

Full Length Research Paper

Invigorating the Teaching Profession for the 21st Century Teacher in Zambia

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Abstract

This paper emanates from the long-drawn out years of teaching experience of the authors and an interrogation of literature on the topic under consideration. The paper is a mouth piece for transforming the teaching profession for better teachers and school administrators in Zambia. It further provides a progressive 21st century vision for the professional teacher by reflecting ideas and experiences of serving teachers and administrators in our classrooms and schools.

Keywords: Teaching Profession, 21st Century, Teacher, School.

INTRODUCTION

There is a lot that is needed to prepare teachers for an increasingly competitive global society in Zambia. The Ministry of Education, cooperating partners and key stakeholders do more to ensure that teaching is very much respected and supported as a profession. In addition, seasoned and competent teachers go an extra mile in ensuring that they guide learners and parents.

It is appalling to learn that teachers in Zambia are somewhat not treated like professionals. Albeit being at the center of any form of development (human, economic, social, religious, and political) and playing an inestimable noble task, teachers are by far taken as professionals. Two contradictory perspectives advanced for this. On one hand, stakeholders, learners and the school community contend that teachers no longer carry themselves as they should, thus losing their well-deserved place as professionals. On the other hand, it is common-practice to hear teachers complain that when they are in the profession; they are not supported,

compensated, or promoted based on their accomplishments. Often times, teachers work environments are unfavorable; they are treated like typical industry work stations with rigid work conditions. For instance, those in rural and remote areas are overloaded, deprived of social and health amenities. Such working conditions discourage and demotivate and restrict teachers' opportunities. This puts the teaching profession in ridicule. Consequently, potential teachers shun joining the profession, while young teachers increasing leave or abandon the profession.

Invigorating the teaching profession calls for a far-reaching change in how academics design and implement curricula, give credit for learning, provide academic counseling and motivate teachers. Learning from countries in Africa and elsewhere, schools and teachers must brace themselves for arduous work. Over the years, the teaching profession has been characterized by 'self-made teachers', 'self-proclaimed teachers', and 'impostor teachers' teachers of all sorts. Many describe today's teachers as different from yesterdays. One wonders in which way they differ. We contend that to attract 'selfless teachers', 'teachers with a

passion for the job' into the field, the Government must increase earnings for teachers. Furthermore, there is need to create career and leadership opportunities in classrooms and schools. This will retain teachers in the classroom and stop them from switching to administration and other specialties to improve their earnings.

Objectives of the study

- 1). Describe teacher educators' viewpoints regarding the teaching Profession for the 21st Century.
- 2). Explore viewpoints of teachers entering the Profession from multidiscipline's.
- 3). Investigate career pathways for teachers and their Professional advancement
- 4). Describe standardization measures of the teaching profession in Zambia.

Significance of the study

Invigorating the teaching profession for the betterment of teachers and education administrators is a potent force for the achievement of quality education. This is because teachers and educational administrators are the guardians of the ethics, norms and traditional values of the particular society. A teacher is seen as the mirror through which good manners, morals, nonviolence and community loyalty reflect.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was purely qualitative in nature and employed a case study approach.

Population

All teachers, teacher educators, school administrators and education standards officers.

Sample Size

A total of 50 participants were sampled: 20 teachers, 10 teacher educators, 10 school administrators; and 10 education standards officers.

Sample Procedure

A non-random sampling method was used to sample participants. In particular, the convenient sampling technique was used.

Data Collection Tools

Predominantly, data was collected using the following tools: field notes, interviews, conversations, document review, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self.

Data Analysis

Data coding and transcription preceded the categorization into themes. Narratives obtained from the interviews were triangulated with data obtained from other sources mentioned.

FINDINGS

Findings of the study were discussed in themes as depicted below.

Teacher Educators' viewpoints

The majority of teacher educators unanimously agree that the teaching profession has deep problems, ranging from socio-economic, moral, and political to cultural issues. Today, more than ever, both teacher educators and stakeholders (parents, civil society, community) criticize the caliber of teachers and their attitude towards their profession; and inability of teachers to form a synergy between pedagogy and practice. This is in line with what The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (2010) holds that there is need to support professional learning communities that enable educators to collaborate, share best practices and integrate 21st century skills into classroom practice.

Findings of the study also reveal that many ineffectual teachers come into and linger in the profession, while many effective teachers leave. This scenario is further discussed under three subheadings below: entering the profession from multidisciplines; career pathways for teachers and their professional advancement; and standardization of the teaching profession in Zambia.

