

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

Introduction

To understand the argument presented in this study there was need to make the reader aware of the contextual issues that might have contributed to the need for the improvement of professional practice in the workplace and the response of government in an attempt to address the problem. These are both external pressures at the global level and internal pressures at the national level. At the global level demands that people possess information on which to base decisions pressurised countries to have workers with such skills. The chapter argues that the interplay of global and national pressures led to new demands for knowledge and skills, and that these impacted on the education system as a need for knowledgeable and skilled people. Government's response to these demands was to professionalise degree courses, as articulated in both the NCE and the NPE (1977), by introducing the Bachelor of Education programme at university level (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/1993:3) to improve professional practices in the workplace.

Reference to the above issues will help back up the claims made by the study, in claims that professionalising degree programmes does not necessarily lead to improvement of professional practices in the workplace. The issues discussed in the chapter include the education system before the introduction of the BEd programme, the school environment, globalization and pressures in the schooling system detailing circumstances that led to the introduction of the BEd programme. The chapter also details the Bachelor of Education programme and the profiles of the people who register for it.

The education system before the introduction of the BEd

Botswana inherited from the British colonial government an education system that was largely underdeveloped. At independence, most people were unqualified. The country as a whole had few people with degrees and most of those were from outside the country. It is this lack of qualified manpower that led to heavy reliance on

expatriates, since there were not enough qualified people to do the job (NCE, 1977:38). Botswana lacked capacity and as a consequence had to import skills from neighbouring countries. The good thing with these expatriates was that although they may have had to learn what they had to do, owing to different contexts, their contribution was highly critical and indeed what Botswana needed. Globalization highlights this as reiterated in the literature review section by Oman (1996) when he maintained that, “globalization is seen as a catalyst to the increased movement of goods and services, including that of people in the form of migration”.

The problem of shortage of resources meant that there were not many schools in the country, while these few schools were not easily accessible to everyone, owing to the fees (NCE, 1977). For those who were lucky enough to make it through primary schooling, their chances to make it through secondary schooling was largely curtailed by the fact that there were not enough secondary schools in the country. The result was that those who could not proceed to secondary schools got teaching posts in primary schools (NCE, 1977). This had implications for the type of education that was provided in primary schools, as apart from having lower educational levels, most of these teachers did not have any teacher training experience. Even with the opening of teacher training colleges in the late 1950's and 1960's, the situation could not have improved greatly since standard seven was not particularly a good educational background for teachers (NCE, 1977:67).

The school environment

During that time, learning was largely based on memorisation, as there were not enough books or material, and teachers were poorly qualified (NCE, 1977). Lack of resources resulted mostly in poor delivery of instruction in classrooms, with teachers resorting to expository teaching as the only means of imparting the curriculum to students (NCE, 1977). This kind of teaching was a hindrance in itself, as it increased the discretion of teachers and lead to their monopolising the learning process. They spent most of their time talking while students just listen and only respond to instruction.

In these contemporary times, the traditional expository teaching method, with its emphasis on rote learning, is simply outdated. A commonly held belief about

expository teaching methods is that they do not effectively address the development of thinking and problem solving skills of students. Regressively, this affects students as too much dependency on the teacher impedes the development of full individuals who are able to articulate their being. The result is that those who learn best by memorising facts are at an advantage in terms of assessment, while those who learn best by doing are at a disadvantage. There was therefore a need to come up with strategies that could silence the teachers and get the students to be more involved in their own learning.

Attempts to promote child-centered learning in Botswana schools led to the introduction of new innovations, meant to improve the quality of education given to students (NCE, 1977). These innovations were a breakthrough for Setswana, continuous assessment, guidance and counseling and the project method (NCE, 1977). All these innovations were child-centered in nature. Child-centered learning decreases the discretion of the teacher in the learning process and gives students a chance to engage in it. Contrary to the traditional method of teaching, where students were dependent on the teacher for knowledge, child-centred learning affords students chances to identify well with what works best for them. They become motivated by the learning situation, discuss issues openly and develop the confidence that goes with discovering solutions to problems with little or no help from their teachers. This in turn leads to reliance on their instincts and the combined efforts of their colleagues.

