

CHAPTER SEVEN

CAREER CHOICES AND PREFERENCES OF THE GRADUATES

Introduction

The chapter explores the expectations the graduates had of the degree. This was done to find out what informed and influenced career choices and preferences of the graduates. Even if the intention behind the training of teachers may have been to improve their professional practices in the workplace, with the degree graduates may have developed certain individual expectations. They may now want something better in terms of incentives. Given the nature of the teaching profession in Botswana in connection with incentives, they are not as rewarding and as competitive as those in other departments, especially those of primary school teachers. Graduates' work experiences before training were sought from the graduates in order to generate propositions for comparison with what they wanted after completion of the degree.

Graduates' work experiences before training for the degree

In a move towards attaining universal primary education (UPE), it has been the task of policymakers to increase access to primary education in the country (NPE, 1977). Schools in Botswana are scattered throughout the country to enable all school going children access to basic education. The posting and transfer of teachers is generally done on the basis of where the services of the workers are needed and the country's developmental needs, which include provision of fairness in terms of allowing all school children equal access to the pool of qualified teachers (NPE, 1977). Teachers can be posted or transferred to any school in the country where there is an available vacant teaching post (COR, 1976).

The fact that teachers can be posted anywhere in the country did not seem to go down well with the graduates. Many did not seem eager to work just anywhere and several accounts seemed to converge around this point. The data shows that for some graduates it was out of choice to work where they were, while for others it was not their choice. For the former; as one graduate said: "It was my choice to work in Hukuntsi village because I come from the Kgalagadi district; I saw a need to bring back the little knowledge I had to my people so as to make a contribution

educationally.” Another graduate claimed that he preferred to start work far away from his home village so that he could move closer to his home village in the later years of his career. Another graduate maintained that she wanted to work in a certain area because the people there had a history of cooperation.

Others preferred to work in places nearer to their homes or with family ties. They believed that if they stayed in the same places as their families they would be able to cut down on unnecessary expenses. Accordingly, one graduate claimed that she would not have had to pay rent as she would have been staying in her own house. This view was largely associated with the low salaries that the teachers said they were paid with their primary teachers certificates. Ordinary teachers were paid with the salary scale of B1, which amounted to P450 (R598.5) per month. Another graduate argued that, as a married woman, it meant that as she stayed in separate places with her family they were then forced to spend twice on everything, that is pay rent twice, buy food twice as well as expenditure on basic utilities, which could have been saved had they been staying in just one place as a family.

For the other graduates, posting was not done out of choice. One graduate remembered that he preferred to work in a tourist place out of interest and so she could interact with people from different places. One was in a mining area where he could be exposed to different job prospects. Another graduate maintained that although the place that she was working was not her choice, she felt she was still young and it was an experience having to live in a rural place and learn to live with the people there. Others would have preferred to work in or at places nearer to their home villages, and to be with their families. One graduate said she wanted to work at her home village because she wanted to care for her mother who was sick. Regardless of where the graduates wanted to work, evidence points to the fact that they preferred particular places for personal reasons, ranging from exploration to social ties and family problems.

Teaching in primary schools is regarded as an all-purpose job. Teachers are expected to teach all subjects as they appear in the primary school syllabus (COR, 1976, NPE, 1977, Scheme of service, 1994). These include core subjects and general subjects, the former including Mathematics, Science, English, Setswana, and Social Studies, the

latter, Agriculture, Home Economics, Art and Craft, Physical Education, Religious Education and Music. Given the recommended class size in Botswana schools, which is in the ratio of one teacher to forty pupils (NCE, 1977), primary teaching is seen as a 'headache' by the graduates, who felt that it provided too heavy a workload. As one graduate put it:

Teaching all subjects is a challenge and an experience in itself. It is not like everyone can do it. It requires a lot research for these subjects, irrespective of whether one is good at them or not. This requires a lot of effort and time and normally has to be done after working hours.

