

CHAPTER EIGHT

GRADUATES' WHEREABOUTS AFTER COMPLETION OF THE DEGREE

Introduction

This chapter gives indications of where graduates are, seven years after completion of the degree. It provides evidence of the extent to which their fate and their attempts at new employment prospects largely reflected their choices, preferences and disappointments. This however may not depict the whole picture, since this was the first attempt at tracing the whereabouts of this group, and even then it is only for one cohort from the BEd (primary) programme.

The chapter argues that although the emerging trend in higher education is to try and align the degree to the workplace in practice, university degrees have different functions in career development. With the degree graduates seemed to have lost interest in their initial jobs. In former times, even if teachers wanted to change and do something different, they were largely restricted by the fact that they were not highly qualified to do so. In the process, they could do little since the context was too inflexible. Now, however, graduates with degrees could relate thought to action and make choices. The chapter discusses their experiences after completion of the degree.

Graduates' experiences after completion of the degree

Normally, on completion of the degree, graduates venture into different jobs or remain unemployed for sometime. With the 1997 graduates of the BEd programme of the University of Botswana, this was not the case. Since all the graduates were initially teachers, on completion of the degree they were posted back to primary schools in line with their employers' expectations. They were expected to return to the workplace to enhance production, as they may have become better practitioners with a better understanding of their work (Department of Primary Education Handbook, 1992/3, 1996/7). It was hoped that their contributions would lead to improvement and effectiveness in the workplace, and that their approach may change the performance of learners. However, life became more unbearable for the graduates as they felt the frustrations of lack of incentives and the possibility of a better life as new possibilities in the labour market presented themselves.

The table below represents the whereabouts of the graduates before doing the BEd programme and where they are now.

Movement of the BEd (primary) graduates in the job market

	THEN	NOW			
Employer	Teaching Service Management (TSM)	Teaching Service Management		Ministry of Education	University of Botswana
Jobs	Teachers	Teachers	Lecturers	Education Officers	Lecturers
Positions Held	Head teachers = 1 Deputy = 2 Senior teachers = 6 Teachers = 17	Head teacher = 1 Deputy head teachers = 4 Head of department = 3	Senior = 9	In service = 3 Field = 2	Junior = 4
TOTAL	26 Teachers	26 Graduates			

The above table shows that before training all the twenty-six graduates were employed by the Department of Teaching Service Management (TSM), as primary school teachers. Nine of them were in management positions, one being the head teacher (H/T), two deputy head teachers (D/HT) and six senior teachers. The other seventeen were in the assistant teacher rank. At the time of the survey the situation had changed dramatically, with only seventeen of the twenty-six still employed by TSM. Nine out of seventeen of those still employed by TSM had moved to the Department of Teacher Training and Development (TT and D), as college lecturers. Only eight out of the seventeen employed by TSM are still under the primary education section. Of the latter, one is a head teacher, four are deputy head teachers and three are heads of departments (HODs). Five of the graduates are directly employed by the Ministry of Education as education officers (Eos), three in in-service training, and two as field EOs. Only four of the graduates have joined the University of Botswana as lecturers. This actually aligns well with what was noticed in the literature review section by Carnoy (1999:8), when he proclaimed that “career jobs

are slowly being replaced by jobs that demand higher knowledge and skills and as such experience in one job does not necessarily matter as it may not be as appealing as it did before.” Although there was mobility of graduates in the job market after obtaining higher qualifications, they have all remained in the field of education.

