

## **TRANSFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION: THE QUEST FOR A UNIFIED PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study tracked the implementation of a policy directive that was intended to reform primary teacher education in Zimbabwe. The primary purpose of the study was to assess the degree of implementation of the policy since almost eight years have gone by without any visible changes on the primary teacher education landscape. A case study methodology was used to collect relevant data from two teacher colleges. The sample consisted of 100 prospective students who were pursuing a teaching diploma at two teachers' colleges; 24 teacher educators equally drawn from the two institutions involved in primary teacher training. The results of the study indicate that the policy has been open to interpretation by participants at different implementation sites. At the management level, the policy message has been translated to mean quality provision of pre-existing programs instead of rationalization and standardization of disparate teacher education programs. Similarly, in the two colleges investigated have also responded differently to the policy. In one of the colleges investigated the policy seems to have been adopted for opportunistic reasons whereas in the other the policy has been rejected completely. At school level the supposed beneficiaries of the program namely mentors and student teachers find the programme alienating and burdensome. The underlying cause for this flows from two possible sources namely the cost of the program in terms of time and effort demanded of frontline users without commensurate benefits and incentives. In addition, the policy directive lacks specificity in terms of aspects of primary teacher education that were to be unified or integrated. More significantly, user conditions in teacher colleges and schools characterised by financial resource limitations and lack of staff commitment to the policy were found to be serious constraints in the implementation of the policy. In light of these findings, this study recommends a major revisit to all processes of the policy conceptualisation, formulation, design and implementation. More specifically there is need to craft a new policy vision through widespread consultations of all stake holders for a unified primary teacher education programme. This can only be achieved through the involvement of all stakeholders at national, college and school levels

**Key words:** policy reform, implementation, curriculum unification, teacher education.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout Africa, the quest for a relevant education system has seized most post-colonial governments. To this end African governments have committed huge amounts of resources in trying to reform the inherited colonial education systems. The results of educational reforms have however been disappointing. Researches conducted in post-independence Zimbabwe

have reported that the educational landscape in Zimbabwe is strewn with education reform failures (Jansen, 1990; 1991; Gatawa; 1998). The causes of reform failures have generally been explained in terms of resource shortages or community resistance (Dorsey, 1989; Gatawa, 1998). However, researches on educational reforms in developed countries have provided a rich source of insights into why translating educational policies into practice is always fraught with danger. According to Elmore and Fuhrman ((1994:9), the big ideas of policy are vulnerable at all education levels to the capacities of the people and institutions that implement them. Similarly, Walker(1990: 427-428) observed that policy disappoints because it is crises driven-once the crisis is over the motivation to implement falls away .

Other research studies sponsored by the World Bank have revealed the essential ingredients for successful educational reform to occur. They include some of the following:

- A national operational commitment that is well planned.
- A national effort that is made concrete through systematic management and a professional structure, and an effort that is sustained over at least ten years.
- Room to manage local implementation and latitude for adapting the programme to be maximally effective.
- A coherent linkage system between central, district and local school levels via information, assistance, pressure and rewards (Dalin 1994: xi-xii).

Additionally, some researchers have identified the following as constituting factors in educational reform:

- The need for a critical mass of advocates before an innovation may be implemented (Orlich, 1979).
- A good vision that provide shared criteria for judging movement(Fullan,1991)
- Pressure and support from within and without the implementing school organisation(Fullan,1992),
- On-going assistance, resources, skills and early implementation(Huberman and Miles, 1984:76-88)

Utilising the above literature as a conceptual framework, this study investigated the following aspects of the policy directive to implement a Unified Teacher Education Programme in Zimbabwe:

- Quality of pre-implementation planning (vision formation, policy frameworks, training of implementers; resource procurement etc.)
- Degree of implementation of the UTEP (full, partial or non- implementation).
- Quality of the implemented programme as perceived by the frontline implementers (i.e. primary teacher colleges and schools).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Great confusion and controversy surround the implementation of a policy directive that was addressed to all principals of primary teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. The policy directive from the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology (MOHET)(2001) instructed all primary teachers in the country to design a new primary teacher education programme that would unify and harmonise all primary teacher education programmes in the country. The initial focus of the policy was two fold, namely to unify diverse teacher education programmes in the country and to increase enrolments of student teachers in

primary teachers colleges (MOHET, 2001). This teacher education programme is popularly referred to as the 2-5-2 model which is reference to the structure of the programme. Prospective student teachers spend the initial two terms (6 months) of their teacher education programmes in college, five terms (15 months in schools) and the last two in college. Specific aspects culled from the policy sent to all primary teacher colleges are as follows:

