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# **Student Teachers' Perceptions Of And Attitudes Towards Teaching Practice Deployment In Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper presents results on the perceptions and attitudes of student teachers following the non-graduate Diploma in Education programme in 14 Primary and Secondary Teachers' Colleges in Zimbabwe, towards Teaching Practice (TP) deployment and the implications of this deployment on their performance on final Teaching Practice assessment. A sample of 264 student teachers took part in the study which was conducted mainly by means of questionnaires and interviews on selected responses.*

*The results show that student teachers hold views that differ from what others think of them on matters of deployment. Evidence indicates that both Primary and Secondary student teachers prefer being deployed in urban to rural schools. In the case of rural areas they show preference for mission rather than council schools. Where mission schools are well equipped, have facilities and proper accommodation and are easily accessible, student teachers consider they can perform well.*

## **Introduction**

Recent experiences in the training of non-graduate teachers in Zimbabwe, where different training programmes have been tried since independence, point to the need for constant research in the area of teaching practice, particularly on how teaching practice has been and is being perceived by the products of the system.

## **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to establish the views of student teachers on their teaching practice (T.P.) deployment. It is hoped that, in future, a similar study will be conducted on the views of the teacher educators about student deployment. It is further hoped that knowledge such as this will bring about a better understanding between the teacher educator and the student teacher.

## **Methodology and Instrumentation**

The main instrument used for the study was the questionnaire. It sought to elicit data on students' perceptions of and attitudes on teaching practice deployment. The procedure was to employ simple descriptive statistics on student perceptions and attitudes in the above area. The present study was conceived by the researchers as a pilot study which, when refined in both its instruments and methodology, will lead to a more comprehensive and detailed study, leading to an investigation of the teacher educators' views on their task of deploying students.

In sending out questionnaires, random sampling was used. Fifty questionnaires were sent to each of the 14 teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. The Teaching Practice (T.P.) Head of Department (H.O.D.) of each college was asked to send half of the questionnaires to second year students on T.P. and the other half to the 4th years on T.P. In all, 264 (37.7%) questionnaires were returned.

The questionnaire was followed up with random interviews of students on T.P. by the researchers. The purpose of the interview was to get further explanation and clarification from student teachers on issues raised in the questionnaire.

The study was conducted over one school term, from January 1990 to 31 March, 1990.

## **Literature Review**

This study attempts to find out the perceptions of student teachers on their deployment by teacher educators. Not much research work has been done on this topic in Zimbabwe. However, related topics have been studied in Zimbabwe. According to Siyakwazi (1987), the widely scattered placement of students is still of serious concern and requires urgent action by the colleges. The issue of deployment is clearly explained in one of the external assessors reports (1984):

We noted the time required and cost of travel to see the sample of students and emphasize the value for the college and students in persuading the school authorities to cluster students in any particular district.

## **Definition of Terms**

In the Zimbabwean context today, the term teacher educator loosely includes all those who are involved in the training of teachers. These are college lecturers, assistant teachers, teachers, headmasters, university lecturers, particularly those in the Department of Teacher Education of the University of Zimbabwe and Education Officers from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Teacher Education involves a joint effort and some collaboration. Siyakwazi (1987, 37) writes about when he says:

It should be realised that the scheme of association cannot be a success unless there is collaboration of various parties which include Head Office, Colleges, Regional Office, Schools, and the University.

The Scheme of Association described above is neatly summed up in the Chief Education Officer's Circular Minute No. 6 of 1982, quoted by Bourdillon (1983, 2) who writes:

Therefore the success of the scheme will depend on what close supervision the students get. This can only be done effectively through the concerted effort and co-operation of college lecturers, regional offices, heads of schools and their

Staff members, university staff and many others who are directly or indirectly linked with the scheme.

For this study, the term "teacher educator" shall be taken to mean all those mentioned above, people who have a part to play in the moulding of a teacher, and, once more, these are college personnel, school personnel, ministry personnel, and university lecturers, particularly those in the Department of Teacher Education.

Mission schools are schools run by churches in urban and rural areas. In rural areas, church schools are usually boarding schools.

Rural schools are schools found outside towns. They comprise of government rural schools, rural mission schools and rural district schools.

Urban schools are found in towns and cities. This category includes day schools in the high density suburbs, low density suburbs, and some boarding schools.

## Results

**Table 1**  
**Programme Followed By Student Teachers**

	N	%
Primary	200	75.76
Secondary	63	23.86
N.R.	1	0.38
Total	264	100.0

N.R. refers to non-respondent

Tables 1-8 give general back ground information on the respondents. Table 1 shows that there were more respondents from Primary Teachers Colleges 200 (75.76%) as opposed to those from Secondary Teachers Colleges 63 (23.86%).

**Table 2**  
**Composition of sample by Gender**

	N	%
Male	155	58.7
Female	109	41.3
Total	264	100.0

Table 2 shows participants by sex 155 (58.7%) male and 109 (41.3%) females. Perhaps, this is an indication that there are more male student teachers than females.