The COR (1976) specifies that teachers have to teach eight periods every day, which graduates felt was strenuous, as they would have to make daily preparation for each. One graduate maintained that they had to search for the relevant content in cases where there were no teachers' guides or reference books, and they had to look for the appropriate teaching aids or devise means where necessary. This would not only take up most of their spare time, according to one graduate, but to a larger extent would undermine the spirit of uniformity. Teachers are expected to teach the same syllabus country wide, with the hope that they will help students achieve the intended objectives. Uniformity is critical to Botswana, especially given the fact that the country uses an examination-driven curriculum. Additionally, graduates maintained that they were expected to provide individualised attention to students, including not only the provision of instruction, as explained by one graduate, but also support when they are sick, attention when they engage in activities during play time or break time, counseling when they are experiencing difficulty of any kind, and mediating during disagreements and fights.

The job description of teachers does not only include teaching a class and attending to the individual needs of students, according to the teachers' Scheme of service (1994) and the Code of regulations (COR) of 1976. They are also expected to perform additional duties and do extra curricular activities with the students. Additional duties include sitting in on different committees in the school, such as fundraising, subject panels, examinations committees, health committee, environmental committees and departmental committees (COR, 1976). For their contribution to extra curricular activities, teachers are expected to do sporting activities, which includes athletics and

ball games, conduct music lessons and lead different clubs, such as drama and traditional dance clubs.

Although the majority of the graduates expressed the fact that primary school teaching is a strenuous job, some indicated that they enjoyed it. One of the graduates expressed her experience: “I have always liked teaching, in teaching you gain experience everyday of your life as you research and so you learn new ideas everyday; even from the children.” Some of the graduates maintained that they enjoyed their work as they saw themselves as “born” teachers. One of them attributed this to the fact that he was good at his work and felt he was productive, as evidenced by the good results he claimed to have produced. Another maintained that teaching was the best that she could offer, and that this was even evidenced in the way her students enjoyed her work through passing and progressing, even to Cambridge. Yet, as the National commission on Education of 1977 claimed, the quality of education in primary schools in the country was not impressive. This indicates that these graduates were among some of the few who were actually productive.

Others, however, said their love for teaching was largely influenced by the fact that they liked children and were concerned about their future. According to some of these graduates, although teaching was seen as a demanding job, they chose to teach mainly because they liked working with smaller children: “children are innocent and helpless.” Another claimed that students were the future leaders so they deserved to be appropriately prepared for their roles. This reflects that they were prepared to help the students with the kind of service rooted in the notion of teaching as selfless, which is associated with a particular kind of disposition, of being charitable, understanding and making a contribution to the country’s development. It indicates to a larger extent that these graduates were very passionate about their work, not in it for the money but well-intentioned. To inspire students and serve humanity was their prime intention.

However, while teachers may have been content with the demands of their jobs in the past, in the new era it was not easy for teachers to handle their jobs without the necessary knowledge and skills. In the new era, productivity is being advocated, with issues of quality and efficiency being emphasised both locally and internationally. Realistically speaking, such conditions did not fit with the changing times. Handling

these strenuous demands without the necessary information may discourage teachers from doing their jobs well, perhaps because teachers were also expected to play multiple roles of accountants, social workers, nurses, feeders and even policemen/women. They therefore needed to be empowered to handle all these different demands.

This section points to the overwhelming challenges at the workplace and the requirement for further training if teachers are to cope with them. The graduates demonstrated an understanding of this, most acknowledging their dire need for information that would help them to handle their work, hence their application for the degree programme. Accordingly, there are those who said they needed information on advanced teaching in the classroom: “There were a lot of new innovations that were introduced, so I needed to know the methods of using the innovations.” These responses are in line with the literature, notably the views on the professional degree courses expressed by Delaney (1997), Heath (1998) and Pring (1999), who claimed that to be in position to handle work demands students need the knowledge and skills that would put them in a better position to do so, hence their recommendation for professional degree courses that would specifically address these demands. However, it was not only information on teaching methodology that was critical for teachers to know. They also needed class control skills, especially in response to the use of child-centered learning that required that children take control of the learning process. One graduate, who said she needed to upgrade herself so that she could be in position to handle the increasing workload in teaching, further illustrated this in her response. This increased workload required that teachers be in position to use the limited time they had to handle their work. As a result, another graduate maintained that she needed information and skills on time management, so that she could be able to effectively divide and manage her time.

As some of the graduates were in management positions when they applied for the degree, they claimed that they needed skills that would help them do their jobs effectively. One of them expressed his concern in this way: “I had a post of responsibility, but I had a discomfort without the necessary knowledge to help the people I was supervising as they looked up to me”. Such accounts by graduates outline some of the general needs of teachers in primary schools. The data also points

to the necessity of the policy initiative. The policy was formulated in order to improve the teachers' professional practices (NPE, 1977) and In this regard, it seems it targeted the correct variable in that teachers needed to improve their professional practices in the workplace.