- From January 2002, there will be more than one student intake per year for all primary teachers colleges;
- The teaching practice component would be extended from one year to one and a half years;
- Mathematics as a requirement for admission or entry to primary teachers' colleges would be dropped;
- All colleges would be required to teach Mathematics to those students enrolled without Mathematics(MOHET,2001)

However, the implementation of the policy has generated a lot of acrimony and controversies among participants in the implementation. The controversy pits the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) of the University of Zimbabwe as the supervising authority and certifying authority on one hand against frontline implementers namely teachers' colleges and schools on the other. The borne of contention with regard to this policy seems to revolve around the interpretation of the policy by the participants. A memorandum from DTE to teacher colleges seems to shift focus from unifying primary teacher education programmes to improving the quality of primary teacher education (DTE, 2001). However it has become clear that on one hand, student teachers and lecturers in primary teachers' colleges seem to be strongly opposed to this new. This study is an attempt to unravel and understand the underlying causes of the seemingly endless conflict. .

## **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The primary purpose of this study was study to assess and determine the extent to which the policy directive by the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology has been implemented at all educational levels and to explain the causes of conflict among the implementers. The information generated would be useful to the programme initiators and developers to either improve or abort the programme.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions were regarded as constituting the main aspects of the problem to be investigated:

- (1).To what extent were the core aspects of the policy directive incorporated in the design of primary teacher education programmes?
- (2).To what extent are current practices in primary teacher education colleges and primary schools congruent with policy intentions as expressed in the policy directive?
- (3).What are the attitudes of school based mentors and prospective teachers towards the new programme?

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Berman's (1978) concept of macro- and micro implementation passages in the context of public policy implementation provides a useful conceptual framework for the study. According to Berman (1978) as public policy passes through bureaucratic organisational settings, it is prone to adaptation and redefinition in terms of the policy sector' interests and

characteristics. More specifically, Berman (1978:167) has identified four passages in the macro-implementation of policy and these are namely (1) administration; (2) adoption; (3) implemented local practice and (4) local policy outcomes. Each of these passages according to Berman transforms and redefines the policy decision. Other research literature indicates that public policy is vulnerable at all educational levels to the whims of the people who implement them (Fullan, 1991; Elmore and Furman, 1994). Guided by the above, this study investigated passages through which the policy directive from source down to the shop-floor levels. These passages are namely the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology (MOHET) as initiators of the policy, the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) as the policy administrator and primary teacher colleges as programme developers and schools as local policy implementers. Utilising Berman's (1978) concept of implementation passages this study investigated the responses of the DTE, targeted teacher colleges in particular teacher educators, school mentors and prospective teachers in respect to the policy directive to unify primary teacher education.

### Research Methodology

#### **METHOD**

The case study method was preferred in this study. The case study approach is a comprehensive design incorporating detailed approaches to data collection and data analysis. It combines data collection methods such as searches in archives utilizing data collection instruments like questionnaires, interviews and observations. More importantly, case studies provide deep insights into issues under investigations and the development of theory (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990; Sporn, 1999). Similarly, Yin (1994) argues that case study inquiry is suitable for investigating contemporary events which the investigator has little or no control. The reasons advanced by Sporn and Yin for the case study approach is compelling and were therefore adopted in this study.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Data collection was confined to two primary teachers' colleges located within the Masvingo region that were part of the ten primary teachers' directed to implement a unified primary teacher education programme. An equally number of teacher educators were drawn from these two each of the institutions. More precisely, the sample consisted of the following groups of participants: (a) 100 diploma students drawn from the student intake of 2002; (b) 24 teacher educators equally drawn from each of the participating colleges and (c) 15 mentors supervising student teachers on the UTEP programme. The diploma class of 2002 constituted the pioneering groups of the re-branded apprenticeship model or the Unified Teacher Education Programme. It was hypothesized that data from the above would provide meaningful insights into the problem being investigated.

#### **INSTRUMENTATION**

Four instruments namely a content analysis tool (See table 1); a student rating form (See table 2) and interview guides for teacher educators and mentors respectively (See tables 3 and 4) were used to collect data. The content analysis tool adapted Lewy's (1977: 25-36) scheme and was used to collect data with respect to the quality of planning that preceded the implementation of the policy directive at college and school levels. This data was used to address question one. Data in respect of the quality of programme delivery was collected by means of a classroom observation form, student rating form

and interview guides for teacher educators and mentors respectively (See table 2-4). Data collected by the above instruments was used to address research questions 2 and 3. The classroom observation form collected data with respect to lecture room processes and behaviours considered critical in imparting professional knowledge and skills to trainees. The student rating form was intended to collect evaluation data, from the perspective of the recipients of the programme, its quality and value. In this respect, prospective students were asked to rate the effectiveness of key components of teacher education programmes (See table 4).