**Table 3**  
**Academic Qualifications of subjects**

	N	%
"O" Level	234	88.64
"A" Level	26	9.85
N.R.	4	1.52
Total	264	100.0

Table 3 shows that more respondents have "O" Level qualifications 234 (90%) as opposed to "A" Level qualifications 26 (10%). When the study was carried out, there were fewer teachers' colleges admitting applicants with "A" Level qualifications than those admitted with "O" Level.

**Table 4**  
**Sample by marital status**

	N	%
Single	182	68.94
Married	80	30.30
N.R.	2	0.76
Total	264	100.0

According to Table 4, the majority of the participants are single 182 (69.5%) of the total respondents. Most of them are in the age range of between 20 and 31 years.

**Table5**  
**Composition of sample by Age**

	N	%
20 - 25	148	56.06
26 - 31	45	17.05
32 - 36	6	2.27
37 - 40	3	1.14
N.R.	62	23.48
Total	264	100.0

Data on Table 5 shows that more respondents are between 20 and 25 years of age 148 (56.06%), only 3 (1.14%) are in the 37-40 age range. Quite a substantial number of students 62 (23.48%) did not indicate their age range. One can only conclude that perhaps some of the respondents were over 40 years and did not want their ages to be known by the public.



**Table 6**  
**Distribution of subjects by Region**

	N	%
Harare	20	75.76
Mash. West	8	3.03
Mash. East	27	10.23
Mash. Central	8	3.03
Midlands	38	14.39
Masvingo	69	26.14
Manicaland	13	4.92
Matebeleland North	50	18.94
Matebeleland South	12	4.55
N.R.	19	7.20
Total	264	100.0

Table 6 shows the number of respondents according to regions. Masvingo 69 (28.2%), Matebeleland North 50 (20.4%), Midlands 38 (15.5%), Mashonaland East 27 (11%) and Harare 20 (8.2%) have high numbers of respondents.

**Table 7**  
**Pre-Training school Teaching**

	N	%
Yes	154	58.33
No	109	41.29
N.R.	1	0.38
Total	264	100.0

Table 7 shows that the majority of the respondents 154 (58.33%) had done pre-training school teaching. Such an experience has an advantage for the respondents because they are aware of problems faced by student teachers and teachers in the various schools in Zimbabwe.

**Table 8**  
**Pre-Training Teaching Experience**

	N	%
Under 1 year	68	25.76
Under 2 years	33	12.50
Over 2 years	53	20.08
N.R.	110	41.67
Total	264	100.0

The majority of the respondents had done temporary teaching before joining the college. The duration of temporary teaching experience varied

from under 1 year 68 (44.2%), 2 years 33 (21.4%) to over 2 years 53 (34.4%).

## Deployment

There is a national problem in deploying student teachers in Zimbabwe today. This is due to clash of interest between Ministry of Education and Culture, who are responsible for all the deployment of teachers, including student teachers and the students in training in terms of where they should be deployed.

Student teachers appear to have their preferences with respect to deployment. The researchers wanted to find out what these preferences were and why they were preferred.

**Table 9**

**Does it make any difference in your performance if you are deployed in a rural rather than an urban school?**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	147	73.13	50	79.37	197	74.62
No	52	25.87	13	20.63	65	24.62
N.R	2	1.00	0	0	2	.76
Total	201	100.0	63	100.0	264	100.0

According to the above data, 197 (74.62%) said it did, while 65 (24.64%) said their performance, as practitioners, was not likely to be affected whether they were deployed in rural or urban schools. More of those agreeing were from secondary teachers' colleges, suggesting that they

consider themselves too good to be deployed in rural schools. In a follow-up interview, students indicated that if they are deployed in a poorly equipped school, their performance is likely to be affected.

**Table 10**  
**Deployment in a mission school rather than a rural school**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	140	69.65	51	80.95	191	72.35
No	58	28.86	12	19.05	70	26.52
N.R.	3	1.49	0	0	3	1.13
Total	201	100.0	63	100.0	264	100.0

A further distinction was made between a mission school and a rural school. The majority, 191 (72.35%), preferred a mission school and 70 (26.52%), a rural school as far as deployment is concerned.

When the mission school was compared to an urban one, the majority of students, 60.5%, preferred an urban school, and 39.5% preferred a mission school. Both Mission and urban schools were said to be better equipped for teaching and learning.

**Table 11**  
**Deployment in an urban school as opposed to a rural mission school**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	119	59.80	39	60.0	158	59.85
No	79	39.70	24	36.92	103	39.01
N.R	1	7.50	2	3.08	3	1.14
Total	199	100.0	65	100.0	264	100.0

The table above shows that the majority of the respondents, 158 (59.85%, preferred an urban school, and 103(39.01%) a mission school.

