

Towards the Preparation of Quality Foundation Phase Teachers in the University: The Attitude and Improvisation Skills of First Year Students

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Abstract

There has been a major outcry about the quality of teachers produced in teacher education programs in South Africa recently. The society, through the employers of the teachers, have been complaining about the quality of newly graduated teachers, most especially from the university, in terms of their subject matter knowledge (SMK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Foundation Phase teachers are not exempted from this inferior quality. Knowing fully well that education at the Foundation Phase forms the bedrock for other levels of education and that the teachers' knowledge and skills are key determinants of the quality of this education, there is need for systematic studying of the preparation of teachers to improve the quality. One of the ways such studies could be done is to examine the entry behavior of the admitted students for the program, the content and pedagogy adopted to prepare them, and knowledge and skills demonstrated at the point of graduation. This study is the first step in this direction, in that it was designed to examine the entry behavior of newly admitted pre-service teachers in terms of their attitude towards teaching at Foundation Phase and skills already acquired about improvisation of resources. The findings show that the newly admitted pre-service teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching at Foundation Phase, production and use of instructional resources and expectations from the university in the training of these teachers. It was recommended, among others, that an empirical study should be carried out to assess the quality and quantity to preparation given to the pre-service teachers in South African universities.

Keywords: Foundation Phase Education, Teacher Preparation, Attitude towards Teaching, Improvisation Skills, Entry Behavior

Introduction

The teaching profession has always occupied a significant position in the educational system just as the educational system has always occupied a significant position in the development of a society [1].

Logically, any society that is concerned about holistic development in terms of social, political, and economic power will make development of quality teacher a priority. One of the challenges a society might face in the quest to develop quality teachers is how to identify one, since the negative effects of poor teaching could be hidden for years [2]. But as soon as this is noticed, all hands must be on deck to ensure that the teacher education program is fortified, and quality teachers are prepared for the educational system of the society. Efforts towards preparing quality teachers in two other African countries [3].

In South Africa, there has been an outcry about the quality of teachers working at Foundation Phase level of education. Mr Sampa, (2008) in his opening remarks at Boksburg Conference, stated that the conference theme, “Laying a Solid Foundation for Learning” was chosen with special consideration to the different experiences and economic levels of African countries. He further stated that regardless of this, all nations built their houses on solid foundations, and equated this to the need to lay solid foundations for quality learning for all children. He recognized that many studies, particularly in the southern part of Africa, indicate that there are poor levels of reading and writing among learners in early years of schooling and a poor culture of reading among children and adults. He specified that this affected the quality of education in the region. He indicated that the correct choice of language policy at the Foundation Phase is paramount for effective learning and active participation because it prevents the negotiation of learning a language while at the same time getting knowledge. (Report on the Foundation Phase, 2008)

This level of education is overly sensitive and requires serious planning and execution because, as the name suggests, it is the foundation upon which other levels of education are built. If the foundation is faulty, there is hardly any effective amendment that can be done at upper level.

To effectively address the problem of inadequate quality of teaching in the Foundation Phase, there is the need to look at the quality of teacher education received by the teacher. There are numerous factors that could be studied in teacher education program, such as the curriculum content, resources available, pedagogical strength and the quality of students admitted for the program [4].

The thesis of this study is, no matter how good the quality of teacher education program curriculum is, the resources available for its implementation and the effectiveness of the methods of teaching; if the quality of students admitted for the program is too low the quality of the teachers produced by the program will be low. Literature has it that a substantial proportion of students gaining admission into teacher education programs are either those with low academic performance during high school, those who were rejected by other university programs or those who cannot meet up with the requirements of the program of their choices.

With this claim, there is the need to study the attitude of newly admitted pre-service teachers of Foundation Phase level towards the teaching profession and the skills they have already acquired that could determine their teaching quality. There is an abundance of research evidence that attitude is a significant and strong factor that determines students’ learning outcomes [5]. Newhouse (1990) emphasizes that attitude is an especially crucial factor in influencing human behavior [6]. Attitude is affected by opinion, and these opinions can be formed through personal life experiences and education. Studies concerning the science learning environment show that there is a relationship between this

environment and students' attitude toward science [7]. Attitudes toward science involves the students' affective behaviors, for example, preference, acceptance, appreciation, and commitment.

