

CHAPTER FIVE

POLICY AND THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter aims to describe, analyse and interpret the current teacher educational policy, as well as the strategies to go about the policy. The chapter commences by making reference to the point where teacher education policy began to be driven by the global economy, that is, pressure for knowledge and skills. It gives clear the need for professionalisation of the degree, the drive to which in the policy is highlighted. A brief outline of how this is reflected in the BEd degree is given, indicating the changes in the degree in terms of objectives, the approaches and expected outcomes.

The chapter questions the policy and its assumption that if one professionalises degree courses one is more likely to improve professional practice at the workplace. The chapter argues that this assumption about the policy is problematic, as there may have been other things that needed to be in place, such as incentives meant to motivate workers. The chapter further claims that policies like these are assumed to be fashionable because they have been proven to work elsewhere. It concludes that Government's move to try to improve professional practice in the workplace by professionalising degree courses for teachers was perhaps a necessary condition, but it was insufficient.

Teacher education reform

Demands for knowledge and skills in the labour market, due to global pressures, correspondingly led to an agency in primary teacher education in Botswana. The way knowledge was perceived now was such that it had the capacity to ensure that workers deliver services in the workplace. Higher education was seen as a key factor in the reconstruction of development in the country. Global pressures maintained that it had the ability to offer skills to the education system that previously were not there (Carnoy, 1999), and to ensure that learners learn, teachers teach and administrators administrate. Higher education gained the utmost recognition in terms of its perceived capacity to provide opportunities for people to take their rightful places in their workplace. It was largely believed that if workers had higher education, they would

now be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to enabling them carry out their duties.

Despite continued efforts to improve teacher education following the country's independence, the level of educational attainment continued to decline, especially at primary level. This is according to a presidential task force commissioned to look into the problems inherent in the education system (NCE, 1977), and despite rigorous efforts made to improve education through the provision of resources (NCE, 1977). With Government's aim to increase the number of trained teachers in the system gaining momentum at that point (NCE, 1977), one would have thought that students would have been in position to enjoy the services of able and capable teachers, who knew their content and pedagogical skills well enough to confidently impart them. With the little educational background that most teachers had, coupled with teacher education training to certificate level by most, teachers were facing major challenges as the context around them was changing in reaction to pressures from the new global economy, whose forces were beyond their control.

Teaching was now characterised by a different set of expectations, which required new information and skills that differed markedly from the ones the teachers initially had. The capacity of the teachers to handle the new challenges then came under contestation. Even the students themselves needed to be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for them to succeed in the world of work. There was a need to look for an understanding in the complexity of this context, features of which were that teachers had: low levels of basic education, no professional teaching skills and very little knowledge in methods of teaching (NCE, 1977). This called for a new conception about teaching and learning that required skills different from those taught in the past. These were skills needed in the new era, and contextual changes gave education a new meaning as they dictated that people should acquire knowledge and skills at all costs. It is generally believed that there is a direct correlation between levels of education and economic development (Blaug, 1987), and from the NDP 7 (1991:335), it is stated that:

Education is an important investment and one of the main foundations of economic growth that Botswana needs. This applies both to the provision of

specific, high level skills required by the modern economy and basic education for all Botswana.

An intervention was needed at the national level to address this problem, but this put pressure on Government to make a detailed analysis of the problem, calling for a change of the teacher in this new context, since the teacher is seen as one of the many factors that help in student learning (UB Department of Primary Education Handbook, 1992/3). Teachers know learners better; therefore they should know what to teach them. Opportunities had to be created for teachers to learn and how to teach, and policy had to target teacher development. This was being done in order to appease the teachers in a legitimate way, in light of their poor educational backgrounds.

In essence, teacher education had to be given priority by being made the primary focus of teaching. The government needed to compensate for the injustices the students suffered at the hands of the teaching fraternity. It was vital that it balanced the problems of lack of professional skills in the workplace with enhanced training opportunities for teachers. Everyone has a right to meaningful education, which the government has a responsibility to safeguard, a clearly stated aim of the NCE (1977:23). The individual is endorsed as a very important element in the development of education in this way: “of unique value and it is only through changes in the developed capacities and attitudes of individuals that society changes. All aspects of education therefore should be developed with the individual in mind.”

The right to public free, meaningful education is a right that Government could no longer afford to postpone. In this case, a conception of rights to education meant first developing education so that there were good programmes of teaching and learning in the system. Second, it meant developing education so that the system ended up producing good teachers. Thirdly, through the production of good teachers the system produces good students, who could go out and compete in the world of work.