The main problems cited in rural schools were poor facilities, such as lack of adequate accommodation, entertainment, transport and teaching equipment. Indeed, we have cases where external assessors have felt it would be unfair to assess students under some poor teaching conditions, as Shumba (1990 , 5) notes:

Two secondary students were not given a teaching mark by external assessors because the school was deemed unsuitable to enable a student to be graded both in terms of facilities and resources, and in terms of the school's administrative and instructional leadership.

Chivore (1990 , 17) makes a pertinent observation on facilities in both primary and secondary schools:

If facilities in the country's capital city schools are inadequate, the situation is likely to be worse in the rural

areas. Not only that, if we agree, as we should, that facilities such as books, are a pre-requisite for effective teaching, under circumstances where these are deemed inadequate, the effectiveness of teachers working under such conditions is bound to be adversely affected.

**Table 12**

**Does working under an untrained Headmaster or Head of Department makes any difference to T.P. performance**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	71	35.32	12	19.05	83	31.44
No	127	63.18	49	77.78	176	66.67
N.R.	3	1.50	2	1.17	5	1.89
Total	201	100.0	63	100.0	264	100.0

The researchers wanted to know whether the students felt their teaching performance was affected by working under an untrained Headmaster or Head of Department, a situation likely to obtain in a rural school today.

Here, the majority, 127 (63.18%), from primary and 49 (77.78%), from secondary teachers' colleges said that such a situation did not affect their teaching performance. 71 (35.32%) from primary and 12 (19.05%) secondary teachers' colleges said it did. It would appear then that the quality of local supervision is not one of the major reasons why students shun schools in rural areas. A comparison of the two responses above, primary and secondary, raises interesting possible interpretations. Considering that the colleges main functions of training teachers are extended to the practising school should expose the colleges efforts in turning out well trained teachers. In order for this to happen, the

practising school has to have a headmaster or head of department who is well-conversant with the latest ideas of teaching methods which the college is assumed to have. It is only a trained headmaster or head of department who is likely to possess such knowledge. In the light of this, if a majority of students then shun the advice of well-trained personnel; many questions are bound to be raised on the issue, such as;

- i. Are the student teachers made aware of the contribution a practising school can make to their training, by way of guidance and advice from the headmaster, head of department, etc?
- ii. Is the practising school made aware of its responsibilities in the training of student teachers?

The majority students' response in table 12 above is in direct contrast to what Siyakwazi (1987, 5) observed:

In some cases, student teaching is done in schools where headmasters are under-qualified and as a consequence, students do not get appropriate professional guidance.

Although data from this study does not clearly indicate that unqualified headmasters are not professionally helpful, there was evidence from discussions with students that unqualified headmasters tend to suppress innovations by student teachers. This, therefore, suggests the desirability for a new approach to deployment.

**Table 13**

**Being given a responsibility such as Acting Headmaster or H.O.D. affects Teaching Practice performance**

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	178	89.0	53	82.81	231	87.50
No	22	11.0	10	15.63	32	12.12
N.R.	0	0	1	1.56	1	0.38
Total	200	100.0	64	100.0	264	100.0

From the above table, we can see that the majority of students 231 (87.50%) believed that the extra responsibility affects their T.P. performance, while 32 (12.12%) did not believe so. A common explanation given in a follow-up interview was that extra responsibility robs the student of the time to concentrate on the real business of learning to teach.

It would appear then that from the responses of the students so far discussed, the majority would not mind working under inadequately qualified heads, as long as they would not be required to shoulder some of the leadership responsibilities quoted above. But the question of an untrained head raises a number of important issues: (a) Does the student



teacher benefit from his leadership? The head is likely to see the student as a threat to him, and that creates an environment which is not conducive to learning. This requires, therefore, that colleges and the Ministry of Education and Culture should work closely together in selecting schools with qualified headmasters for an effective T.P. experience for the student. Students interviewed indicated that urban schools are always the first choice for the majority of the student teachers because of the better facilities found in them. Again, the question of collaboration is very important.

(b) Should students be deployed in urban schools? If so, would that not rob rural schools which have no trained teachers of quality education? These are important issues that all involved in the training of teachers should be addressing.

## **Conclusion**

The above results are mere perceptions of student teachers on their deployment during the teaching practice period. They are, therefore, only one point of view and may not be the full story. In order to obtain a balanced picture, it is necessary to carry out an investigation into the perceptions of teacher educators on their deployment. The perceptions of the two groups can then be compared. However, the results show, though in a limited way, that people involved in educating teachers should revisit the area of deployment and find ways of making it effective for all involved. Issues such as deploying student teachers in rural schools without basic facilities and in schools with untrained/unqualified headmasters should be seriously addressed if the quality of teacher education is to be improved in Zimbabwe.

The present researchers hope that they have, at least, managed to show that this area still needs to be researched into by raising issues for debate in teacher education.

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