### **SAMPLE**

The sample consists of the following groups of respondents:

- 100 student teachers in their final year of training,
- 24 teacher educators equally drawn equally from the two teachers' colleges.
- Curriculum documents(Course outlines, syllabuses and schemes of work)

### **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

The data collected by means of the above instruments is presented, analysed, and discussed in the following section.

**Table 1: Summary data on the presence or absence of core aspects of policy directive in teacher education programs.**

<b>Design element</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Congruence of program aims with policy goals	Official documents are silent on the rationale, vision and mission of the new model Key elements of policy directive not incorporated in curricula.
Existence of a five term teaching practice program.	Going on in one college A but not B.
Existence of examination centre	Both colleges are registered as examination centres for Maths O and A level
Relatedness of program content to policy goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good from a disciplinary perspective but irrelevant to professional growth of students.</li> </ul> Major weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content is evaluated negatively in the following aspects:</li> <li>• Relation to goals ;</li> <li>• Scope and balance;</li> <li>• Integration,</li> <li>• Articulation.</li> </ul>
Degree of changes in assessment procedures	Familiar, easy to implement traditional assessment methods such as written tests, terminal examinations and verbal activities constitute assessment procedures. Major disadvantages Assessment procedures do not reflect a skills-thrust indicative of competence-based teacher education programmes. Absence of performance benchmarks in line with implicit goals of the programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largely unchanged.</li> </ul> No apparent link to policy directive

**Table 2: Summary data on programme delivery processes as observed in the repertoire of behavioural patterns of teacher educators.**

<b>Programme delivery dimension</b>	<b>Comment/Observations</b>
<b>Programme vision and goals.</b>	. Major weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most teacher educators are not familiar with the programme vision and goals.</li> </ul>
<b>Change in instructional strategies.</b>	Major weaknesses: Stress on discipline content fails to unlock and develop processes of teacher professional socialisation. Neglects student teachers' needs interests and experiences. Learning tends to be compartmentalised in subject areas and teachers tend to foster passivity in students..
<b>Changes in supervision methods and strategies.</b>	Major strengths: There is recognition of the difference between supervision and assessment. Major weaknesses: Infrequent school visits and irregular due to logistical constraints such as non-availability of transport and personnel.
<b>Changes in student assessment</b>	Major weaknesses Continued use of old assessment protocols is incompatible with new model. Weighting of assessment marks is reflective of the unequal partnerships between schools and colleges. The student and school reward system lacks transparency and objectivity.
<b>Quality of application</b>	Major weaknesses No advocacy from initiators of the model nor was there any resource injection in provision to support the implementation of the UTEP.

**Table3: Summary data on student teachers' ratings of essential dimensions of the new UTEP.**  
**N=100**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Somewhat Effective</b>	<b>Not effective</b>
Adequacy of program content	53.4%	23.9%	22.7%
2.Skills to use prescribed methods	No: 36.8%	31%	32.2%
3Skills to improvise instructional materials	35.8%	21%	45.2%
4.Skills to handle pupil differences in class"	41%	19%	39%
5.Practical demonstrations of good lessons by lecturers	20.8%	25.6%	39.8%
6.Procedural knowledge to diagnose and evaluate pupil learning"	34.6%	25.6%	40.2%
7 Guidelines for managing personal and professional relationships during the practicum.	40.9%	22.9%	36.2%
8.Time to practice classroom management skills.	40.5%	26.2%	33.3%
9. Provision of distance education materials.	24.1%	36.6%	39.3%
10) Mentor guidance and support	14.2%	28.6%	57.2%
!!Overall rating of the programme' effectiveness.	37.3%	28.7%	34%

Table 4: Summary data of school mentors assessment of their new roles in programme implementation.