Teacher education policy

Policy development in Botswana is largely informed by the four national principles of education (NPE, 1977), namely democracy, development, unity and self-reliance. Democracy gives all people in the country a right to voice their concerns (NPE,

1977), which they can only do if so empowered. Development of individuals improves their way of life in the hope that they will in turn contribute towards the prosperity of the country's economy (NPE, 1977). The principle behind this is that everyone has a role to play and therefore everyone has to be empowered to grow and be in position to play their roles. Self reliance is a principle meant to eradicate dependency on expensive expatriates who dominated all sectors of government departments, and even the private sector, due to lack of skilled manpower in the country before and after independence (NPE, 1977). Unity is meant for developing in all individuals a sense of belonging, cooperation and loyalty to oneself and the country (NPE, 1977). All these principles are meant to bring about social justice in terms of provision of equitable measures and equality of opportunity for all Batswana (NCE (1977). Education to this end is regarded as a ticket through which the national principles could be made a reality. It is these principles that continue to inform the developmental process of education and its guiding strategies.

Due to the shortage of manpower in the country, lecturers in teacher training institutions and officers in the ministry of education were mainly people from outside the country (NCE, 1977). NDP 7 (1991:336) argues that Botswana could not afford to waste any more resources on the employment of foreign personnel while it still faced the very critical task of achieving the goal of basic education. Furthermore, NDP 7 (1991) maintains that it was important for local personnel to have the necessary skills needed in a growing economy, in addition to replacing expensive expatriates with qualified citizens.

It was against this background that Government resolved to localise posts in teacher training institutions and the primary education departments, and also to train primary school administrators. The implication was that those who were providing the services were themselves not well equipped knowledgeably and skillfully to do so. Measures solicited to support the professional development of teachers included:

- a) In-service training of tutors and education officers.
- b) Introduction of curriculum innovations such as breakthrough, project, remedial teaching, continuous assessment and guidance and counseling.

Recommendation 108 of the NCE (1977:161) stipulates that all courses were to have in them a professional teaching element. Depending on the type of course, training would either be short term at field education centers, or long term at colleges of education or at university level. Recommendation number 109 of the NPE (1977:11) particularly emphasises the necessity of training a cadre of tutors of Botswana origin, earmarked to be carried out at the University of Botswana Faculty of Education. Of particular importance was that these people were to be extracted from the pool of already serving, experienced primary school teachers (NCE, 1977). The policy recognized that indeed there is a role for teachers to play in the development of education. With this policy therefore there was a vision, that once teachers' professional practices were improved, they would be in position to influence positively the learning process in the schools.

On the eve of the introduction of UPE, the Government undertook a bilateral decision in conjunction with USAID to improve primary education in Botswana (Department of Primary Education Handbook, 1992/93). USAID brought into Botswana a solution to alleviate the problem of low quality education. The project responsible for this reform initiative was the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP), which was meant to upgrade the professional qualifications of teachers and administrators, as recommended by NCE (1977), although it was also responsible for quantitative improvements. PEIP started in 1980, but the actual implementation began in 1981, with the introduction of the Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana, to provide extensive training of teachers (UB Department of Primary Education Handbook, 1992/3)

It followed then that graduates of the BEd programme were posted to the Teacher training colleges (TTC's) as tutors, and the Ministry of Education (UB Department of Primary Education Handbook, 1992/3) as education officers. The Department of Primary Education (UB) also offered diploma courses for primary school administrators. The mature age of entry was between twenty-five and forty-five (UB calendar, 1993/4), but this was however extremely dangerous, as many of the administrators above the age of forty-five could not go for training. The danger was that a system would be produced that was headed by less qualified administrators.

However it is necessary not only to have administrative skills but also to have academic skills, so that the administrator could advise teachers in their teaching.

For the many teachers in the system who could not be trained at university level, in-service workshops were conducted to sensitise teachers to new innovations (NCE, 1977), using the cascade model of training. However these workshops may not have been enough to provide the information and skills that teachers needed, because the nature of this model is that only a few teachers attend the workshop and they then report back to the majority who could not attend. The main flaw with the cascade model is that information cannot be effectively multiplied and so can easily be distorted. Due to the fact that teachers did not have good educational backgrounds, even if they realised they were not able to express themselves, they may have lacked help. Additionally these reform initiatives were meant to enhance teachers' professional knowledge, but they could not reach the majority of them as only a few teachers attended the workshops. These workshops could not therefore have been adequate, as they did not impact positively on teaching and learning. The training of tutors and education officers, although helpful in the sense of contributing in the localisation of posts, also could not have directly impacted on teaching and learning in the schools as these people were trainers of teachers, not classroom teachers.

