Inculcating Professional Teaching Skills in Graduate Teachers: A Case Study of Post Graduate Diploma Education Zimbabwe Open University Students

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Abstract: *The graduate teacher brings to the classroom experiences, beliefs, practices and theories to teaching. These beliefs might be congruent or at logger heads with the principles and beliefs of the teacher educator. Failure to communicate effectively between the post graduate student teacher and the teacher educator can lead to controversy. Mayer and Austin (1999) pointed out that helping student teachers to negotiate their own professional identities is central to the supervision process. Therefore there is a need for positive, personal and professional relationships between the teacher educator and student teacher, involving open and frank communication. It is a necessary prerequisite for a successful practicum that students have an teacher educator who is communicative, reflective and supportive and has clear beliefs and philosophies in regard to teaching and supervision. Learning to teach is an activity that depends upon social interactions, and for this reason teacher educators should supervise student teachers' learning by being supportive of their acquisition of professional and practical skills. An analysis of the supervision process by Zimbabwe Open University will be critically examined in order to appreciate to what extent the post graduate students are acquiring the necessary professional skills through interaction with the teacher educator and mentor.*

I.   Introduction

The economy of Zimbabwe has been performing very poorly in the past 15 years. Most industries have closed and the main employment has been in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Graduates from the various institutions with varied qualifications have been absorbed as teachers. The challenge has been that these prospective teachers do not have the professional qualifications to teach in schools. In 2015 a Ministry of education Circular stipulated that any teacher without a professional teacher qualification would be terminated. Consequently a large number of graduates enrolled for the Post graduate diploma in education with Zimbabwe Open university. It is in the light of these developments that this study was done.

II.   Statement Of The Problem

The decline of the Zimbabwean economy has led to more and more graduates reverting to teaching as a livelihood. A large number of these graduates do not have the necessary professional skills to teach. As a result in 2015 the Ministry of primary and secondary education threatened to terminate the contracts of any teacher without a professional qualification. A large number of graduates from different institutions subsequently enrolled with Zimbabwe Open University to study the post graduate diploma in education. The study aims to investigate the role and challenges that the teacher educator and student face in the supervision process.

III.   Research Questions

What challenges are teachers facing in order to develop the classroom management and delivery skills? To what extent is the teacher educator equipped with the skills of developing student teacher professional skills? How should the teacher educator relate with the student teacher in order to inculcate professional skills in the student teacher?

IV.   Methodology

The current research involved a case study of four teacher educators working in collaboration with the Faculty of Education at Zimbabwe Open University. These teacher educators had been identified as being effective in supervision by both student teachers and visiting lecturers. Four groups of second -year students undertaking the last practicum volunteered to take part in semi-structured group interviews. Data were collected from teacher educators and student teachers by means of a semi-structured face-to-face audiotape interview. The interviews were transcribed by an independent person working outside the university. The questions asked related to interviewees articulating their own beliefs in relation to good practice in terms of being teacher educators and in the supervision of student teachers. Other questions asked of teacher educators related to a model or style of supervision they might use and if they had changed this in any way in response to individual student teacher needs. Questions for student teachers were similar but they were also asked about the skills of

supervision they preferred. Responses were analyzed and grouped into common sets of themes; for example, the importance of teacher educators as role models, personal pedagogy, reflection, feedback, communication.

The study used interpretivism as a framework and approach to illuminate the importance of supervision in the professional growth and challenges for student teachers in their teaching practice. Denscombe (2007) wrote that case study is the examination of an instance in action: with a view to giving a more in-depth account of events, relationships and experiences which occur in an instance often in small scale research. Case study in these instances is not viewed as a standard methodological package: rather it is seen as a more eclectic approach to research and seeks to probe, observe and understand. Case study can thus, very usefully provide the data for reflection on detailed practice and its wider implications, in this case for supervision practices and teacher educator professional development.

