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STUDENT TEACHER ATTITUDES TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN RELATION TO TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS.

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Abstract

A total of 54 post "A" level student teachers at Gweru Teachers' College sat an attitude test to check their commitment to teaching as a profession. The attitude scores were related to the effectiveness of the teachers in classroom. The results show that students may join the teaching profession initially without interest in the profession but are later socialised by the college and schools to even cherish the career and be effective teachers. The attitudes of student teachers are not a critical determinant of the performance/effectiveness of the post "A" level student teachers.

As early as 1958, Professor Fletcher's Working Party on Teacher Education in Zimbabwe warned;

..that however small the pool of applicants for training, there should always be a selective process applied since health, character temperament and sense of vocation are necessary in addition to minimum academic standards. (Fletcher, 1958p.26)

The sense of vocation referred to by the Working Party can best be measured by the attitudes of the selected student teachers to the teaching profession. Fletcher (1958) suggested that two terms after students are admitted to teacher training, there should be a 'weeding out' point so that only committed teachers are left to train. This weeding could be based on observed performance and general attitudes of the recruits to the teaching profession. However this would naturally be a wasteful procedure.

McNamara (1972) argues that most college lecturers involved in student teacher recruitment are of the opinion that applicants must show *commitment to teaching*. Teaching for many is a second-choice occupation and does not have high social honour (McNamara, 1972). If this be true, it could mean that a number of teacher training recruits are not committed and are likely to be less effective classroom practitioners. Commitment to teaching can be partly measured by attitudes of trainee teachers to the teaching profession/career. Unfortunately, as applicants are sometimes desperate for teacher training vacancies, measuring their attitudes before entry into the programmes produces faked results.

Wragg (1982) reports that recruits to teaching gave 'love for children' and 'love of subject' as the most common reasons for joining the teacher training courses. Other reasons found include 'job security', 'opportunity to help others,' and 'upward social mobility.' Except for job security and upward social mobility the other reasons given show a positive attitude to teaching. Brownlee (1985) says in the 1970s teachers in the United States gave four reasons for joining the teaching profession. These were the desire to work for or with children, a chance to render an important service, a desire to work with children and the desire to impart knowledge. These attitudes could be genuine according to Brownlee since there was no fierce competition for places for teacher training in the U.S.A. In fact, Brownlee op.cit argues that those students who opted for teaching in the U.S.A. in 1976 ranked fourteenth out of sixteen fields of study based on their Scholarstic Aptitude Test scores. With this background however, some effective teachers were still produced. This suggests that;

Measures of intelligence, achievement and academic ability have not proved to be strong predictors of success in teaching. (Brownlee, 1985p.50).

If this be so, there could be a hidden variable that determines effective teachers and this could be attitudes to the profession according to Brownlee. Bedford (1972) cited by Wragg (1982) found that apart from intelligence tests, teacher admission tests should include personality and attitudes of the recruits to the teaching profession. Bedford found

that students with a low composite score in Intelligence, personality and attitudes to teaching had a 75% chance of being in the bottom 14% in their teaching practice grades. Student teacher attitudes to teaching therefore are a contributory factor to teacher effectiveness. Yates (1972) says that student attitudes though known to influence teacher effectiveness are difficult to measure and are subject to change with professional socialization of the teacher. It is with these conflicting views and uncertainty that the present research seeks to establish Zimbabwe student teacher attitudes to the teaching profession and how this may bear on teacher effectiveness.

The Problem

Zimbabwe is currently training teachers for primary and secondary schools in fifteen teachers' colleges. Up until 1983, entry into both primary and secondary teachers' colleges was based on five 'O' level passes including a pass in English. From 1984, Hillside, and Gweru teachers' colleges admitted 'A' level holders for the teacher training course which was reduced from three years duration to two years duration. It was assumed then that these recruits would be of a stronger academic background and could possibly do the course in a shorter period. A number of these students had initially done 'A' levels to proceed with University education. However, since the universities in the country could not absorb all 'A' level graduates, these 'A' level graduates proceeded to train as teachers. It is with this background that one would wish to know the level of commitment, interest and general attitudes of the current post 'A' level recruits to teaching given that few had initially aimed at this career path.