Compared to the past, when the work of teachers was relatively easy and they only had to transmit the curriculum, currently teaching is increasingly difficult to handle. Demands of the new innovations and methods of teaching were that teachers had to do more, especially given the differential ability ranges of students, the gifted, average and the slow learners. These posed major challenges for teachers, as all mixed ability students had to be catered for individually during instructional delivery. It could therefore be expected that many of the teachers became insecure in their work because their capacity to respond to the new methods of teaching was largely limited. It is largely for this reason that the NCE (1977:29) made a resolution to improve professional practice in the workplace. The implication of these new methods of teaching was that teachers had to be kept in line with the changed times. There was a need for a schooling system that saw schools as systems of delivery, and for

instruction to move to a higher level. It was no longer important for teachers to teach better, but also to teach in different ways. This is because teachers are key in trying to mediate reform of any kind, including the curriculum. Teachers had to adapt, and to keep up with the knowledge required for their work, as well as to be given the means and the latitude to do that by developing their pedagogical skills so that they could learn to teach properly.

Today teachers are meant to prepare students for the challenges of life (NPE, 1977:3), hence the need to prepare them to the best of their ability. As contexts change rapidly, new demands are placed on the education system. However, a problem with these reform models was that they assumed that teachers were ready to take on such responsibilities. These assumptions had major implications for the type of qualifications teachers possessed. For instance, most teachers in primary schools had primary teachers' certificates (PTC), which was the minimum entry qualification to teach in a primary school in the past (COR, 1976, Scheme of service, 1994). As a result, most teachers had not been taught about these methods of teaching during training for the PTC. Evidence collected by the Commission verifies this view, as it came to the conclusion that the quality of teachers, both trained and untrained, left much to be desired (NCE, 1977:68). Government therefore could not expect to improve performance in the schools without increasing investment in the knowledge and skills of individual teachers. New changes cannot be introduced without proper regard for how those entrusted to implement them would do so, or whether they could actually do so. There is always a danger that the outcome would do more harm than good.

In most countries, teachers are singled out as the most important resources in contributing meaningfully towards school change (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1996/1997:4). It is believed that the quality of their own education can to a larger extent influence the kind of education passed on to the children. With demands being made on the education system to try and improve the quality of teaching, especially at primary level (NCE, 1977), schooling had to be preserved by reviving the teachers' qualifications. Simply put, the PTC proved to be inadequate. There was a need to train teachers in ways that were responsive to the changing times, and as the needs of the country continued to change. Teacher

education also had to change in ways that would enable the system to produce good teachers, who would be better prepared to produce competent and confident students, who would go out there and compete in the world of work.

Globalization and pressures in the schooling system

Since independence, the education system in Botswana has undergone major changes, many as a result of pressures at both the global and national levels. At the global level the most sought after resource is knowledge (Carnoy, 1999:6; Castells and Carnoy, 2001:21). The general argument behind the rationale for the importance of this resource is that it will make people economically active and able to benefit not only themselves but their countries in general. Also fundamentally important is that everyone has knowledge, so that everyone is empowered with information on which to make informed decisions. The underlying assumption is that countries will make it or fail to make it economically in this global era, on the basis of the extent to which they have this knowledge or lack of it.

It is the demands for this knowledge and the skills that go with it that have pushed for the restructuring of the labour market. The organization of the labour market now is such that employers want to hire people who are certified as knowledgeable and skilled (Arrow, 1973:88; Blaug, 1987:78; Castells & Carnoy, 2001:10, Carnoy, 1999:2; Pitcher & Purcell, 1998:180; Spencer, 1973:88), making them the most sought after in the labour market. Possession of higher education certificates has as a result become an important selling point. This has resulted in the emergence of other pressures in the labour market, related to greater flexibility (Castells & Carnoy, 2001:11; Carnoy, 1999:8) and autonomy (Carnoy, 1999:8), leading to more mobility of people in the labour market (Castells & Carnoy, 2001:11, Carnoy, 1999:9), as people with higher education now have a range of job choices.