The traditional expectation that graduates go back to their initial workplaces lost its centrality when six months after returning back to their jobs the first group of graduates said they changed their jobs, with others saying they followed subsequently with the availability of spaces in the labour market. As Carnoy (1999) noticed, the traditional ‘job for life’, with its career paths clearly defined, which happened to have been the only available option for graduates in the past, did not now appeal to their aspirations. The degree marked a turning point that sparked their careers. Evidence was to this end provided by one graduate who mentioned that when things were not going one’s way, one has to take a position and do something about it. Some felt that the information gained from the programme would become stale in primary schools, as they were not specialising. There was one graduate who felt that no person should be seen to be doing one thing all their lives. The degree acted as an empowering tool to the graduates as they used it to get the jobs they wanted. In line with the data, Carnoy (1999:8) claims that possession of higher knowledge and skills gives graduates the autonomy to choose between jobs and that this autonomy gives them a ticket with which to move between jobs (Blaug 1987:86, Castells & Carnoy, 2001:11, Carnoy, 1999:9). This, as Blaug (1987:94), Castells and Carnoy (2001:11) and Carnoy (1999:8) further note, is because the labour market has become flexible enough to absorb them, with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Rather than make them more of professionals, the knowledge and skills gained through the BEd (primary) programme appears to have made the graduates more marketable. The degree has provided them with opportunities that may be utilised in differing contexts, but particularly within the field of education. This afforded graduates the chances to explore their own ambitions and to assert their positions in the world of work. It is these opportunities that ultimately enabled graduates to diverge from their initial duties to other things. Since the degree appeared to have placed authority in the hands of the graduates, they therefore maintained that they looked for employment related to their career plans. They discovered opportunities

and developed interests that they had previously not pursued before the degree. In this way the degree created easier transition into other, more fulfilling, jobs. As Carnoy (1999:9) noted, organizational restructuring, with its emphasis on high level knowledge and skills, increased opportunities for graduates by opening up better job prospects. In this way the degree could be said to exist to protect the interests of the graduates, and demonstrates that within the limits of reason, no person, no matter how naïve they may be viewed, wants to be marginalised. Unfortunately, the actions of the graduates do not help improve professional practice in the workplace, a problem the policy was trying to address.

However, higher education qualification as a pre-requisite for entry into the labour market in itself encourages competition among graduates (Pitcher and Purcell, 1998:181). Absorption of graduates into the labour market varied. As a result, some of the graduates managed to secure themselves lecturing posts in colleges of education, as well as at UB. Others joined the inspectorate cadre as in-service education officers, either in education centers, or as field education officers. Although these jobs may need highly qualified people, primary schools also need highly qualified people in order to function well in this era. Those graduates who have not been so lucky to leave primary schools seemed to have progressed as well, as they were elevated to management positions and are now holding positions of head teacher, deputy head teacher and heads of department. Whilst this might not appear so appealing to the graduates, it is what NDP7 (1991) advocated and what was initially recommended by the NCE, 1977. Graduates are expected to take a lead in the introduction of change in the schools. Though it is beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to see how the graduate teachers still in primary schools perform as compared to their counterparts without degrees.

The absorption of graduates into different work settings of course had major advantages, as well as disadvantages. Asked whether they thought the degree had benefited them, the responses diverged slightly, depending on the extent to which they compared their present time to their times before obtaining the degree. Those who managed to migrate and exit primary teaching saw themselves as having done extremely well in their careers. These graduates analysed their responses in relation to the way they progressed, their salaries and the status they attached to their current

jobs. In terms of progression, one graduate commented that she has been able to move from primary schools to colleges of education, from an educator of learners to an educator of educators. Another responded that “the BEd was instrumental in changing my career from a primary school teacher to a college lecturer to a university lecturer.” In relation to salary, one beaming graduate exclaimed that her salary increased dramatically over night, by an extra five more scales - that is from his initial B1 scale in primary schools to a start of C1, with yet another increase two years later to D4 in colleges of education. This is in line with the literature. Evidence from the human capital theory, as portrayed by Blaug (1987), strongly supports this kind of pattern. The theory maintains that higher education qualifications guarantee higher levels of pay and that people with lower levels of qualifications in this era earn less than those with higher qualifications. Other graduates however felt that since they had been given the opportunity to specialise in the subjects they trained for, they had finally been provided with the status they deserved.