The aim of this study was to establish the attitudes towards the teaching profession or career of the post 'A' level students training as teachers at Gweru Teachers' college. The study further relates the attitudes of these teachers to their performance and effectiveness in the classroom.

Sub-problems

In addressing this topic a number of sub-problems will be answered and the combined answers to the sub-problems will form the basis for the major conclusions of the study. The sub problems are;

- * What range of attitudes are shown by post 'A' teacher trainees towards teaching as a profession?
- * When precisely did the trainee teachers decide to train as teachers?
- * Do student teachers show commitment to teaching?
- * What is the relationship between a student's attitude to teaching and his effectiveness as a teacher?

Methodology

A sample of 54 randomly chosen second year post 'A' level student teachers at Gweru Teachers' college were given an attitude test in June 1992. Appendix 'A' shows the twenty eight attitude statements used. The three part questionnaire sought general information on the applicant (Section A), attitudes towards teaching based on the Likert scale (Section B) and general attitudes of students to teaching (Section C).

Three grades given by the college lecturers to the students while on teaching practice from January to April 1992 were used to rate student teacher effectiveness. This was done as Bedford (1972) notes that actual grades are a better measure of teacher effectiveness than college assignments grades. The student were graded under the following system; 0-49% fail, 50-59% bare pass, 60-79% good and 80 + % distinction. Attitude scores were analysed per student teacher per question and for all the subjects combined. Overall group attitude scores were computed for each of the 28 attitude statements and a mean attitude score was computed for each attitude statement. This

would enable discrimination of instances of negative and positive attitudes.

The attitude scores of 41 of the students were correlated to their average scores in teaching practice using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). Fischer's 't' was computed to check if there were any significant differences in the performance of male and female students. The statements on the students' general attitudes to teaching were analysed to determine overall impressions and possibly discover other attitudes not tapped by the questionnaire. The tests were supervised at the college by this researcher.

RESULTS

Altogether, 54 subjects sat the tests and of these 28 were males and 26 were females. All subjects had passed 'A' level and applied to enter one of the country's universities but had not been successful. Only after this did they resort to study for a Diploma in Education at this teachers' college. Of the 54 subjects, 42 (78%) had been temporary teachers before joining the teacher education course. With a total of 28 attitude statements and a rating of 1 (for unfavourable attitudes to teaching) and 2 (for favourable attitudes to teaching), the minimum and maximum scores on this questionnaire could be between 28 and 140 for the two extremes.

Table 1 shows attitude scores and teaching practice grades (as percentages) for each of the subjects by sex. (see Table 1 appendix)

Table 2 (see appendix) shows the mean group attitude scores for each of the 28 attitude statements.

From the table, most negative attitudes were in statements 3, 12, 13. Student teachers in statement 3 showed that they would not remain as teachers in the next 5 years, in 12 they showed that they preferred jobs in the private sector than teaching and in 13 they argued that salaries for diploma or certificate teachers were so low that these could drive them to other professions in future.

The table 3 (see appendix) further ranks the mean group attitude scores by statements in order to identify clusters of attitude statements that scored in the same range.

From the results above only 11% (3 out of 28) of the students had outright unfavourable attitudes to the teaching profession while 61% (17 out of 28) had outright favourable very favourable attitudes to teaching as a career. In fact, this number can further be increased if those who scored a mean attitude score overall above the 3.0 attitude points are considered as having generally favourable attitudes, then 89% of the students (25 out of 28) can be said to have more favourable attitudes to teaching.

Pearson's 'r' was calculated to find the relationship between the attitude scores and the scores by the students in teaching practice as given on table 1 for 41 students who had both scores. With an $r = + 0.15$ the conclusion was that there is a very weak correlation between student's attitude and teaching practice scores.

