Instructional Guidance to Zimbabwean Experienced Student Teachers with Bachelor's Degrees Studying Towards Postgraduate Diplomas in Education

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Abstract

Instructional guidance is an essential component of the professional training teachers receive as it assists in the production of efficient and effective teachers. The story of experienced graduate teachers who have no requisite professional qualifications is unique as these teachers join a training programme, the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), when they already have some experience in teaching, with some already in instructional leadership positions at their schools. The problem arises when they are the ones to be supervised when they join the training programme. This research study sought to solicit these graduate trainees' perceptions concerning the effectiveness and usefulness of the programme to them with the aim of establishing how they are guided and who their instructional leaders or mentors are when they are on teaching practice (TP). This was a qualitative multiple case study of five purposively sampled student teachers who are instructional leaders at their schools. Data was collected through interviews with these students and a focus group discussion with five lecturers who went out to supervise them on TP. The study found that these student teachers did not have mentors or did not make use of them and therefore lacked support and guidance when on TP. They, in most cases, did not want the junior staff members to know that they were pursuing a professional programme which then affected their preparations for their supervisors (the college lecturers). The study recommends that graduate teachers be encouraged to join professional programmes immediately after completing their first degrees, before they are engaged as teachers and even given positions of leadership which make them mentors, or instructional leaders, before they attain a professional qualification. The universities can also marry the bachelor's degrees with an education component. The Ministry of Education should appoint fully qualified teachers to leadership positions in order for them to be able to assist the novice teachers and students deployed to their schools. The

university can also deploy these students to other schools where they can get instructional guidance which is essential for their professional growth.

Introduction

After completing a bachelor's degree in specific subject areas most graduates join the teaching profession. These are considered as unqualified teachers until they acquire a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), a programme which expects them to undergo a six-month teaching practice (TP) session in order for them to interact with actual learners, thereby learning how to teach and mastering the methodologies for delivering the content they would have acquired during their first degree. TP is considered one of the most important aspects of teacher education, but its success also depends on effective instructional guidance (IG) which, in most cases, is offered by formal leaders like the heads of schools, deputy heads and heads of departments in the schools. In Zimbabwe there are, however, people who are engaged as teachers and who are appointed to act in posts of responsibility without the requisite professional qualifications. Prior to their joining the PGDE programme, they are at times appointed to various leadership positions in which they are responsible for supervising even those students on TP. Of late the Zimbabwean government has encouraged all these graduates, without the pedagogy component, to register for these programmes. Most of them would have taught in schools for more than a year. Some would have been considered by their subordinates as qualified because of the leadership positions they hold. The problem that emerges is when these student teachers are on TP at their schools where they are leaders but need to be supervised. This paper, then, seeks to establish how and who guides or mentors these experienced student teachers when they join the PGDE training programme when they are already leaders.

In order to understand how these students are guided, the study answered the following question: How is instructional guidance offered to the students who are in leadership positions? What also are their perceptions about the programme? Are they joining the programme in order to gain something useful or just to have a professional certificate (qualification) as required by their employer?

The paper takes cognisance of the fact that the area of teaching practice has been explored by many researchers, but most of these authors dwelt on the roles of the mentors (Saunders 2014), assessment of student teachers on TP (Maphosa and Ndamba 2012; Tillema 2009), methods used to assist these student teachers like collegial supervision (Tshuma and Bhebhe 2016), and collaboration (Ong'ondo and Jwan 2009) and teaching practice as a tool for quality assurance (Mannathoko 2013). This study's major aim was to enhance the supervision of the experienced student teachers so that they benefit from the PGDE programme. The study, which was informed by the research question, intended to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify the instructional leaders who guide the student teachers on TP when they join the PGDE programme;

- To establish how they are mentored during their TP session.