A reform measure was needed, therefore, that would directly target the schools and the teachers, so that they could begin to impact positively on teaching and learning. It was at that point that NDP 7 (1991) took upon itself to raise the quality of primary education by expanding in-service training of primary school teachers through higher education. It was hoped that with NDP 7's initiative the system would now boast a pool of better and much more qualified teachers, who would be more knowledgeable and skillful than before. Most of the posts in the Department of Education and TTCs were now satisfactorily staffed with locals and requirements to teach in the latter were now raised to a Master's degree. It was resolved through NDP 7 (1991) that the BEd programme would continue to train primary teachers, but this time, the BEd graduates were to be posted to primary schools as administrators and teachers. It was believed that this would have a positive effect on teaching. While initially the admission process of BEd students mainly targeted older teachers; as a result of the new developments this trend changed to the programme now enrolling younger teachers

with higher basic education than before. This was an attempt to establish conditions for successful implementation of education programmes in the context of the declining quality education.

With the BEd (Primary) programme there was a transition from emphasis on theory to improving the educational backgrounds of the teachers in courses offered at certificate level, so as to place emphasis on theory with methods and make teaching more practical (NCE, 1977). This shift called for change in traditional courses to those that were linked more to schools and perceived as being more valuable in teaching.

Assumption about the policy

The assumption about teacher education policy is that if the degree is professionalised, practice in the workplace will improve. This narrow view of policymaking is assumed as fashionable because such policies have been proven to work elsewhere. The result of adopting reform models from other countries leads policymakers to continually opt for the wrong reform initiatives. I argue that there may have been other pressing issues in addition to knowledge and skills that needed to have been dealt with first, such as provision of incentives for teachers. It was therefore important to take into account the context, and taking a calculated and sensitive approach to handling issues. In particular, there should be acknowledgement and avoidance of mistakes made in other countries.

The issue of the provision of quality education was, in my view, not given sufficient attention. There was a need to unpack the phenomenon to look for things that may have impeded the capacity of teachers to deliver instruction effectively, so that the system could be activated with all the possible solutions. Provision of quality education could be prone to a number of challenges. It can be argued that quality can be associated with other important things that are more enhancing. The issues that I think needed to inform policy makers with regards to the provision of quality education are listed below:

- a) Possession of knowledge (having information on new developments in one's field of work).
- b) Competence to do one's job satisfactorily.

- c) Morale of teachers.
- d) Provision of incentives.

The above issues act in contestation with one another but influence the way instruction is delivered in schools, and all were therefore central to the core of improvement. Policy developers were not particularly astute in trying to make schools achieve quality education without actually exploring all issues that could result in poor delivery of services in the first place. It was critical to explore these issues to establish why there continued to be a decline in the quality of education in the country. This was not possible since there was no system in place to regulate it. It is disturbing to realise that the country is still unable to clearly define 'quality'. As it was, the situation remained critical and could not be solved unless all possible measures were taken to address it.

Conclusion

Demands for higher knowledge and skills in the labour market resulting from globalization pressurised the Botswana Government into attempting to improve the quality of education provided to its citizenry. The Government came up with the resolution to professionalise degree courses by introducing the Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Botswana. The Government assumed that with the addition of a professional element to teaching, the quality of education provided in the schools would improve. This was done without proper consideration of whether the degree alone would address the needs of the workplace and was further problematic in that it did not take into account other factors that might have contributed to the lack of provision of quality education in the schools.

This chapter has argued that to professionalise degrees in an attempt to link training to the workplace, though necessary, was insufficient and the policy undermined the conditions under which teachers work. No model of teacher training can work unless all possible constraints are identified and proper measures of alleviating them are addressed. This would result in discipline of planning. Policy development should lead to a better understanding of the conditions of how teachers operate. There was a need to get smarter by finding a way of getting closer to the schools so as to know the contextual issues that they were dealing with from the vinticators themselves – that is

the teachers. In the absence of such a strategy the situation remained critical. It is however very important to note that the chapter is not arguing that addressing contextual issues will lead to the provision of quality education, rather it is highlighting grounds for other possible measures to top the professionalising of the degree that could influence the provision of quality education in the schools.