Much has been written and many studies completed about the role of the teacher educator and it is evident that they have a big responsibility in the supervision and mentoring of the student teacher. Not only should there be an open and frank relationship between the two but also a provision for student teachers to become more active and critical learners rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Pinder, 2003). Active participation will help student teachers acquire the knowledge, thinking and behaviour associated with becoming a teacher and teach them the subtle and overt ways of acting like a teacher (Ovens, 2003). Turnbull (2002) stated that effective supervision begins with the development of common principles between the teacher educator and student teacher from which a teaching philosophy can be derived. In relation to teaching, principles can be defined as the ethical guidelines for the philosophy and values that underpin practice. This means for student teachers they have to know how to interact with other adults including their associate teacher and other teachers at the school and work effectively with them asking for guidance and assistance where necessary and building up an effective teaching and learning relationship.

The role of the teacher educator has a number of inherent challenges. Teacher educators can be viewed by student teachers as instructional coaches who give physical and psychological space in their classroom to try out strategies while supporting student teachers with feedback, modeling and teaching materials (Fayne, 2007). Beck and Kosnik (2002) identified seven themes from interviews with student teachers about the supervision they said they required from teacher educators. These included emotional support, shared authority, collaborative planning, flexibility, feedback, modeling of effective practice and organizing challenging but manageable workloads. But equally the responsibility can be placed with the student teachers for the learning process to be successful. They need to be prepared to be open and responsive to suggestions, participate in discussions with associate teachers and reflect critically on their own progress (Ball, 2000).

One role of pre-service education is to help student teachers develop and reflect on teaching skills so they can learn from these experiences. Learning from experience is an important teaching trait described by Schon (1983) as reflective practice. In order to observe quality teaching, student teachers need to be placed in an environment that encourages learning and where the associate teacher has clear supervision and mentoring practices. Hence associate teachers need to "think consciously about their role as teacher educators and engage in the same sort of self-study and critique of their own practice" (Zeichner & Gore , 1990, p.123). Most teacher educators involved in supervision are forced to bring their own practice under reflective analysis and find that this contributes to their own professional renewal (Blunden, 2000). For that reason then the supervisory relationship needs to be interactive, challenging and responsive so that individual student teachers' learning differences, approaches and preferences can be accommodated within the supervisory relationship.

Student teachers are learners, and like the pupils they teach, they need knowledgeable others to help them on this journey. The knowledgeable others (teacher educators in this case) need to work with the student teacher helping them connect with prior learning experiences, reflect on them and interpret them (Hoben, 2006) and then use this knowledge to improve their teaching. In order for teacher educators to realize their own potential, they have to create significant learning experiences for future teachers. They need to think about change in relation to empowering student teachers to want to learn, and being able to collaborate with associate teachers (McDonald, 2001) in the classroom. This argument aligns with the move over recent years from a teacher-student centred approach of teacher educator in student supervision to a more learner-dominated approach of inquiry and investigation. It has also led to a change from the teacher educator being the goal setter, problem solver and decision maker to the student teacher and working in a collaborative, problem solving way with joint decision making and goal setting.

The focus of the research was to look at supervision practices and styles student teachers were more or less responsive to. Zimpher & Howey (1987) in their research delineate four types of teacher competence that should be addressed by supervisors: technical (skills), clinical (practical reasoning and problem solving), personal (intra and interpersonal abilities) and critical (recognition of social, ethical and moral issues). Each of these types of competence has a supervisory approach. The key to success is to know when to be prescriptive, interpretive or supportive- three types of supervisory behaviours (Zahorik,1998). It is about getting the balance right.

The importance of supervision for student teachers cannot be underestimated, and processes that promote the involvement of student teachers in reflection and action are said to have the most successful outcomes (Gibbs, 1996). Price & Sellars (1985, p. 21) indicate that "excellent supervisors use basic principles of clinical supervision in that they are collegial, non-directive and supportive rather than coercive in style and seek to foster professional autonomy in students under their care" The skills of collaboration, reflection, feedback, and support are skills which result in more effective supervision practices by associate teachers and more responsiveness and active participation by student teachers.

