

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The chapter gives an overview of the context in which the Bachelor (primary) of Education programme (Bed) was introduced at the University of Botswana (UB) in 1981 as a background to the study. To help build on the foundation for the problem, the nature of the BEd (primary) programme is discussed in detail, outlining its goals, expectations as well as the profiles of the people who register for the programme. Discussed also in this chapter is the main argument, the significance of the study and an outline of chapters, detailing their aims, arguments and issues to be addressed.

The intention of the study is to find out how university degrees influence career paths and workplace practices of the graduates. The study makes the claim that while the emerging trend in higher education is to align the degree to the workplace; the reality is that in practice university degrees have different functions in career development. It is these different functions that provide graduates with a range of opportunities that may allow them to diverge from their initial work settings.

The need to improve teachers' qualifications in Botswana

As a result of globalization, the traditional structures that initially existed have had to be changed and modified to suit new demands. (Dale, 1989). Globalization refers to the networking of states through their important aspects of the economy, including education; finance, production and trade. (Castells and Carnoy, 2001) This affects the lives of people as they have to be equipped with the necessary skills to enter the global market, and knowledge, as noted by Castells and Carnoy (2001:21) and Carnoy (1999:6), becomes a larger factor of the economy. Pressures for knowledge and skills have consequently impacted on the labour market, especially in relation to labour mobility (Blaug, 1987:86, Castells & Carnoy, 2001:22; Carnoy, 1999:8), as those with higher education qualifications are now in demand. This mobility comes about as a result of the flexible nature of the labour market in this era, (Blaug, 1987:94, Castells & Carnoy, 2000:11, Carnoy, 1999:8) as graduates now have to choose jobs from a labour market that may have difficulty in absorbing them. Higher education is no longer a luxury, but has increasingly become an advantage and a key to a better life in the new global era. This is due to its nature of being closer to the workplace than the

other levels of education (National Commission on Education {NCE}, 1977). The emergence of these global trends has led to a call for reform of the education system. Globalization superimposes the need to develop workers who have knowledge and skills. Central to this debate is the issue of the provision of basic education for all (EFA). If knowledge is seen as an overriding factor then the right to education fundamentally becomes a right without any limitations. Universal primary education (UPE) for all dictates that in an agenda to meet globalization, certain skills must be removed from the education system to help drive the economy. In support of this claim, Dale (1989) maintains that education is meant to emancipate people and provide equal opportunities for them.

Attempts to improve education in Botswana owe their origins to the report of the NCE of 1977. The transition period to independence, as well as the period immediately after independence, saw the government experiencing many problems in education. A high level task force was commissioned in 1976, by the Botswana government, to review the total education system, to identify the problems it was facing and to devise strategies on how they could be solved (NCE, 1977). The commission uncovered a number of concerns, notably that primary education in the country was of low quality (NCE, 1977:53; National Policy on Education {NPE}, 1977:2). These local pressures, coupled with pressures from the international arena for an educated nation, would require a complete restructuring of the education system. To this end, primary education, which is seen as the pillar for other levels of education, became the main target as far as improvement of quality education was concerned. (NCE, 1977:53). The commission recommended that degree courses be professionalised at university level (NCE, 1977:161). With this resolution, the government believed that teachers would improve their professional practices and, consequently, the quality of education in the country. The government, in partnership with the United States agency for international development (USAID); established at UB the Department of Primary Education in 1981 (UB Department of the Primary Education handbook, 1992/1993), in an attempt to improve professional practice in the workplace through the training of primary school teachers in Botswana from certificates to degree level.

The Bachelor of Education programme of the University of Botswana

The UB (1996/1997:5) handbook stipulates that the Bachelor of education (BEd Primary) is a four-year double major degree programme, introduced in 1981 through the Department of Primary Education. The first major is Primary Education, compulsory for all students (UB Calendar, 1993/4). The second major is made up of a selection of subject options, determined by performance (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/1993) The choice of options is 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 (UB Calendar, 1993/4).