The study adopted a qualitative case study to investigate how and by whom instructional guidance is provided to the student teachers. Interviews with the student teachers and a focus group discussion with their university lecturers were used to solicit their views on the PGDE programme and its supervision. The study established that the PGDE students, who join the programme having worked for some time, see themselves as already qualified with no need of supervision, and thereby do not perform as required of them.

PGDE Programme

The PGDE is offered as a part-time programme to students already on the job. The programme is divided into three parts. In the first two semesters the students follow some foundation courses. These are meant to provide foundational knowledge of learners and learning. Knowledge on schools and classroom structures are also included (Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald 2009).

The second part deals with the methodology courses, commonly known as pedagogical studies. This part of the course focuses on practices related to the teaching of particular subject matter, classroom management and assessment procedures. The methods that exist for teaching particular subjects are explored.

The present study is concerned with the third aspect of the programme, which is the teaching practice session. This is when the student teachers are exposed to experiences that will make them efficient classroom practitioners in the schools. This is a period during their training process where they will need an instructional leader to mentor them. For other students, the exercise is quite easy as it is just a temporary period of teaching in a school of their choice, but this is not the case for the graduates who are already fully employed and have leadership roles that they are expected to perform.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to investigate how and by whom the experienced student teachers who are also instructional leaders at their institutions are guided and mentored when on their TP session. It is hoped that the data obtained will assist planners to come up with a better programme for these experienced graduate student teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted the distributed leadership (DL) perspective as developed by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) and the systems theory as propounded by Senge (1990). The DL perspective views leadership as a shared and socially influenced process. Elmore

(2000) sees this leadership perspective as a theory that allows people to lead where and when they are experts. Distributed leadership involves the activities engaged in by the leaders in interaction with others in particular contexts around specific tasks (Smith and Andrews 1989). It is therefore a theory that blends supervision, staff development and curriculum development in order to facilitate school improvement. Being non-hierarchical and inclusive in its approach, it empowers all personnel and encourages their participation in the leadership process. It criticises the focus on positional leaders but encourages knowing the how of leadership (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2004). DL replaces the model of a single leader adopting a leadership style that is dictated by the situation and expertise (Wright 2008). Similarly, Senge's systems theory (1990) proposes that institutions should have a vision that does not involve a one-man band but rather the input of the subordinates. It also involves pulling together expertise in order to produce results.

The two perspectives were useful as the researcher wanted to explore how and by whom the experienced student teachers were guided and supervised during their TP session. The theories helped to illuminate how these students, who are also leaders, interact or otherwise with their qualified followers in order to be assisted to improve their teaching and also develop professionally. For these students to succeed, there was a need to accept their subordinates as leaders in their own right, to accept them as people who can lead them and assist them as mentors in order to realise the vision of becoming competent professionals.

Literature Review

The purpose of this review is to examine aspects of the TP programme and what instructional guidance entails, especially the role it plays in the development of teachers during TP. The personnel involved (instructional leaders) will also be considered in a bid to establish the guidance the experienced student graduate teachers receive at the work stations.

Teaching Practice (TP)

Teaching practice (TP) is student placement in schools for them to practise lesson planning, classroom organisation and classroom teaching. It is an exercise that should afford students close monitoring as well as guidance in professional matters (Ngara, Ngwarai, and Ngara 2013). Ngara, Ngwarai, and Ngara (2013) go further to assert that TP should involve helping, motivating, supporting, advising and stimulating growth in prospective teachers. It is meant to provide mentoring to students in their initial school-based experience. Bigelow (in Mpofu and Chimhenga 2016, 27) defines this mentoring as "a process of helping student teachers to develop teaching behaviours and strategies involving a nurturing relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person where the mentor provides guidance by serving as a role model and advisor."

The students are therefore exposed to a range of experiences as they work in the classrooms and the entire school. They should work under the guidance and supervision of a mentor in

order to develop and improve their professional practices. They also gain first-hand experience in working with the learners, and as a result develop professional norms of teaching. The rationale for having students undergo a TP session is to prepare student teachers for their career as teachers, thereby developing as professionals. It grants the student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Kiggundu and Nayimuli 2009, 47). It is therefore an important aspect of becoming a teacher as it adds value to the specialised knowledge learnt during their first degrees.