Findings

The findings confirmed the importance of the role of the teacher educator in not only inducting the student teacher into the classroom and development of their teaching practice but also into the teaching profession. The teacher educator inculcated in the student teachers by discussing professional matters, school management and community issues and they saw this as part of their supervision practice. A student teacher commented:

The discussion that transpired each time I met my teacher educator helped me to see the bigger picture of what teaching entails. It involves developing values, beliefs and care for the pupils.. (Student teacher) A number of the teacher educators in the research commented that being a teacher educator is part of their professional responsibility. For them the dynamics of the interactions between themselves and student teachers was an important issue. This was evident also in the study where student teachers constantly indicated the importance of being able to "try things out" without worrying about repercussions. Teacher educators had to display certain attributes that would foster student teacher learning.

A teacher educator who is a good listener helps you to develop self esteem. Start to believe in what you can do.(Student teacher in Plumtree)The student teachers some of whom are mature and responsible stated that they enjoyed being supervised by teacher educators who were approachable, flexible, who give the student the latitude to experiment and makes mistakes. Such supervisors develop in teachers an independent mind. The teacher educators realised when they were invited into a class and they took the opportunity of being observers rather than inspectors they tended to learn more through that experience than hunt for faults.

I think supervision has changed since I started out as a tea. I think teacher educator supervision now is about imparting your enjoyment to somebody else. I always look upon it as a two way process, because I always learn heaps from student teachers too. (Teacher Educator)

Teacher educators acknowledged that to assist student teachers in their learning they themselves had to be effective practitioners and role models for the students. They needed to know the skills of supervision. It is so important for teacher educators to have the training in the required skills of supervision. They can't be narrow in their approach.(Teacher educator)Student teachers in the study expected the teacher educators to have read the practicum brief and been to a briefing meeting beforehand. These meetings were organized and run before practicum by lecturers at the schools or university, but it was not compulsory to attend. There were also courses available for teacher educators to attend on supervision and mentoring. Teacher educators who are more supportive to the student teachers are appreciated by the student teachers than tutors who want to impose their will on the student teacher.

Some of the student teachers stated that they find it difficult to link the philosophy of education and what they teach on a daily basis. Although some of these student teachers have been teaching for a long time without a teaching qualification, they find it difficult to conceptualise the relevance of philosophy in teaching the content of a given subject. It is therefore essential for teacher educators to take time of explaining how the different subjects learnt by students influence the learning process.

Both teacher educators and student teachers stated that feedback and the interaction that takes place after a lesson is critical to the teachers' development. One of the major challenges that teacher educators face is the number of schools that they have to visit within a limited period of time. This challenge is worsened by the distances that should be covered in a given period. To exemplify this challenge one team of teacher educators had to travel and supervise nearly 18 students covering distances of more that 800kilometres of gravel roads. The table below highlights the challenges faced by teacher educator and student teacher.

Schools visited	Distance covered	No of students	No of hours travel
Bulawayo-Solusi Secondary	67 kilometres	1	1hr tarred road
Solusi to Tshabanda Sec School	37 kilometres	3	25 minutes tarred road
Solusi to Bubude Sec School	43 kilometres	1	50 minutes gravel
Bubude to Dikili Sec School	25 kilometres	2	1 hour gravel
Dikili to Dinyane Sec School	41 kilometres	2	1hour 30 minutes
Dinyane to Plumtree	88 kilometres	Hotel	2 hrs 45 minutes

Due to the poor roads that have not been serviced for a long time, teacher educators spend more time travelling on the gravel roads. The Zimbabwe Open University cannot redeploy the students since that responsibility is the job of Public Service Commission. As a result the teacher educator has to balance between completing the job by taking limited periods of time interacting with the student teacher and travelling the long distances.

Teacher educators who were competent in teaching their content were effective teachers of their subjects as a result their students tended to emulate their teaching methods. Teachers who had taught for long periods of time had certain mannerism in their teaching approaches that were difficult to correct. They are some student teachers who do not have commitment to their practice. They were going through the Post graduate diploma in education as a means protecting their jobs but they are not committed to teaching as a profession.

One of the observations made by student teachers was that teacher educators whose supervision style involved interacting with the student tended to provide a lot of guidance and comments that motivated the student teacher.