Profiles of Bachelor of Education students

Generally, the BEd Primary Education programme is for teachers, who to be eligible for the course have at least to have a Junior Certificate (JC), although this criterion has changed to a Cambridge Certificate for admission with a teaching experience of at least two years. This group is admitted through the mature age entry scheme, the minimum age requirement under the mature age entry policy being 25. On average about 34 students register annually for the programme, and about 35 graduate from the BEd programme (Department of Primary Education handbook, 1992/93, 1996/97; 2003/4).

The primary goal of the BEd primary programme is to produce graduates who would make a meaningful contribution to the development of primary education as a foundation for other levels of education (Department of Primary Education handbook 1992/93, 1996/97; 2003/4). Such candidates, the handbook goes on, should be in position to take a lead in the introduction of change, in particular through the introduction of new innovations that employ a variety of teaching methods, and that engage child-centered learning rather than teacher-centered learning.

With their newly acquired knowledge and skills, it is 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 (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 2003/4). Whatever they do, the expectation is that the graduates will have enhanced professional practice when they get to the workplace. It is not the intention of this

study to find out whether these graduates have changed their teaching practices in the classroom as a result of the degree. Rather, the intention of the study is to trace what the graduates are doing as a result of the degree.

As opposed to the expectations of the degree, the reality 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 field to seek better-paying jobs in other domains (UB Department of Primary Education handbook, 2003/4). Many see the degree as a steppingstone for moving to other degrees. This raises problems about the purpose of the programme, as well as questions about improvement of professional practice in the primary schools, and the issue of the decline of the quality of education in Botswana, as articulated in the NCE (1977), NPE (1977), and National Development Plan 7 (1991). Of additional concern is what happens to the career paths of the graduates after completion of the degree, and what informs their choices. These aspects form the focus of the study.

Statement of the problem

The resolution by the Government of Botswana to improve professional practice of teachers in the workplace led to professionalising of the BEd (primary) degree course at UB (NCE, 1977). This was a systematic attempt to improve the quality of education in the country. To link training to the workplace, the courses of the Bachelor of (Primary) Education programme are designed with specific goals in mind, with very clear outcomes and specified expectations. Despite the trend to professionalise degree courses, degrees still have different characteristics that may not fall within this particular framework of university programme design. In addition to enhancing professional practice in the workplace, degrees increase autonomy, flexibility and mobility of labour, as confirmed by some of the views about what degrees do in this study.

Against the above background, the key question of the study is:

How does a university degree influence career paths and workplace practices of the graduates in Botswana?

In addition the study addresses three specific sub-questions:

- 1) What debates and theories dominate the role of university degrees and the workplace?
- 2) What contextual issues influence the relationship between the degree and the workplace?
- 3) How do the graduates approach their career challenges and choices after obtaining the degree?

Argument

University programmes are by nature designed with specific goals and expectations in mind. For professional courses this is normally done to try and link university education with the workplace. Central to this idea is the belief that professionals are people who should possess specialised knowledge and skills on certain disciplines needed in the domains in which they work. It follows that professional courses attempt to offer specialised training for specific jobs in order to try and align the degree to the workplace. Delaney (1997) believes that professionals deal with challenging experiences in their workplaces on a daily basis. Consequently, professionals should be trained in ways that will enable them to handle the demands of their jobs. This trend to professionalise degrees is actually common in many universities across the world.

Since the BEd (primary) programme was designed with specific goals in mind, as well as specified expectations, with its introduction it was hoped that graduates would improve professional practices, a position that would enable them to do their duties effectively, and that production in the schools would improve as a result. This study challenges these assumptions, arguing that, whilst the system may have made drastic changes in progress, in terms qualified personnel with the attainment of degree qualifications, the BEd programme has failed to improve professional practice in the workplace. After completion of the degree, most of the graduates left the primary education sector to seek jobs in other sectors, due in part to the difference in degrees. Additionally, introduction of the BEd (Primary) degree did not take into account the myriad of challenges that teachers endure in the workplace. This seems to suggest that if progression chances are not there, salaries are low and people's contributions are

not valued, leading to them seeking employment opportunities elsewhere. Though teachers need training to higher levels, they also need provision of incentives to be efficient and effective in the workplace.