In the same vein, the pedagogical skills already possessed by newly admitted pre-service teachers might go a long way to determine the quality professional skills and knowledge such students will gain in the teacher education program. Teacher professional knowledge and skill was measured in terms of academic content knowledge (ACK), general pedagogical knowledge (Gen PK), PCK and teacher practice [8]. Their PCK instrument identified two factors within PCK: PCK-content knowledge and PCK-pedagogical knowledge. It was reported that teacher gained existed for all variables. Only Gen PK had a significant relationship to teacher practice. ACK was the only variable that explained a substantial portion of student achievement. Their findings provide empirical evidence that we interpret through the lens of the model of teacher professional knowledge and skill, including PCK, according to [8]. A model of teacher professional knowledge and skill including PCK: Results of the thinking from the PCK summit. In A. Berry, P. Friedrichsen, & J. Loughran (Eds.) [Re-examining pedagogical content knowledge in science education (pp. 28–42). London: Routledge Press], highlighting the complexity of measuring teacher professional knowledge and skill [9].

Based on the above premises, this study is carried out to examine the attitude towards teaching and the teaching resources improvisation skills of the newly admitted pre-service Foundation Phase teachers. If the levels of the attitude and skills are known early in the program, two important planning strategies could be made to enhance the quality of these teachers at the end of the program. The first of such planning is that longitudinal research could be staged that will determine the effects of the attitude and skills on the quality of the teacher education program. Secondly, efforts must be made towards improving the attitude and skills of the pre-service teachers early in the program will be known.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this empirical study is to determine the attitude towards teaching, production, and utilization of instructional resources of newly admitted pre-service teachers of Foundation Phase level of education. This is considered imperative towards the quality of the teachers by the end of the teacher education program. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

- A. Determine the attitude of newly admitted pre-service teachers towards teaching at Foundation Phase level.
- B. Determine the attitude of newly admitted pre-service teachers towards production and use of instructional resources.
- C. Examine the influence of gender and prior teaching experience on the pre-service teachers' attitude.

Research Questions

To achieve the stated objectives, the following questions were raised:

- A. What is the attitude of newly admitted pre-service teachers towards teaching at Foundation Phase level of education?
- B. What is the attitude of newly admitted pre-service teachers towards production and use of instructional resources to teach?
- C. Is there significant difference between male and female newly admitted pre-service teachers in their (1) attitude towards teaching at Foundation Phase (2) attitude towards production and use of instructional resources?

- D. Is there significant difference between pre-service teachers, who had teaching experience and those who did not, in their (1) attitude towards teaching at Foundation Phase (2) attitude towards production and use of instructional resources?

Materials and Methods

The study adopted quantitative method with survey research design of the sample survey of intangibles type. [10] submit that the sample survey of intangibles is one of the designs under survey, which collect data from a given sample of a population to measure attitude, opinion, values or other psychological or sociological constructs [10]. The quantitative method was used to enable the collection of data from many samples that can adequately represent the entire population for the purpose of generalization. Sample survey of intangibles was adopted, since the study was to collect existing data on intangible construct (Attitude) from a sample of newly admitted pre-service teachers of Foundation Phase level of education. Also, the study was descriptive in mode of presentation, as the attitude was described, and no attempt was made to manipulate any variable or determine any causal-effect relationship among variables [11].

The population of this study is the newly admitted pre-service Foundation Phase teachers (First year Students) in the universities in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Out of the four major universities in the province, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the only university that has a Foundation Phase teacher education program. Total enumeration technique was adopted to involve all the Foundation Phase first-year students of the program, and, after the data collection, 99 students fully participated in the study. Out of this sample, the majority – 84% - are female, while 16% are male students. Only 8% of the sample had teaching experience before entering the university, while 92% had never taught before. Again, 4% of the sample have their fathers as teachers, 10% have their mothers as teachers, 6% have both parents as teachers, while 79% have none of their parents in the teaching profession.

Because of the focus of the study, which was to collect data that could reveal the attitude of the students towards teaching and instructional resources, a 4-point Likert Scale questionnaire titled ‘Questionnaire on Pre-service Teachers Entry Attitude towards Teaching at Foundation Phase.’ (QPsTEA_TFP). QPsTEA_TFP has two parts, where Part A measures the relevant demographic information of the students, while Part B measures the students’ attitudes, and it was validated, and the reliability tested, using Cronbach alpha technique. The reliability coefficient obtained is 0.74.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics of an independent t-test were used to determine significant difference in the attitude mean score between two groups.

Findings

The findings show that the newly admitted pre-service teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching at Foundation Phase, production and use of instructional resources and expectations from the university in the training of these teachers. It was recommended, among others, that an empirical study should be carried out to assess the quality and quantity to preparation given to the preservice teachers in South African Universities.

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