Migration from the primary department to other sectors by the graduates unfairly impacts on the poorer students, the potential beneficiaries of the professionalisation of the degree, with very little consideration given to their fate. This makes training to degree level in primary schools meaningless. Rather than enhance primary school teaching, it leads to the loss of its potential contributors, which cuts across the principle of development and the importance of the contribution to and from the individual, as per the recommendations of the NCE (1977). The degree seems to have impacted profoundly on the graduates, as individuals and not really tackling the problem experienced in the system. What this is saying about the whole projected plan of government is that whilst the teachers are now developed, instead of adding value to the system with their accumulated wealth of knowledge they chose to run away and, in the process, there remains a vacuum in the primary education sector. This having been noted, people who have developed in the primary sector through training a framework to draw from, holds the key to unlocking the problems experienced at that primary level. This also proves that deep inside individuals, no matter how enhanced and developed they are, they lack the passion and commitment in their work. This shows that the problem of the declining quality education will remain critical and the solution will only come about if all parties holding the answer

to the problem - the teachers and the Government - start to define the problem in practical terms.

The graduates who were still working in primary schools say they were constrained by the lack of employment opportunities which they aspired for most. They had still not attained their preferred employment choices at the time of the survey and so felt de-motivated and alienated. Their responses ranged from one feeling “misused and misplaced” to one who felt she was unable to fully utilise her skills, leading to fear that she was likely to forget all that she learnt in the programme. Still another felt that her management experience warranted her being in an office. These graduates were being marginalised by the labour market because of its competitive nature, yet they remained optimistic that they would secure themselves prestigious jobs with better promotion chances and pay structures. Though all of them were in management positions, graduates working in primary schools view their progress and promotion prospects as slow in comparison to their colleagues who have migrated to other departments. As a result they were still looking for jobs that could provide better incentives even at the time of the tracer survey. The fact that these graduates appear to be dissatisfied with their jobs may mean that they would carry out their duties with little enthusiasm. Further research is required to find out where these people would be in the next few years.

If graduates who are still in primary schools want to leave, it shows that the concept of democracy, yet another principle of the policy, is being misused. More importantly, this shows that Botswana as a nation are not yet ready democratically to really prioritise their needs to benefit the country. Given the country’s history, in terms of education, they could be asking themselves what is of value that could be contributed to the problems at hand. By the graduates’ own admission, there are problems that need addressing in primary schools in Botswana, with high level knowledge and skills, as justified by their application for the degree programme. They know that they have the degree but they felt betrayed by the system as the primary sector does not provide incentives for workers. As a result, they were using their democratic rights to look for jobs they felt were better for them. This to a larger extent shows that the degree as a transformation measures actually benefited the self.

Although the findings spot variations in terms of where graduates are working, evidence still points to the fact that the degree influenced career paths and practices of graduates in positive ways. This is mainly because most of the graduates are now aware of the power that they hold as a result of the degree, and that they are highly knowledgeable and skilled. Irrespective of where they are, the responses of the graduates seemed to converge, as they maintained that they were able to cope with their work challenges as a result of the degree. Although this study does not provide details of the exact job description of the work the graduates are currently doing, this analysis presents evidence showing the extent to which graduates are able to cope with their present duties as a result of the degree. By their own admission, graduates maintained that generally the BEd adequately prepared them to cope with the challenges of their present duties. This, they said, was because they were exposed to many things.

Graduates said that the knowledge and skills they learnt through the programme are transferable, since they are able to apply them to the workplace. As one graduate from the inspectorate cadre of field education officers responded, when asked whether he was able to cope with his work demands, “Although the courses did not specifically train me to be a field education officer, it was very easy for me to pick up the needed skills on the job.” Graduates as a result claimed that they could handle anything, as they said they could cope with whatever came their way. Here there is convergence of ideas as some felt that the knowledge and skills gained through the BEd were relevant to those of the workplace, particularly management and psychology courses, whose theories were said to be applicable almost anywhere and in any context.