Significance of the study

To justify the carrying out of this study, I argue that Botswana has risen, among serious problems of deprivation and a complete lack of resources, to a situation where the development of these have brought the country the respect, envy and the global recognition. It is only vital, if not befitting, that interventions meant to further improve the situation in the country be seen to be doing just that. It has now been two decades since the BEd (primary) programme was introduced at the University of Botswana. The programme was introduced as a measure to improve professional practice in the workplace (NCE and NPE, 1977). Since its inception in 1981, the BEd (Primary) Education programme has produced graduates who were posted to the teacher training colleges as tutors, and the Education Departments as education officers. This was done to reduce dependency on expatriates at the time when the country was experiencing serious manpower shortages, and also to ensure that teachers get better services during training as well as in the field. (NCE, 1977)

The move by NDP 7 (1991) that the programme produce graduates to be posted to the primary schools made the programme highly unsuitable, as the teachers now needed knowledge and skills related to their work in primary schools, if the recommendations of the NCE (1977) were any indication. The commission recommended that degree courses be professionalised so that teachers could improve their professional practices (NCE, 1977). Teachers in primary schools are expected to teach all subjects (COR, 1976, NPE, 1977, Scheme of service, 1994), and they could therefore not be expected to specialise without the understanding that it would be in the primary schools, or that they are going to offer specific services in relation to those specialist subjects. This might send the wrong message to the graduates, as it could inculcate wrong ideas in their minds. As it is, the degree risks the danger of being used as a passage into the world of work. Graduates of the degree may believe that they can just get the degree and work anywhere, but currently the degree is irrelevant for the professional development of primary school teachers. The design of the degree should have changed as soon as NDP 7 (1991) resolved to improve professional practices of

primary school teachers. From the point of view of the university, the findings of the study may become a tool which the university could use to reflect and review the objectives and outcomes of the programme, since it has now changed focus. Reviewing the degree programme is critical, so that primary school teachers become qualified in matters related to primary teaching, and they themselves become primary material.

The BEd programme was introduced as a policy intervention to improve professional practice of the teachers in the workplace (NPE, 1977). Students engage in different types of knowledge meant particularly to improve their basic education, content knowledge and pedagogical skill. The findings of this study would serve as a frame of reference for other prospective students who want to do the BEd, in terms of what to expect of the programme.

Most of the debates in educational reform centre on issues of implementation of education policies, claiming that national policies may not be able to reach the schools as adapted by chains of implementers in order to suit implementation on the ground. Elmore talks about mediating policy to suit context. (Elmore, 1993) Very often, when there is a problem in education, it is assumed that the teacher is the problem. However, it may be profitable to assess the schooling system in general and not just assume that when there is a problem it is about the individual alone. The notion that when one trains teachers one gets everything right is not necessarily true, as there might be other factors to consider. It is advisable to be familiar with what is needed in the workplace. Elmore (1993) writes about structural reform, arguing that to reconstruct the structure to make it more enabling. According to Elmore (1993) it is highly critical to identify the problem and devise strategies that could help address it. Development is about arrangement of the structures and the degree of involvement of those affected in the shaping of the structures. New practices cannot be expected to function well in old structures, as they may not fit. In the case of the graduates, un-enabling structure caused dissatisfaction. However, in reality it is difficult to change anything unless one has a system that is agreeable, but if it is closed it becomes impermissible. The findings of the study stand to inform policymakers to continually unpack issues and not to assume that problems are deeply embedded in individuals. In

this way the finding may raise awareness of the importance of context in the implementation of policy.

Organization of the study

The study is divided into nine chapters.

Chapter one: Introduction. This chapter introduces the study elaborately, by giving an overview of the problem. It provides a little contextualization of issues that led to the problem. These are pressures at the global level, which had an overbearing impact on the education system at the national level, ultimately leading to the introduction of the BEd (Primary) Education programme at university level. The information serves as the background and builds on the foundation of the problem statement. Discussed also in the chapter are the significance of the study, the central argument, as well as a brief outline of the preceding chapters. The chapter argues that professionalising degree courses, though necessary, was insufficient because in reality degrees do different things that may particularly not fall within the framework designed by universities for their programmes.