The question arises then: how to mentor and guide these student teachers through this important process when the students are already "teachers." They are no longer prospective teachers but experienced student teachers. The question this paper seeks to investigate is how to provide the growth they need and who should motivate and stimulate them when they are already leaders.

Instructional Guidance and Leadership

According to Blase and Blase (2000), instructional leadership entails the ability of teacher leaders to involve their colleagues collaboratively in the process of improving teaching and learning. This is echoed by Neumerski (2013) who concurs that instructional leadership comprises actions and behaviours of the leadership—how it engages in different activities of guiding and directing instruction in schools. Quinn (2002) perceives instructional leadership as behavioural actions and activities performed by leaders in order to develop a productive work environment for teachers and a conducive learning environment for the students. This paper sought to establish how the graduate teachers in the PGDE programme are able to create the required environments for themselves to learn in during TP. Being a student and a leader at the same time demands the ability to involve colleagues in the process of developing oneself professionally. This is where the distributed leadership theory comes in, letting the experts, those who have undergone a similar training programme before, lead you, although they may not be formal leaders. Instructional guidance, on the other hand, also refers to the collective academic activities of the leadership performed by all concerned regarding the education system at school level (Quinn 2002). There is a need for the involvement of all teachers at the school to assist these trainees, even those who perform non-supervisory roles and those who do not hold any formal leadership roles.

Mentor/Instructional Leader

Being teacher leaders, in most cases, mentors are supposed to influence the activities of an organisation or group of people in order to accomplish their goals (Rukanda et al. 1997). People without formal authority can exercise leadership, because it is seen as influence. Leadership, especially instructional leadership, consists of actions or activities undertaken by formal or informal (non-positional) leaders with the aim of developing a working environment that is satisfying and desirable for the teachers and for student learning (Rukanda et al. 1997). In order for formal positional leaders to have mentors when they

join the PGDE programme, there is a need for them to accept that leadership is influence and the management of conditions under which people work (Elmore 2006). Even people without formal authority can exercise leadership, as it is an influence.

Methodology

The study employed a multiple case study, which was a bound system of individuals (experienced student teachers on TP). These were experienced teachers who held formal leadership positions at their schools. The population was 27 PGDE students of 2016. The targeted group from these were the eight students already employed and in leadership positions from whom five students were purposively selected by virtue of their schools being convenient to reach for the researcher (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). These teachers had bachelor's degrees in different academic subjects. They also had teaching experience of five to 10 years and held leadership positions, such as acting head or deputy head, senior teacher and head of department (HoD). The researcher is cognisant of the fact that the sample may not be representative of the wider population, but it was suitable for this study as it allowed the researcher to interact with the students/subjects. This was a focused sample which allowed the researcher to acquire thick descriptive data (Yin 2003).

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were used with the student teachers as they were found to be useful and suitable in exploring people's perceptions and getting the information in their own words, thereby accessing their interpretation of the PGDE programme and especially the TP component. A focus group discussion with the students' lecturers revealed how the students were performing in comparison with their colleagues not in leadership positions.

Status of the Respondents

The five students who were selected were drawn from five schools where they held leadership positions as indicated in Tabele 1.

Table 1: Status of the chosen sample

School	Students and Their Leadership Positions
A	One acting deputy head
B	One acting deputy head
C	One head of department
D	One head of department
E	One senior teacher

The five respondents chosen comprised two acting deputy heads, two heads of department and a senior teacher. All have leadership roles that they perform at their schools. They undergo the PGDE programme on a part-time basis and so they are expected to perform their supervisory duties as usual. The professional programme (PGDE) is an additional assignment which does not warrant their release from their leadership roles.