<b>Programme dimension</b>	<b>Summarized comments</b>
Awareness of the new programme vision or goals	Negative. Information about new roles unavailable.
Clarity about the comparative advantage of the new programme	Negative. No explanation provided by program initiators.
Clarity in respect of new mentor roles.	Not clear. Most are unsure.
Clarity about new expectations	Do not to have any.
Adequacy of time for students to acquire and practice new knowledge and skills.	Time to master the requisite knowledge and skills severely limited due to pressing exam requirements.
Supply of distance education materials.	Erratic due to resource constraints.
Quality of communication with colleges.	Irrelevant. Mostly addressing administrative rather than curriculum issues.
Quality of mentor incentives.	Poor. Only schools producing distinctive students are awarded certificates of appreciation.
8 Quality of student assessment practices.	Remains unchanged. School marks ignored student assessment.
Quality of relationships with student supervisors	College lecturers barely engage school mentors beyond student assessment tutorials
Quality of partnerships between collaborating schools and colleges	Nothing to talk about



## RESULTS

The data displayed in Tables 1-4 above reveals that the policy message to unify primary teacher education in Zimbabwe has either been largely lost or subjected to different interpretations across educational policy sectors.

The data in Table 1 indicates that the key objective of the policy namely to unify primary teacher education has not been given due emphasis in programme design. The data in table 1 indicates that the curricula documents produced in response to the policy directive do not in any way reflect or address the issue of unification of primary teacher education programmes in Zimbabwe. An analysis of the curricula documents indicates that the current program goals and content do not support and reflect the policy intention to create a unified primary teacher education programme in Zimbabwe. More specifically, lack of clarification on policy intention with regard to primary teacher education has obscured efforts to reform primary teacher education. In addition the data displayed in table 1 indicates that there has been very little change in assessment procedures from pre-existing programmes. This might be due to the fast-track approach used to plan and implement the new primary teacher education programs. An analysis of the timelines for implementing the policy directive reveals that both the DTE and teacher colleges were required at short notice- two months(November to December, 2001) to craft the new programme. According to college lecturers, DTE representatives and link persons actually dictated the contents of the programme because they felt there was no time for deliberations. Curricula for the programme had to be put in place quickly as the launch day (January, 2002) was too close.

In view of the above, it is therefore not surprising that substantively, the message of the envisaged new programme is not different from pre-existing primary teacher education programmes. More precisely, one of the colleges investigated has rejected in toto implementing the policy directive.

Similarly, the data displayed in Table 2-4 indicates that a matrix of factors related to the fast-track approach of implementing policy are derailing or undermining the implementation of the policy directive. From the data displayed Tables 2-4, the following realities constitute barriers to actual implementation of the UTEP:

- Information deficits,
- Demoralised and incapacitated teacher educators
- Resource constraints;
  
- Opportunism and selective implementation by some colleges;
- Frustrated mentors and prospective students;

The key participants in implementation policy namely teacher educators, mentors and teacher trainees are not clear or familiar with the key elements of the policy directive. Hence most of the information on the policy is communicated in piece meal from DTE officials who are perceived by teacher college lecturers to be arrogant and aloof. Similarly an information deficit has resulted in the programme acquiring different names. Respondents give various names such as the Attachment model, the Unified Teacher Education model, the 2-5-2 or even the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (Zintec)

model. These different names convey different meanings of the program to different audiences. In view of this, it can, therefore, be argued that the programme is implemented differently at different educational levels. This undoubtedly compromises the task of unifying primary teacher education in Zimbabwe.

In addition, the data in Tables 2-4 indicates that teacher educators and mentors seem not to be aware of the new roles as school-based teacher educators and writers of distance education materials respectively.

In the same vein, the data in Table 4 indicates that the time required to prepare and develop practical teaching skills for student teachers in the time given is woefully inadequate. The data in Table 4 indicates that teacher educators have inadequate time, energy, expertise and resources to prepare distance education materials for trainees. More significantly the distance education component seems to exert serious strains on the financial resources of institutions. In this regard, one of the colleges implementing the programme quickly reverted to the conventional and pre-colonial 3-3-3 model of teacher education which has no distance education components.

To sum up, the data displayed in Tables 1-4 indicates that the key message of the policy directive has not been delivered accurately and faithfully among frontline implementers namely teacher colleges and schools. Consequently, the policy has been selectively interpreted and adopted by the frontline implementers.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study set out to investigate the implementation of policy directive B/14/6 Reference 132 issued to all principals of primary teachers colleges in Zimbabwe. The major goal of this policy was to unify, rationalise and harmonise diverse primary teacher education programmes in Zimbabwe. The results of this study indicates that this task is nowhere near completion for a number of reasons,

Firstly, the implementing agency or supervising authority in this task namely the DTE has selectively focused on aspects of the policy to the extent of undermining the major goal of the policy. The results of the study indicate that the DTE has in respect of the government policy reoriented and redefined it to such an extent that the primary policy goal has become obscured. Consequently, more emphasis is now being put on aspects of the policy that are consonant with the interests and concerns of the DTE the credentialing authority of primary teacher education certificates. For example, task forces have been dispatched to teacher colleges and primary schools to enforce compliance with the requirements for the provision of distance education materials to all students during teaching practice. Again in the aspect of examination fees the DTE has been uncompromising. Student teachers failing to remit fees have been denied certification. These issues have greatly soured relations between the DTE and concerned colleges to the extent that college staff is mulling the option of either dissolving or reconstituting the Scheme of Association.