Chapter two: Theoretical review. The chapter provides insights into the claims and explanations made about university degrees and the labour market. The main issues explored in the chapter are: conceptions of degrees, the nature of university degrees programmes including curriculum design issues, globalization and restructuring of the labour market, and theories of education and the labour market with emphasis on career paths. Evidence provided in the chapter shows that even if the course does or does not provide students with good knowledge and skills, employers might demand other things. For example, while a number of years ago employees chased employers in need of jobs, in this era employees are in demand, and as a result employers are constantly in search of possible employees. To this end degrees are constantly creating much flexibility and autonomy in the labour market, due to possession of skills and knowledge, consequently leading to more mobility within the labour market. As a result, there is no clear-cut relationship between education and the labour market in terms of what degrees are advocating, and what is actually happening in the labour market.

Chapter three: Research design and methodology. This chapter provides a rationale for the overall mode of inquiry. It discusses the research methods and design used in the study, as well as making a case for the choice of the methods. It makes clear the criticality for the selection of the sample used, including special precautions to protect the respondents from risk as well as the research tools for collecting data. The chapter also discusses how the data was analysed, by unpacking the coding system used and the identification of the themes that emerged.

Chapter four: Contextual issues. Chapter four outlines in detail the context under which the BEd programme was introduced. The chapter argues that changes in the schooling system in Botswana were triggered by pressures at both the national and the global level hence the introduction of the BEd (primary) education programme. The chapter details how globalization operated to undermine lack of knowledge and skills and as a result offers an understanding of not only how the decision to professionalise degree courses came to being, but also why it was necessary to address it the way it was addressed.

Chapter five: Policy and the legislative framework. This chapter aims to explore the changes that informed primary teacher education policy framework in Botswana. It discusses the teacher education policy framework and the call to professionalisation in the policy, and why the model was seen as appropriate for improving the quality of education in the country. Highlighted also are principles that guide the policy and strategies to go about it. Also discussed in the chapter are the assumptions of the policy, as well as problems in the policy itself. The chapter challenges the assumption that if you professionalise the degree you are more likely to enhance professional practice in the workplace. It argues that there might have been other things that needed attention in addition to professionalising the degree.

Chapter six: How different are professional degrees in education? The case of the BEd (primary) degree programme at the UB. The chapter examines the professional BEd (primary) degree programme in comparison with other teaching degrees at the University of Botswana. It highlights what professionalisation of the degree meant in relation to what the courses would entail. It also discusses the views

expressed by the graduates about the degree. The chapter claims that teaching degree courses differ slightly in structure, depending on what they are intended to address.

Chapter seven: Career expectations and preferences of the graduates. This chapter explores the expectations the graduates had with the degree. This was done to find out what informed and influenced career choices and preferences of the graduates after completion of the degree. The chapter argues that even if the course provided the graduates with the needed knowledge and skills to become better practitioners, graduates may demand something better in terms of incentives. Now, given the nature of the context in which teachers operate in developing countries; particularly in Botswana, teachers' incentives are not the most rewarding.

Chapter eight: Graduates' whereabouts after completion of the degree. The chapter challenges the assumption in the policy that if degree courses are professionalised, professional practices of workers will improve. The chapter argues that the degree has not improved professional practices in Botswana primary schools as the graduates have left the primary industry to join other departments. The chapter aimed to find out where the graduates were and what happened to their career paths after completion of the degree. As a result this chapter gives indications of where graduates are, seven years after completion of the degree. It provides evidence of the extent to which the fate of graduates and their attempts at new employment prospects largely reflected their choices, preferences and disappointments.

Chapter nine: Conclusions and recommendations. The chapter discusses the key insights and the general conclusions emerging from the study. This is done in line with the questions the study is addressing. In this way the chapter makes explicit the main argument made in the study, by supporting it with evidence from the data and linking it more systematically to wider literature. Accounts on how the conclusions drawn from the findings can benefit practice in Botswana are given.