Fischer's 't' was used to compare the performance of males and females in their attitude scores. For the 28 males and 26 females and with 52 *df* t p at 0.05 hence there was no significant difference between the attitude scores of the males and females. Fischer's 't' test was also used to compare the performance in teaching practice for the 22 males and 19 females. With 39 *df* t p at the 0.05 level and there was thus no significant difference in the teaching practice grades of males and females.

In the free response questions on their attitudes to the teaching profession, 87% (47 out of 54) were prepared to leave the profession in future if the issue of improving their salaries was not addressed. Of interest is that, despite this wish to leave, 96% (52 out of 54) student teachers enjoyed the actual teaching in the classroom (see statement 7 in appendix 'A' which had a mean score of 4.56 a score showing a liking for seeing their children do well in class).

The teaching practice was passed by all students in the sample and all 124 students on the post 'A' level 1992 class. In the sample, 7 students scored bare passes (50-59%) while 24 scored good passes (60-79%) and no 80+% scores (distinctions) were recorded.

Discussion recommendations and conclusions

From the study it is evident that all the post 'A' level teacher training students sampled at Gweru Teachers' college had wished to do university education but when it became difficult to obtain places at any Zimbabwean university, they turned to teacher training courses as a second choice. One would expect such students to have negative attitudes to a second choice alternative career. The results of the attitude tests (Tables 2 and 3) clearly show that these students have positive attitudes to teaching as a career. Except for three students, 89% of the sample showed a general tendency to now like the profession though there were specific areas of dislike.

Specific areas of dislike included the equating of post 'O' level and post 'A' teachers at the end of the course. Student teachers felt that since they had done 'A' level, the college should award them an education degree at the end of the course or clearly distinguish the post 'O' and 'A' level students by way of remuneration after completing. This is summarised in statements from the comments of two student teachers shown below.

Subject 27: 'The course should be distinguished from the the post 'O' level course. It should be of higher value than the post 'O' level course.'

Subject 15: 'There should be a clear distinction between the post 'A' and 'O'. 'A' levels should not be brought to the same grounds with the 'O' level by being given a diploma (too). Salary should be given according to qualification of [sic] entry not as as in the present situation.'

Though liking the course, a number of student teachers (87%) felt that the salary was very low and that this could lead them to leave the profession. This can be demonstrated by sentiments expressed by the two student teachers below.

Student 30: 'The course I am doing is quite challenging but the salary is so low that most people end up not working whole-heartedly.'

Student 16; 'I like the profession but the salary is too low compared to qualifications. ... Also, the degree should be offered to the graduates of this course at the university or right here (Gweru Teachers' college*).' * Author's addition.

These sentiments are in agreement with the 93% (50 out of 54) who felt that salaries were a drawback in making the profession a life-long career. Indeed, it is clear that some teachers are likely to stay if the question of low salaries is resolved. Other attitudes shown were that the student teachers would 'leave' the teaching profession for a time so that they could get university education (even in teaching). All such moves could not be taken to be negative but in some cases could only produce a better teacher. It is clear that some student teachers after starting on the diploma course noticed that they had invested in teaching and that future advancement to the originally desired degree-holder status could be met only by doing B.Ed. degrees after the diploma in education.

This could mean that although initially they came to the teaching profession out of desperation, the socialisation into the profession has occurred and attitudes had thus changed hence positive attitudes to teaching were now shown. This observation has been found by Yates(1972) and this study further confirms this as shown by the following sentiments by some student teachers;

Student 54: 'I feel that the two year programme is essential, especially for post 'A' levels even though I

joined at first unwillingly I would like now to further my studies because I am finding it interesting.'

Student 31: 'Teaching is not an easy profession as I thought it would be. One has to work very hard with much commitment to the profession.'

A number of student teachers showed that they had been socialised into the teaching profession and this is further shown by the table three results which show that over 89% of the attitude statements were scored closer to 5 (the maximum score for positive attitudes) than to 1. However it is worth mentioning that three students still felt that they were doing something not worthwhile and wanted to leave the profession now or in future.