Secondly, the results of the study indicate that the two colleges investigated have responded differently to both the policy and DTE pressures. One of the colleges has successfully resisted the policy in terms of adopting the prolonged teaching practice

period, production of distance education materials and has successfully defended the status quo. The other college has seemingly complied with DTE requirements. However, a close scrutiny of the data indicates that the college has adapted the policy and DTE pressures to suite their financial interests and realities. For instance, this college has increased student intakes for financial rather than pedagogic reasons. Prospective student teachers without “O” level Maths are initially enrolled in bridging courses which in reality prepares the students to seat for “O” Maths instead of direct entry into teacher education programmes. In addition the cost of producing distance education materials has been passed on to the prospective student teacher. In this way the college in question has effectively cushioned itself financial. However, of significance to this study are the curricula responses of the two colleges to the MOHET policy directive. As pointed out earlier in this article, the key policy intention or goal namely to unify and rationalise diverse primary teacher education programs has been lost.

The findings of this study support and extend similar findings reported in the educational change literature. Elmore and Fuhrman (1994) have argued that the big ideas of policy are vulnerable to the capacities of the institutions and people that implement them. In this study, it has become clearer that the MOHET has no capacity to monitor, supervise or influence micro-level policy implementers and agencies. As a result these frontline implementers have adapted the policy in accordance with their own concerns and perspectives.

Similarly, studies by Fullan (1999) and Per Dalin (2000) have highlighted the importance of quality planning at national level in relation to policy proposals. These writers have emphasised the need for a national plan to guide the implementation of national projects. In the same vein, the World Bank Report (2001) has advocated the development of policy frameworks as a pre-requisite for successful implementation of national policies. In this study, the results indicate that the policy prescription lacked specificity and procedural detail to guide implementers. Consequently the policy directive has been subjected to different interpretations by its implementers.

To sum up the results of this study indicate that the major goal of policy B/14/16 of 2001 namely to unify primary teacher education programmes in Zimbabwe is far from being accomplished. And the underlying reasons for this failure have been identified as policy goal ambiguity, competing interests, informational deficits, lack of capacity among other factors.

## **CONCLUSION**

To sum up the results of the study indicates that the project to unify primary teacher education has lost way in the institutional jungles. At both the macro and micro levels the policy has been reshaped and redefined, to suit the interests and goals of the implementing institutions and individuals. As noted earlier, that DTE as the supervising and monitoring authority of the project has put more emphasis on the managerial aspect of the project leaving out the major goal of the of the project such as the ideological, philosophical and the pedagogical undercurrents of the program. Consequently, the so called 2-5-2 model of teacher education is indistinguishable from pre-colonial teacher education programmes. Similarly the results of the study indicate that teacher colleges have responded to the policy in terms of their capacities, realities and interests. One of the teacher colleges investigated has clearly resisted implementing the policy in its entirety whereas the other has adapted the policy for opportunistic reasons related to fundraising. The grassroots implementers of the programme namely school mentors are the ones who seem to be carrying the burdens of the new programme. Thrust into new roles of teacher educators, these frontline implementers feel alienated and unrecognised in respect of the new programme. Finally, the purported

beneficiaries of the new programme namely student teachers feel hard done in terms of the financial demands made on them and the quality of tuition they are receiving. To conclude, the results of the study indicate that the policy to unify primary teacher education in Zimbabwe has lost way due to lack of clarity, vision and a supportive infrastructure. In view of the challenges identified as impeding policy implementation the following recommendations are suggested:

- development of a policy framework through stakeholder participation that will specify the scope, vision ,goals philosophy and content of a unified primary teacher education programme;
- provision of resources and infrastructure that will support the implementation of the policy proposals;
- An implementation plan incorporating timelines that will provide a monitoring instrument for the implementation.

The above steps are imperative and would ensure smooth and successful implementation of public policy across social sectors.

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