieved through undertaking an in-depth study of teacher education in Kenya focusing on improving the quality of teachers and teacher educators.

Also, developing and implementing a teacher education and management policy, is something that needs urgent institution. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should make this proposed policy a priority framework and teacher development policy. The Teachers Service Commission should implement a scheme for all teachers and teacher trainers to develop their own plan and to monitor their performance and achievement on the basis of these plans. It is proposed that there be established a teacher education directorate to co-ordinate the development of teacher education nationally.

Finally, there is need to engage the capacity of teachers in developing and using school based assessment of learning achievements, paying special attention to the acquisition of literacy, numeracy and enquiry skills and broadly to the attainment of the cognitive, psycho-motor and affective domains of learning to the realization of the broad goals and objectives of education. The paper, therefore, proposes a persuasive new rationale for democratic teacher education, but inevitably questions arise as to whether such teaching practices will produce the type of student learning outcomes expected by policy makers and the public, especially in Kenya.

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