Student 46: (This course..) 'It's not in line and it's useless to me.'

Student 39: 'It is an interesting course and worthwhile especially when it is to be used as a springboard for joining another profession.'

Student 37: 'This can only be a background,[sic] stepping stone, rather than a career to be pursued with all my energy. I only hope what I have learnt will be particularly important to the new fields I wish to pursue.'[sic]

It should be noted that these are a minority possibly the group that had set stereotypes which could not be changed even under college training conditions. The majority seem to have been socialised into teaching. However it is worth noting that even these three students who were so negative to teaching, still scored passing grades in teaching practice. It can be argued that this was done to meet the course requirements only and not for the call of teaching. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a very weak correlation between the attitude scores and the scores in actual teaching for the entire sample. From this, it can be argued that it may not be worthwhile, as Fletcher (1958) and McNamara (1972) note, to test college recruits for

attitudes towards teaching as these attitudes become more favourable with time and the attitudes on their own do not correlate significantly with teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

The student teachers may not initially be interested in the teaching profession but with time they develop interest and perform effectively. There is a need to address the major concerns of student teachers. These include low salaries and the need for introducing teaching courses which are at degree level. The latter was strongly expressed by the post 'A' level recruits as they were aware that they qualified for university education but were denied this due to ever rising entry qualifications. The attitudes of student teachers to the teaching profession are *not* a critical determinant of the performance/effectiveness of the post 'A' level student teachers. Socialisation to the teaching profession seems to occur as the students do the course and the post 'A' level teachers are effective as classroom practitioners.

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APPENDIX A

"CONFIDENTIAL"

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE POST A LEVEL SECOND YEAR STUDENTS ON THE CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION PROGRAMME 1992

Please complete all the items below as accurately as possible. There are no correct or wrong answers. The findings will not refer to any individual per se and will be used solely for academic study and possible future planning of this course. Ensure that all items are answered.

SECTION A

Name of Student Teacher.....

'A' Level subjects passed 1 3

2 4.....

'A' Level school or college attended

Dates to

Have you ever been a temporary teacher? [YES][NO] (tick one).
Did you apply for entry to the University of Zimbabwe or the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) for 1991 or 1992 academic years? 1991 [YES][NO] (Tick one)

KEY FOR QUESTIONS 1 - 28
SA - Strongly Agree/ A - Agree
UN - Undecided/ DA - Disagree
SDA - Strongly Disagree

SECTION B (Tick one box for each question)

1. Teaching has always been a worthwhile challenge for me. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

2. Given a chance to opt for another profession, now, I would leave the CE course [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

3. I doubt if I will remain a CE qualified classroom teacher for more than 5 years. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

4. Given a local university place now, I would first finish the CE course then proceed to university thereafter. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

5. I like the responsibilities that go with the teaching profession. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

6. One need not do 'A' levels to successfully finish this course in two years [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

7. I enjoy explaining concepts to learners and feel happy when they show this by having good grades in teaching subject(s). [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

8. A bare pass for me on this CE course is just all right. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

9. If I were allowed to further my education in future, my thrust would be in the teaching field. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

10. I genuinely have the students at heart when I prepare for and teach a lesson [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

11. Teaching is an important profession and I am proud to be associated with it [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

12. Private sector employment is my final goal and I will take it up if an opening occurs in future. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

13. Salaries for CE (secondary) teachers are so low and this is what will finally force me out of the teaching profession. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

14. If a vacancy for studying for a Bachelor of Education degree were offered to me in the next 3 years, I would take it up. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

15. It is my duty as a Zimbabwean to ensure that Zimbabwean students are taught by trained dedicated teachers like me. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

16. If for some reason I miss a college lecture I feel I have lost a lot. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

17. My learning at college is geared for passing the final examinations and not so much for using the knowledge in future. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

18. I learn to internalise what I consider as meaningful knowledge. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

19. An 'A' level background enhances teacher effectiveness to CE (secondary) level. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