In the current teacher educators and student teachers indicated that the practices of excellent teacher educators in supervision included an ability to motivate student teachers. This involved the teachers finding out about students teachers' specific teaching needs, and discussing and critiquing their own perceptions about teaching practice. Student teachers mentioned that teacher educators need to be able to give regular feedback to student teachers, be supportive and reflective, and have a passion and enthusiasm for teaching. According to student teachers, this passion needed to be reflected in clear interpersonal skills of communication, being approachable and a good listener. The findings confirmed the importance of the supervision practices of the teacher educator and the way student teachers respond to that supervision. However it was clear from the findings that there were a number of issues and tensions for both teacher educator and student teachers in the role of supervision.

V. Discussion

Freeman (1989) suggests that an effective teacher education program needs to be interactive involving the teacher educator and the trainee." The two individuals, the teacher and the teacher educator engage in a process, the purpose of which is to generate some form of change in the teacher" (Freeman 1989:38) The teacher educator needs to help the trainees to realize how their behaviours and actions affect pupil participation or lack of it. This realization can be initiated through the way theory of education is related to practice. " By asking the student to reflect on his/her practice by asking questions, by making observations in a detached way, by sharing personal teaching experience, the collaborator endeavours to start the teacher on a process of reflection, critique and refinement of the teacher's classroom practice. (Freeman 1989:40) The main role of the teacher educator should be to trigger change through the trainee's awareness rather than to be prescriptive. The student teacher needs to generate his/her own solutions through development.

On the other hand Freeman (1989) agrees with Richards that the teacher educator has to train the student teacher. (Freeman 1989:39) states that training "is based on the assumption that through mastery of discrete aspects of skills and knowledge, teachers will improve their effectiveness in the classroom" Although some aspects of effective teaching can be operationalized and presented to teachers in training as techniques to be mastered, there is more to teacher preparation than skills training. Richards (1987) argues the student teacher must adopt the role of an autonomous learner and researcher in addition to that of practice.

The teacher educators need to develop strategies that stimulate critical thinking and reflective practice during the visits they make as they supervise the student teachers. During focus group discussion, some students intimated that lecturers should avoid being prescriptive when supervising lessons. One of the students stated that, "For the three times that I was supervised by the same lecturer, he did not have time to discuss the lesson with me. I was only grateful that I was awarded a passing grade." Although most students admitted that they were given useful comments by their lecturers, during the supervision process, it is evident from the students' comments that there are some lecturers who do not behave professionally. Teacher educators and students should develop a friendly professional relationship so that the students feel free to consult the teacher educator at any time that he/she requires help. One could argue that poor student lecturer relationship inhibits the development of reflective skills. The supervision process should be structured in such a way that the student teacher and teacher educator collaborate or engage in a process of interaction in order to generate change in the student teacher. This process can be developed provided the teacher educator is prepared to listen to the student teacher and spends time discussing issues related to classroom practice.

One other complaint which was stated by student teachers during focus group discussions was that most lecturers do not give them a chance to explain the reasons for using certain teaching strategies. If the lecturer is opposed to the method used by the student he/she is given a failing grade. Some of the comments written in the supervision forms written by lecturers confirm the complaint of the student teachers. Supervision is meant to mould student teachers into being professional teachers. The underlying concept behind such a belief

is that the students are novices, therefore they should take orders from the experts the teacher educators. Such an attitude is not helpful in developing professional teachers given that some of these students have been teaching without a professional qualification.

One other challenge facing teacher education in Zimbabwe is our failure to distinguish between supervision and assessment when helping the student teacher during teaching practice. Teacher educators are always in a hurry to assess as many students as possible. As one of the teacher educators summarized this challenge, "The main objective of the assessment is to fulfil the requirements of the Zimbabwe Open University who are the certifying University." It is unfortunate that such a practice does not take into consideration the skills that the student teacher acquires in the process. If the Zimbabwean teacher education program is to be developed and transformed into programs that produce skilful reflective practitioners, then the structure of the teaching practice need to be revisited as a matter of urgency.