For other graduates, the knowledge and skills were said to be helpful, even though they were not doing what they were trained for. They maintained they could pick them up easily without any struggle in the workplace: “Even though I specialised in Mathematics and Science education, I now teach Business studies, I am able to use most of the skills I learnt through the BEd, not only from my option, but from other courses as well”. Another graduate working at a college of education claimed that the BEd did not fully prepare her for her present duties. This graduate claims that during training she did only English literature and grammar, and not Setswana. However, she is teaching Setswana and feels that the knowledge and skills from the English

component are not easily transferable, as they are two different languages. As a result she feels that all she is doing she learnt in the workplace. The implication of this is that it does not necessarily matter what one studied, since the graduates do not see relating the skills to the workplace as a problem.

Also significant in the data is the fact that the degree exposed graduates to academic life. The degree was not only instrumental in filling out the knowledge gaps they initially had, but also laid for them a foundation for other degrees. Due to the availability of financial provision by government, most of the graduates managed to upgrade their studies to postgraduate level. A few did a Postgraduate Diploma in Counseling Education (PGDCE), and most did the Master of Education course (Med). Only those who joined the inspectorate cadre had not yet managed to go for further training because, as these graduates maintained, it is not yet in their department's training plan to do so.

Graduates in colleges of education and in the university claimed that there was a need to upgrade themselves, because the Master's Degree was a prerequisite for their jobs. Those in primary schools said their need to upgrade emanated from the fact that they still harboured the same ambitions as when they completed the BEd. They maintained that maybe the Master's would open doors for them, by providing them with opportunities to get jobs that would provide them with better incentives. There is however little evidence to suggest that at primary a Master's degree is needed, especially since the qualification does not warrant any salary increase. The responses of the graduates challenge the assumption in the BEd degree. Contrary to the belief that degree courses would enthuse confidence of the teachers as both their subject knowledge and pedagogical skills would have led to improvement of professional practices in the work place, with the degree many of the graduates have left the primary schooling system. The few who still remain in the primary schools are seeking jobs that they feel are more fulfilling to them than teaching in primary schools. The fact that the degree failed to improve professional practice in the workplace to a large extent threatens the realisation of the UPE. Therefore, while with the introduction of the BEd there might have been a vision to improve production in the workplace, a vision that tended to diminish with graduates leaving the primary industry.

Postgraduate training, for those who undertook it, seemed to have provided a broader knowledge base for research, according to the responses of the graduates. It is clear that most graduates, although acknowledging the contribution of the postgraduate training, believe in the utmost contribution of the BEd. They said it greatly impacted on their lives in a very positive way. In short, the degrees seemed to have provided graduates with a range of opportunities to choose and do what they want, depending on what the job offers. The best offer on the market graduates may diverge to other jobs that are different from what they initially did before they did their degrees. This renders university education much more than just an attempt to professionalise teaching.

Asked what they expect to be doing in the near future, some graduates in the colleges of education said that they were still satisfied where they were. Those at UB expressed that they wanted to do doctorate studies to sharpen their writing and research skills. Others from both colleges and UB maintained that for them 'the sky was the limit'. This last group emphasised the fact that no one is ever satisfied in life so if opportunities continued to present themselves to them, they would grab them. This in my view would be the most sensible thing to do, while the country is still striving for development. In future, chances may be harder to come by, as more people continue to enroll for degree programmes.

Conclusion

The data allowed a detailed examination of the relationship between the degree and the workplace. The data shows a clear pattern, where choice of jobs by graduates seems confined to the education field. With training there has been a particular kind of shift from classroom teachers to graduates who are now more focused, perceptive and, as a result, more knowledgeable and skilled than before. Graduates are sending a clear message that, in this new era, the traditional standard of staying in one job for life is no longer a comfort zone.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion is that for most of the graduates the degree seemed to have made a difference in their working lives, no matter how insignificant it may appear to some. This is because, for all of them, the

degree seemed to have redirected them from the jobs they initially did before they went for training. Some are lecturers, others Education officers, and even those who are still in primary schools are in leadership and management positions, albeit they maintained that even those without the degree have an equal chance of getting the posts. Their present jobs confirmed the fact that the degree provide graduates with upward mobility.