International attempts to help countries acquire knowledge and skills to be competitive saw powerful international organizations jointly intervening to ensure that all individuals have access to basic education, commonly known as universal primary education (UPE) for all. The call for universal education for all (EFA) can be traced to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in the 1950s, calling for the

rights of everyone to education to be observed. This call was re-affirmed in subsequent world declarations, the 1961 conference in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, with 1980 as the initial target; and 1990 in Jomtein in Thailand with 2000 as the target. However, due to the financial provisions that go with UPE, and the financial positions in which most developing countries are, whether as a legacy of colonialism or apartheid, most of these countries have continuously failed to meet all target goals of achieving UPE. The year 2000 became significant in this regard as it saw the latest attempt at encouraging countries which had not achieved UPE to do so, this time by 2015. It was in Dakar, Senegal that the Millennium development goals (MDG) were accepted as the latest blueprint for all countries to refer to when measuring their progress in achieving UPE. The (1990) world conference on Education for All (EFA) in Thailand, outlined the goals for meeting basic education teaching needs. These goals included:

- 1) Expansion of early childhood and development activities.
- 2) Universal access to and completion of primary education.
- 3) Improvement of learning achievement.
- 4) Reduction of adult literacy.
- 5) Expansion of provision of basic education and training for youth and adults.
- 6) Increased acquisition of knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound sustainable development.
- 7) Creation of global partnership for development.

The introduction of UPE was a great economic shift, because it was used as an empowering tool to facilitate change. In this regard it provided countries of the world with opportunities to reposition themselves to the challenges of UPE, by using the powers they had to provide for their people educationally, and create platforms for sustainable development. Universal primary education has by far the most potential to positively affect many people and change their lives for the better throughout the world. In Botswana, UPE has been a prime target since National Development Plan 5 (NDP 5, 1980). However, since independence, emphasis had been on getting rid of the legacy of colonialism, in particular the development of the human potential in the country to address issues of manpower shortage (NPE, 1977:3). Secondary education was as a result targeted with the view of addressing this problem. Even with scarce

resources then, pressures for UPE demanded that something be done. Government therefore attempted to universalise primary education as early as 1973, by reducing school fees by half and increasing the number of primary school buildings in order to accommodate the increasing student enrolment (NCE, 1977). It was not until the discovery of minerals and the help of donor agencies that the government was able to introduce UPE, in 1980, following the recommendations of the National Commission on Education of 1977 (NPE 1977:4). This was the first step to systemic educational reform, with a promise of a better life for all Batswana. UPE laid the foundation for educational opportunities that were initially not there for most people.

The commitment of the government of Botswana towards the improvement of the lives of all its citizens for the better can not be overemphasised. This was evident from independence, through to National Development Plan 5 (1980) and succeeding plans. The Government's commitment to access and equity can be better captured in the country's NDP 7 (1991: 335), when it vowed that:

No Motswana child should be denied the opportunity to develop his/her full potential in areas of national manpower priorities through education and training due to lack of access to financial resources. For the country to achieve sustained development, it is important that every Motswana is encouraged to develop skills in areas that can contribute most to the attainment of the planned objectives of rapid economic growth and self reliance.

Measures taken to achieve UPE included the abolition of school fees in 1980 (NPE, 1977:4), ensure that no child was deprived of education because they could not afford to pay them. The increased enrolments brought about by the introduction of UPE also resulted in the education system experiencing many changes as yet more resources and more and better teachers were needed in the system. This required enormous investment in the form of resources, both material and human. As a result rigorous efforts were made to make the implementation of UPE attainable (NPE, 1977:3). This initiative was consistent with well-defined parameters declared collectively by other countries.