20. I am a committed teacher and will remain so for a long time to come. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

21. The content knowledge of this course is not significantly different from 'A' level course I did and so there is a tendency to waste time. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

22. I am not only aiming at passing of CE course but passing with distinctions. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

23. Teaching is a respectable profession and I have no regrets having joined. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

24. The two year duration of the course is fair for most post 'A' level students. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

25.If I could get a university place now, I would leave the CE immediately. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

26.I joined this course because no there job or career was forthcoming. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

27.When learning at college, I learn so as to use the materials in future. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

28.I just joined this course to just get an occupation and remuneration. [SA][A][UN][DA][SDA]

SECTION C

(i)Comment on your general feelings about the CE course you are doing and your future career aspirations.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(ii)Any other comments you may want to make about this questionnaire.

.....

.....

.....

.....

PLEASE CHECK THAT ALL ITEMS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

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TABLE 1 Attitude scores and teaching practice grades for the 54 students teachers

<u>Sub</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Att.</u>	<u>Mean att.</u>	<u>TP%</u>
1	F	82	2.9	63
2	F	127	4.5	68
3	M	84	3	-
4	F	103	3.7	68
5	F	82	2.9	63
6	F	119	4.3	55
7	M	113	4	68
8	M	90	3.2	64
9	M	117	4.2	68
10	M	110	3.9	63
11	M	95	3.4	75
12	M	71	2.5	62
13	F	102	3.6	65
14	F	110	3.9	-
15	F	97	3.5	-
16	F	130	4.6	66
17	F	115	4.1	70
18	M	98	3.5	-
19	F	90	3.2	-
20	F	116	4.1	-
21	M	117	4.2	59
22	M	118	4.2	-

23	M	109	3.9	63
24	M	59	2.1	64
25	M	101	3.6	66
26	M	124	4.4	58
27	M	115	4.1	65
28	M	90	3.2	-
29	F	108	3.9	61
30	F	134	4.8	68
31	F	122	4.4	68
32	F	103	3.7	58
33	F	111	4.0	52
34	M	57	2.0	-
35	M	121	4.3	67
36	M	91	3.3	60
37	M	71	2.5	61
38	M	77	2.8	62
39	F	109	3.9	-
40	F	96	3.4	66
41	F	103	3.7	63
42	F	114	4.1	65
43	F	106	3.8	-
44	F	125	4.5	74
45	F	112	4.0	63
46	M	55	2.0	-
47	M	114	4.1	61
48	M	73	2.6	68
49	F	118	4.2	62
50	M	110	3.9	58
51	F	91	3.3	-
52	M	124	4.4	66
53	M	77	2.8	54
54	M	109	3.9	60

TABLE 2 Mean Group Attitude Scores for Each of the 28 Attitude Statement.

<u>Att.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Att.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Att.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Att.</u>	<u>Mean</u>
1	3.4	9	3.3	17	4.5	25	3.7
2	3.1	10	4.5	18	4.3	26	3.3
3*	2.9	11	3.8	19	4.3	27	4.1
4	4.4	12	2.4	20	3.8	28	3.7
5	3.9	13	1.6	21	3.4		
6	3.3	14	4.2	22	3.7		
7	4.6	15	4.2	23	3.7		
8	3.2	16	3.4	24	3.9		

TABLE 3 Cluster of Attitudes Scores for the Entire Sample.

<u>Score Range</u>	<u>Numbers of Attitude Statements in Range</u>	<u>Total</u>
1.0 - 1.4	0	0
1.5 - 1.9	13	1
2.0 - 2.4	12	1
2.5 - 2.9	3	1
3.0 - 3.4	1; 2; 6; 8; 9; 16; 21; 26;	8
3.5 - 3.9	5; 11; 20; 22; 23; 24; 25; 28	8
4.0 - 4.4	4; 14; 15; 18; 19; 27	6
4.5 - 5.0	7; 10; 17	3
<u>Total</u>		<u>28</u>



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