Entering the Profession from multidiscipline's

Findings revealed a steady increase in the number of people with diverse specialties to take up teaching positions in primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions. The majority of school administrators and teacher trainers contend that professionals from other disciplines who switch to the teaching profession do not learn the psychology of a child (learner) comprehensively. This hiatus makes them fail to have respect and regard for learners as full-fledged teacher trained professionals do. People who enter the teaching profession (from fields like business studies, accountancy, engineering, Agriculture, Military) by merely

studying a teaching methodology supplementary subject tend to view learners as commodities (they can buy and sell them, in short trade them). According to the participants (school administrators and teacher trainers) these teachers often times have dictatorial tendencies in school leadership and management; interaction with learners and have a compromised teaching disposition. The foregoing corroborates with the observation by Ingvarson et al (2014) that 'it is increasingly important that the transition into teaching be a carefully staged process'.

Findings of the study also point to the need for the teaching profession to devise robust and broad teacher education programs for practitioners from multidisciplinary fields entering the teaching profession. This finding corroborates with current isolated practices in many tertiary institutions (Technical Vocational TC, University of Zambia, Zambian Open University, Evelyn Hone College, Kwame Nkrumah University) However, there are also pathways in place for career changers who have extensive content knowledge and experience in another field, but need an entryway into the classroom that matches their professional history.

Career Pathways for Teachers and Their Professional Advancement

Ministry of Education Statistical Bulletins (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013) clearly show the huge teacher gaps between learners and classrooms. Increasing teacher attrition rates, brain drain and teachers deserting the teaching profession point to the need for refashioning the career pathways for teachers and provide guidance on their professional advancement. The majority of head teachers, education standards officers and human resources officers (education) observed that there are many teachers who pursue Development Studies, Public Administration, Law, and Agriculture and yet remain in the classroom for years and fail to switch to their new professions. This was blamed on inadequate knowledge and information on career pathways and professional development.

Furthermore, findings indicate laxity on the part of Ministry of Education regarding promotion of and recognizance of subject areas like guidance and counseling and adult education. The University of Zambia was the leading institution that offered adult education diploma, degree and master's degree. In the past 10 decades the Zambian Open University, Technical, Vocational Teachers Training College (TVTC), National In-Service Teachers Training College (NISTICO) has also been offering guidance and counseling.

Despite the strides made by these tertiary institutions, the graduates who pursue these two programs are not recognized, not upgraded and not positioned on the establishment.

Standardization of the Teaching Profession in Zambia

Three major achievements have been scored by the Ministry of Education in Zambia regarding standardization of the teaching profession. The first one involved profiling a teacher as one who takes two teaching subjects over a specified period of time in the course of study (Diploma or Degree). The second one has seen the revision of the curriculum to make it suit the changing times and needs of learners in the 21st century. The third aspect saw the formulation of the teaching council. Interrogation of literature (Kelly, Achola, Kaluba, Nkwanga and Nilsson, 1986; MoE, 1976, 1992, 1996, 1999; Duncan, Arne, 2009; Lim, Cher Ping, Ching Sing Chai, and Daniel Churchill, 2010) shows the insurmountable effort put in to standardize the teaching profession in Zambia and elsewhere.

An Invigorated Vision of Teaching

This paper advocates for a triad approach to invigorate teaching for the 21st century revolving around the school, classroom and environment. This can be achieved by transforming the classroom into a place for teachers to apply their expert skill, knowledge and judgment to respond to learners' needs. Even though it is common to find our schools packed with a 100 (plus or minus) learners (MoE, Statistical Bulletins, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013), the findings of this study point to the need for structuring classrooms so as to make the most of the instruction. This corroborates with findings of many studies (Kate Walsh, 2013) which advocate for the creation of learning practices, human support and physical environments that will support the teaching and learning of 21st century skill outcomes; an equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies and resources.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that a lot is needed to prepare teachers for an increasingly competitive global society in Zambia. It has also brought out a triad approach to invigorating teaching revolving around the school, classroom and environment. In addition, the article has also discussed standardization of the teaching profession in Zambia; career pathways for teachers and their professional advancement; entering the profession from multidiscipline's; teacher educators' viewpoints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1). The Teaching Council of Zambia should ensure that the 21st century teaching profession is fashioned around

a school model and culture guided by the profiled teacher, revised curriculum and following the teaching council norms.

2). MoGE should provide clear-cut career paths and professional development.

3). MoGE should promote head teachers who are flexible, transformational and progressive to engage teachers in leadership decisions at the school.

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