UPE is embrative in nature, because it is not only limited to quantity but also to quality. The principle here is that students should not only be given a chance to attend school and be provided with enough teachers to teach them, but they should also

receive a good education. The Botswana education system had a legacy of teachers who were not adequately prepared in terms of educational provision, as a result of a disadvantaged educational background (NCE, 1977:67). Pre and post independence, most of the teachers in the system, trained or untrained, had basic education of primary schooling (NCE, 1977:67). Mostly, this was attributed to the fact that due to lack of resources in the country not many primary school leavers could be absorbed into secondary schooling. Consequently, this group was absorbed into the system as primary school teachers. This was a very lower level of education for anyone to be offering teaching services (NCE, 1977:67).

This low level of teacher qualification resulted in students not benefiting equally in terms of teacher competency. The outcome was that most were left behind, not because they did not know, but because opportunities to explore their potential were not there. It goes without saying that the only way for children to benefit from UPE was if there were competent teachers in the system, trained and motivated to teach them (NCE, 1977:127). The government was to improve human potential in terms of skills, but this demanded rigorous preparation of teachers, the focus being on what teachers needed to do to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. This meant that teachers should be given opportunities to change their teaching practices and consequently adopt ones that would assist them in doing so.

It was due to these contextual issues that government resolved to improve professional practice of teachers. It was believed that if teaching were professionalised, students would benefit from improved professional practice in the workplace, and that consequently this would improve the quality of education in the country (NPE, 1977). Primary education was targeted as the lowest level of education, with the intention of upgrading the professional qualifications of teachers (NCE, 1977:9). Through the NPE (1977), the Department of Primary Education was established at the University of Botswana, through a Primary Education Improvement Project, to offer professional degree courses to the teachers (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/1993:3). Introduction of the programme was a strategy used to improve professional practice in the workplace. This was done in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Bachelor of Education programme of the University of Botswana

The UB handbook (1992/193:6) stipulates that the Bachelor of Education (BEd Primary) is a four-year double major degree programme. It was introduced in 1981 through the Department of Primary Education. (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/1993:6), as the first major is primary education and compulsory for all students. This major includes all courses in year one, and only some courses in years two to four. The structure of year one courses includes 'Introduction to Educational Psychology', 'Communication Skills' and 'Introduction to Literature for Primary Educators', 'Fundamental Concepts of Mathematics', 'Introductory Science', 'Social Sciences for Primary Educators', 'Teacher and the Health Care System' and 'Introduction to Education in Botswana' (UB Calendar, 1993/4). Some of these courses are offered within the Department of Primary Education, while others are offered outside the Department but in the same Faculty (education), by other departments as well as in other faculties (UB Calendar, 1993/4).

The second major is made up of a selection of subject options, the choice determined by the performance of students displayed in subjects that make up that particular option (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/1993:6). This choice is, however, not automatic, but subject to approval by the Department. The options require students to complete a minimum of three full courses in the selected option in years two to four. In total, there are four options: Languages, Mathematics and Science, Social Studies and Religious Education, and a last option, whose component is not constant since the Department determines and so where students may be selected only with approval of the department (UB Calendar, 1993/4:36). The curriculum of the programmes includes content in subject disciplines and courses on methods of teaching primary children, as well as general knowledge on courses such as Education, Psychology and Philosophy of Education (UB Calendar, 1993/4).

A practical dimension also exists in the BEd primary programme. Students are expected to undergo at least eleven weeks of internship in teacher training colleges (TTCs), and recently in primary schools, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Education degree (UB Calendar, 1993/4:135). With internship, it is hoped that students will experience real work in teaching. In other fields, this covers a number of possible careers to allow for students to make informed career choices.

With the BEd programme, students are expected to go out and teach. Classroom teachers, personal supervisors and then external moderators, closely supervise this teaching practice (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/93).

Profiles of bachelor of education students

Generally, the BEd primary education programme is for teachers. To be eligible for the course, initially, teachers had to have at least a Junior Certificate (JC), although this criterion has since changed to a Cambridge Certificate, needed to qualify for admission with a teaching experience of at least two years. This group is admitted through the mature age entry scheme (UB Calendar, 1993/4: 46). The minimum age of entry under the mature age entry policy is 25. On average about 34 students register annually for the BEd programme and about 35 graduate from the Bed primary programme (Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/93:6; 1996/97:5; 2003/4:13; UB Calendar, 1993/4:134; UB Calendar, 1996/7:197).