Graduates' expectations and preferences with the degree

Initially, the incentives of teachers, as illustrated by earlier accounts, had been their desire to serve students and the nation in a caring manner. This service involved a particular kind of practice that meant working so that others could get a better life. As Castells and Carnoy (2001) and Carnoy (1999) mentioned, now globalization has transformed the labour market and brought a shift from graduates thinking about others to thinking about their desires, wants and aspirations. In this new global era, the idea of providing a service for the graduates is the essence of self-advancement, not only for others but also for one's self fulfillment and satisfaction. This kind of shift entails a change in the identity of graduates and in what they now value in life.

Graduates' self-determination in expecting certain things in the workplace as a result of the degree is linked to the notion of individualism, a form of self-rule, as the graduates now want to articulate their rights with the motivation of the degree. Studies by Blaug (1987), Carnoy (1999), Castells and Carnoy (2001), and Pitcher and Purcell (1998), also indicate possession of high knowledge and skills as a tool that gives graduates the autonomy to make certain choices and preferences. With this autonomy, graduates now determined their own future. They formulated their own plans and determined their own destiny, because with autonomy the rights of individuals are supreme to all.

Remuneration

It was the feeling of most of the graduates that primary school teaching was not paying them a decent salary. There is a convergence of ideas, as all of the graduates want jobs with better remuneration. In contrast to the claim that primary teaching does not pay very well, the NCE (1977:130) states that the salary structure of teachers tends to compare favourably with other public workers with the same qualifications. The commission maintains that teachers' basic salaries do not deviate significantly from other government salary scales. However, the data seem counter to the report, as

it points to the differences in salaries of primary school teachers and other government workers. This distinction was highlighted during the interview process by one of the graduates, who pointed out that in the Primary Education Department, “salaries are low and even worse is the knowledge that prospects for increasing them are minimal.” Teaching in primary schools was generally perceived by the graduates as just a job, with no possibilities of ever getting a decent salary: “even if they manage to progress to the head teacher ship post”.

In the case of Botswana, the reason why teachers feel that their salaries are less in comparison with those of other public workers may be because of the ceiling of salaries in primary schools, which do not exceed a stipulated salary scale. Ironically, this stipulated salary scale is the entry salary at colleges of education. This lack of consistency in salary structures may act as a barrier to the country’s development, as it creates a large gap between the primary department and others. This may perpetuate inequalities among public servants and may alienate the graduates: “compared with other degree holders in colleges, primary teaching does not pay much.” This may lead the graduates to believe they are worthless and seen as not deserving. The reason graduates feel strongly about this point is perhaps because they feel they are entitled to earn the same as college lecturers, since they did the same programme. This kind of thinking is a problem, as it may discourage the graduates from effectively carrying out their duties. Consequently, they may lose interest in their work, based on feelings that they are of little value.

Status

It is a general feeling that some jobs are better than others, and that some have more to offer their employees than others. Unfortunately, teaching, primary teaching in particular, seem to have over the years earned itself the label of not offering much to its employees. The main reason for this in the Botswana case seems to be that primary school teachers have different academic as well as professional qualifications. In terms of academic qualifications, there are those with Cambridge certificates, most with Junior certificates and few with Standard seven, although most of them must have retired by now. Professionally, there are still many teachers with a primary teacher’s certificate, although measures are in place now to upgrade them to diplomas, (NDP 7, 1991). Others have diplomas and degrees and a few have Master’s. It follows

therefore that people believe that anybody can be a teacher, given the different qualifications these teachers have. As a result, the status of primary teaching has failed to improve over time.

It is from this set of events that graduates' concerns emanate. There is divergence of ideas as to where the graduates want to work and what they want to do. Some were looking for jobs outside the system, while others wanted to get out of the classroom, as indicated by one graduate's response that he wanted to be an education officer as this was the forefront of the education system and would permit him to have a say in education matters. He felt that the post of education officer had more status than that of primary school teacher. The majority of the graduates were looking for other teaching jobs within the system. For example, though one said she liked teaching children she preferred to be a college lecturer because she wanted to specialise. Specialisation was thus seen by the graduates as better, as they said through it they were able to better utilise the knowledge and skills learnt through the course, and focus on a few subjects. However, since a policy was formulated to enhance the teachers' professional practices (NPE, 1977) in the workplace, the system does not want teachers to leave primary teaching. By this policy, the system may be such that teachers want to teach and are able to do so, since the belief is that with the degree they would have improved their professional practices.