Data Analysis

To have order and meaning, the collected data was analysed in the following way. First the data was summarised, noting frequent responses that answered the research question. Themes were then built from the data and these were then organised into a report.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in institutions of learning, so permission was sought from the relevant authorities. I made sure to obtain informed consent from the participants before interviewing them. Sufficient information about the study was provided so that the participants could make an informed decision as to whether they wished to be involved.

Findings

The findings of the study are harvested from the analysis of the data from the five cases in the study and their lecturers. The findings are discussed in relation to the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Theme 1: Reasons for the Unqualified Teachers to Pursue the PGDE Programme

Data from the interviews suggests that most experienced unqualified teachers joined the PGDE programme in order to be fully qualified teachers as required by the Ministry of Education. In support of this, the acting deputy head of School A had the following to say:

> Before the announcement that all teachers must have professional qualifications, I did not think of joining this programme. I saw myself as a good teacher able to teach effectively and also making children pass my Geography well. I was also responsible for mentoring student teachers from the Teachers' Colleges.

This was also echoed by the acting deputy head of School B, who stated:

> I never thought I lacked anything professionally, so I was not going to join the programme if it were not for the announcement made. It was only after our Ministry required us to have the pedagogy component that I decided to join the PGDE programme.

The senior teacher at School E showed that she joined the programme for fear of losing her job. She had this to say: "I joined the programme for fear of losing my job. There were threats that without the professional qualifications, you risk being dismissed."

Theme 2: Significance of the PGDE to Experienced But Unqualified Teachers

The data seems to indicate that, although these experienced unqualified teachers were already in the teaching profession for some time, they were indeed benefitting from the PGDE programme. When asked whether they were gaining anything from the programme, two of them agreed that they were gaining a lot, especially from the foundation courses and pedagogic studies, but they thought the TP session was a waste of time for them since they

had already gained a lot of experience before joining the programme. The deputy head of School B said, "Yes I gained a lot during the last two semesters. The theoretical aspects of the programme were quite interesting and beneficial."

The head of department at School D echoed the same sentiments, saying, "I wish I could be exempted from the TP session since I already have the experience. Yes, the theoretical aspects were very useful to me."

Theme 3: Mentoring of Experienced But Unqualified Teachers in PGDE the Programme

The study seems to show that these experienced student teachers were not being mentored or did not like to be mentored as they thought they knew it all. For example, on the question of who their mentors were, the people who gave them guidance, the deputy head of School B had the following to say:

> I just work on my own. I have been doing the job for eight years now. All the other members in my subject area are my juniors. Yes, they have a teacher training course but I feel I am more experienced than them and so they cannot supervise me. Even the HoD does not supervise me as he only joined this school three years back.

The deputy head of School A also confirmed and echoed the same sentiments as those of the deputy head of School B. He had this to say: "Our Head is from the Technical and Vocational subjects background and is not eager to supervise me. He even assigns me to supervise other members of the department."

Data from the two HoDs was quite interesting. They believed that being specialists in their areas of work (subject areas) gave them the freedom to just work on their own and not collaborate with their colleagues, except where they supervised them. The HoD at School C had the following to say: "No one at this school can supervise me. I am the mentor in the Languages section and also the senior woman."

Just like the acting deputy heads, the HoDs believed that the programme was quite beneficial to their professional work. They, however, believed that although they had gained enough experience they could still benefit from the assistance of mentors during their TP session.

The instructional leader in School E, who is a senior woman, unlike the deputy heads and the HoDs showed that the PGDE programme was very beneficial to her. She also said that her HoD was her mentor who offered her the instructional guidance needed in her work. She had this to say: "I work very well with my HoD who is also my mentor. I have found the programme very useful to my profession."

Theme 4: The Dilemma of Experience without a Requisite Qualification

The study points out that experienced unqualified teachers experienced a dilemma regarding their performance in the PGDE course teaching practice session as they did not welcome or use mentorship. For instance, when the lecturers who visited the five student teachers were interviewed, Lecturer 1 had this to say: "I visited school E. I found the candidate there well prepared. She is the senior woman at the school but, she is doing quite well. Her HoD also assists her a lot."