The primary goal of the BEd primary programme is to produce graduates who would make a meaningful contribution in the development of primary education as a foundation of education (Department of Primary Education handbook 1992/93, 1996/97; 2003/4). Furthermore, as the Department of Primary Education Handbook (2003/4:12) stipulates, the programme should produce a better and much more highly prepared teaching force that, on completion of the programme, would display competency in teaching at least one of the traditional subjects of Mathematics, Setswana, English, Science, Social Studies, Agriculture, Music, Home Economics, Art, and Physical Education. Such candidates, the handbook goes on to note, should be in position to take a lead in the introduction of change, in particular the introduction of new innovations that employ a variety of teaching methods to engage child-centered rather than teacher-centered learning.

While initially graduates of the BEd (primary) programme were posted to TTCs and Education departments, the resolution by NDP 7 (1991) to upgrade teachers' qualifications to a diploma greatly affected this trend. On completion of the programme, now graduates had to be re-posted to their jobs in primary schools (Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/93:3). The expectation was that these people would make a difference in the workplace, and become better

practitioners as a result of the degree. The nature of the training they received would place them in a better position for effecting change in the schools than their counterparts who were not as highly trained as they were. In terms of the objectives and the outcomes of the degree, the Department of Primary Education handbook (1992/93:5; 1996/7:4) highlights that “the programme will produce innovative graduates, who are capable of leading others in the improvement of basic education in Botswana”. The assumption here was that the approach adopted by the graduates might change the performance of learners in classrooms, as they would have a better understanding of the curriculum.

With their newly acquired knowledge and skills, it was hoped that the graduates of the BEd primary programme would display management and leadership skills in developing students’ higher learning abilities, as well as being models for other teachers in the field. These people, on completion, are also expected to show an understanding of a range of educational issues pertaining to child development, language, research, assessment, philosophy and computer literacy (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 2003/4:12). Whatever they did, the expectation was that the graduates would enhance the quality of education in the workplace. It was hoped that their contribution would lead to improvement and effectiveness in the classroom. It is, however, not the intention of this study to find out whether these graduates have indeed changed their teaching practices in the classroom as a result of the degree. The intension is rather to trace what the graduates are now doing as a result of taking the degree.

The reality however does not follow this pattern. Some of the graduates do not operate within the classrooms as they are made agents for the improvement of basic education by being elevated to leadership and management positions. Some leave the primary education sector to seek better paying jobs in other domains. This group is either absorbed into secondary teaching, as lecturers in the colleges of education, or the University of Botswana (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 2003/4:12). In addition to seeking better teaching jobs, some of the candidates leave the schooling sector to do other things, including taking departmental transfers to other ministries and public sectors, while others join non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 2003/4:12). Many see the

degree as a stepping-stone for moving into other degrees. This however raises problems about the purpose of the programme. It also raises questions about the issue of the decline of the quality of education, as articulated in both the NCE (1977) and NPE (1977). Of interest is what happens to the career paths of the graduates after completion of the degree and what informs their choices. This is the focus of this study.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the contextual issues that impeded the capacity of teachers to effectively deliver instruction in the classroom and Government's corresponding response to introduce the Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Botswana. It maintained that, due to the colonial legacy following independence, the country only had a small-educated core of the population with many people not having access to education. The chapter suggests that since independence there have been huge changes in the education system, due to pressures at both the national and the global levels in general.

The chapter further maintains that these pressures had an impact on the quality of education provided in the country. As a result, the education system had to be restructured in a different way. In particular, it suggested that the introduction of UPE dictated that the schooling system be restructured in a radically different way, to enable all schooling children access to basic education. It is these changes that have made the teacher the most valuable resource in the schooling system. The chapter concludes by pointing out that it is these changes in the education system that drove the education reform process that Government opted for.