From the comments of the graduates, one gets the impression that they are now adopting a particular kind of orientation. This shows where the graduates stand in relation to the Teaching service COR (1976), not wanting to conform to the job description of primary school teachers as stipulated in the COR (1976), as far as teaching all subjects is concerned. They want to move away from the traditional norm of teaching all subjects in primary schools to teaching at least a few subjects. This kind of thinking may have been influenced by the nature of the BEd (Primary) programme that requires that students specialise in at least two of the subjects offered in the programme (Department of Primary Education Handbook, 1992/93, 1996/97; 2003/4). The study derives its main significance from this observation.

Progression

According to the data, in primary schools progression prospects are almost non-existent. Before obtaining the degree, as one graduate maintained, she could not progress because she was perceived as young, immature and inexperienced. As a result she claimed that recommendations by heads of schools mostly favored older teachers and those with more experience on the job. The general feeling among the graduates was that, with the degree, progression opportunities might come more easily. They felt that with the degree they stood a chance to be given priority over their less qualified counterparts.

Realistically speaking, all teachers in primary schools have an equal chance of being elevated to positions of responsibility. This was illustrated by one graduate's comment that in primary schools there is no recognition of the fact that one has a degree, because when applying for posts of responsibilities all qualified teachers are considered for promotion. This graduate further maintained that the nature of the qualification does not really matter as a testimonial is given more recognition than one's level of qualification. Perhaps this is because of the fact that though a degree may be an advantage, it is not yet a requirement to teach in primary schools. Therefore, to give degree holders priority would be tantamount to breach of the employment requirement, which states that one has to have done a primary teacher's course to teach in primary schools (COR, 1976). Graduates felt that they had outgrown this kind of socialisation and could better be utilised elsewhere, with recognition given to their status as degree holders. A few subtleties were noted, as none of the graduates made it clear how they expect to progress in primary schools. Many did however express that they wanted to get employment that would acknowledge their qualifications.

The overall responses of the graduates outlined in this chapter show that they are taking a principled stand about their welfare in the workplace. They are confirming that they are not just people without feelings. To me there is really no guarantee that it was indeed lack of professional practice in the workplace only that prevented teachers from providing quality education in the schools. The reason they did not challenge lack of incentives in the workplace before may be because they lacked information on which to critically assess their situation. Though most of the graduates said that

primary school teaching is a job to which they had devoted their lives, as evidenced by their earlier responses, the degree seemed to have inspired and motivated them. With the degree, the graduates seemed to have assessed their situation critically, denoting a strengthening of their faculty to think critically and see things differently. Critical thinking is an important part of decision making.

Inasmuch as the system does not want teachers who lack professional skills in the workplace, as evidenced by the formulation of the policy to improve professional practice and its underlying strategies, the system cannot be expected to function well with demoralised teachers. The decision to improve professional practice in the workplace should have been borne out of this view. This lack of authenticity on the way public workers are treated may lead to a situation where graduates become frustrated, disillusioned and alienated, while making it impossible for them to respond positively to the realities of problems experienced in the schools. The specific role played by incentives in improving professional practice in the workplace poses a threat to the realisation of the policy. This may further lead to a situation where graduates develop a spirit of individualism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter provides a starting point on what maybe needed to align the policy in order to address the main implementation challenges in the workplace. The comments of the graduates suggest that they were dissatisfied with lack of incentives in the primary education sector and wanted to leave. The actions of the graduates undermined the policy, as their dissatisfaction brought about a mismatch in what is expected of them and what is actually happening in the workplace. This chapter has highlighted a very important element in people's lives, namely possession of information. In most cases the reason people do not exercise their rights is that they do not have information. Information is a liberating phenomenon as it allows people to explore their aspirations. The BEd (primary) degree seemed to have raised higher expectations for the graduates. Graduates' experiences also show that degrees have the potential for helping their upward mobility.