Lecturer 2 intervened saying, "You were lucky to visit such a student. At School B the candidate did not have a single Daily Lesson Plan (DLP). When I asked why he was not doing his work he said that it was due to pressure of work and also that he did not know that we would visit him."

The other lecturers also pointed out that these students were not doing well in their practicum. Besides not having instructional leaders to mentor them, they also did not have all the documentation needed. They, as a result, got very low marks as compared to their counterparts who are not in leadership posts.

Discussion of Findings

Whilst TP involves the placement of student teachers in schools for them to learn professional issues (Ngara, Ngwarai, and Ngara 2013), the respondents in this study were not deployed by the university but do TP at their schools. They are fully employed and doing the programme on a part-time basis. They are expected to carry out their leadership duties as usual because they are not replaced nor are they relieved of their duties. For the trainees to gain first-hand experience in working with children (Mpofu and Chimhenga 2016), it is best that they change schools and work under the supervision of experienced instructional leaders. This may mean that the universities have to offer the PGDE as a full-time programme which will then allow the deployment of these students to schools where they are well supervised.

Furthermore, it is evident that the student teachers' (experienced but unqualified) prior experience and beliefs influenced their participation in the PGDE programme. According to Buitink (in Ong'ondo and Jwan 2009), it is essential that students overcome their prior beliefs and embrace new ideas about teaching during the practicum. It is extremely important that the student teachers accept that they are gaining something rather than being influenced by the fact that they have worked in the job for some years. As previously discussed, changing schools may be of benefit in this regard.

It is also clear from the respondents that they think they have nothing more to learn, especially concerning the teaching aspect. They therefore think their colleagues have nothing to offer. This preconceived idea can be rectified when the students are made aware of their needs at the onset of the programme. Numrich (in Ong'ondo and Jwan 2009)

suggests that the teacher trainers should start from where the students are. This will enable the instructional leaders to offer what they need or lack as teachers. Their joining the programme will not be seen as a way of silencing their employer; instead they will appreciate it and know they are going to acquire expertise in teaching.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of the study was to explore how the experienced PGDE students who are leaders at their stations of work are mentored or guided and who their leaders are when they are the ones in the administration of the schools. It was established that these student teachers who join the PGDE programme when they have taught for some years find it difficult to accept that they can be assisted by other staff members who are their subordinates. Because they are leaders at the schools where they are doing their TP, they are not ready to open up to their colleagues and accept that they need help. The researcher also noted that these students are overwhelmed by work since they have to do both their school work and perform their administrative roles. The study consequently makes the following recommendations:

- It is essential for the student teachers to concentrate on their school work so that they fully gain from the programme. It is therefore recommended that they be deployed to other schools for their TP. They will then have enough time for their work and also accept the mentorship of people they do not normally work with or supervise.

- From what the students said, it is clear that the students need to be encouraged to join the training immediately after school before they adopt their own methods of teaching that may not be compatible with the teaching profession.

- Universities are encouraged to marry the general degrees with the education component for the students who want to join the teaching profession.

- The promotion of fully qualified personnel with the requisite subjects' pedagogy to formal instructional leadership posts cannot be overemphasised. The education system needs leaders who have a deeper knowledge of what is expected of the students.

- The teachers in schools have to be aware of the DL perspective. This will make them aware of the fact that all members of the school community can be leaders if they are only given a chance to lead when and where they are experts.

In conclusion, the researcher wishes to acknowledge that the study was limited as far as the geographical setting is concerned. There is a need to carry out further research which may include all provinces. There is also a need to carry out some research on how best these experienced but unqualified teachers can be assisted so that they acquire the needed

professional qualifications in a conducive environment. This should be an environment with mentors whom they respect.

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