The teacher educator as a collaborator should develop skills of triggering the process of reflection. He/she should develop skills of asking the appropriate questions and making the right comments that will trigger the process of reflection. The teacher educators' job is to encourage the student teacher to generate his /her own solutions to the problems of the classroom. The student teacher on the other hand can contribute to the development of his/her teaching skills. The student teacher can start by identifying the issue under reflection. e.g. The role of teacher talk in pupil learning. When the teacher organizes tasks the objective of investigating e.g. Does teacher talk affect pupil learning? In what way can teacher talk be used effectively in order to maximize pupil learning?

The student teacher will plan his /her lessons with the objective of investigating the role of the teacher talk in the learning process. When the teacher organizes tasks for the pupils he questions himself and herself whether there is need to explain the task before the pupils tackle the task. Are the tasks self-explanatory? Will the slow learners understand the tasks? The student teachers can audio tape or video tape the lesson so that after the lesson he/she can review and analyze the role of teacher talk in helping the pupils to learn. Having analyzed the lesson the student teacher can plan the next lesson taking into consideration the findings he/she has learnt from the previous lessons.

Poulous (2007) found that self perception of teaching competence; personal characteristics and motivation were in important contributory factors to teaching efficacy. Students who do not have a drive that motivates them to learn have to be driven These are the student teachers who will go to class without a lesson plan, their documentation does not show any creativity. There is need for the teacher educator to work patiently with such student teachers in order to develop in them the motivation to believe in their practice.

Personal pedagogy

The study revealed the importance of teacher knowledge of the subject matter and skills necessary to impart that knowledge in the classroom. Creativity, pupil interaction are important ingredients of effective teaching and learning. The teacher educator should be familiar with the content of a given subject so that they can provide feedback to the teacher as to the adequacy of content taught. Students should be taught on the importance of reflecting on their practice so that they evaluate their effectiveness in teaching correct content using best practice. Klenowski (1998) suggested that the process of reflection encourage student teachers to be innovative and developmental in their teaching and learning.The importance of reflection is not for the associate teacher to demonstrate and explain how practice should be carried out, but for the student teacher to be given the opportunity for self-analysis and reflection. The focus is on how the teacher educator transfers that professional knowledge to the student teacher. This modelling focuses on scaffolding the learning and has the aim of self-reflection and building self- regulation

Feedback

Regular, clear, constructive feedback from associate teacher educator was highlighted as essential in the supervision process as student teachers stated it helped them in their learning experiences. The feedback was given through formal, informal, formative, or summative methods. Feedback is, as Hinett (1998) suggested, not just looking backwards, but also about looking ahead to improve performance and learning. Teacher educators should be able to provide many experiences in teaching practice needed by student teachers to progress and develop with regular feedback given. It is often the continual communication between teacher educator and student teacher, and the constructive discussion and feedback that is needed for this to occur the student teachers commented.

Relationship between teacher educator and student teacher

The importance of the relationship between teacher educator and student teachers and staff in general at a school was shown to be vital and can only enhance the teaching and learning opportunities for all parties. It was commented that it needs to be positive, professional and collaborative involving open and frank

communication. However the existence of a strong reciprocal relationship between teacher educator and student teacher is essential if constructive criticism be given and received more easily. Blunden (1994) commented that from a student teacher's viewpoint, good supervisors should be friendly, approachable, and supportive and have pedagogic knowledge and advice to give.

Mayer and Austin (1999) suggested that an effective teacher educator is not only committed to the teaching profession, but is an articulate upholder of that profession. They go on to suggest the idea that the teacher educator is acting as a "gatekeeper to the profession" and that it is their role to build and maintain teaching as a high status profession. It is about showing a passion and love of teaching and being able to pass this on. All of these specific dispositional qualities were mentioned in the findings as very important. They relate to the guidance, mutual learning, and friendship between teacher educator and student teacher**.**

VI. Conclusion

The role of teacher educator is to provide the student teacher with the atmosphere where he/she can ask questions about his/her practice. The student teacher needs to reflect on the effectiveness of his /her teaching. Observation of and working with successful teacher educators who effectively model excellent teaching, leads student teachers to innovation and development in their own teaching practice. Teacher educators are in a unique position because of their expertise and teaching knowledge to provide a powerful learning experience for student teachers through the supervision process.

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