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A Tracer Study To Evaluate The Impact Of The Department Of Primary Education Programmes Of The University Of Botswana On The Education Sector Of Botswana

by

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Abstract

One of the aims of the Botswana education since independence was to improve the primary level as a foundation of the whole education system. As a result, the Government of Botswana, in collaboration with other partners the world over, engaged in the mammoth task of improving the primary education sector. One such endeavour was the establishment of the Department of Primary Education in 1991 with the main aim of improving primary education in any way possible. However, since its inception in 1991 and the changes which are taking place since then, no major study if any was ever carried out to holistically assess the impact of the Department of Primary Education's program on the education system. This study utilized combined quantitative and qualitative approaches using a questionnaire survey and interviews. The results show that the Department of Primary Education had had a positive impact on graduates of primary education though with some challenges, which were highlighted. The highlighted concerns need prompt attention if the impact were to be wholly positive.

Key words: Botswana, University of Botswana, tracer study, educational management, Revised National Policy.

Background

Since gaining independence from Britain in 1966, the Government of Botswana pledged to give high priority to the development of basic education as this was the only way to start the arduous journey to the provision of skilled human resources for the various sectors of the economy. Much as the Government of Botswana was committed to achieving this goal and spent a sizeable amount of the country's financial resources in education, it should be realized that one of the main factors in the attainment of quality education is the calibre of the teachers who play a pivotal role in driving the education system (Monyatsi, 2003).

In an attempt to improve the calibre of teachers, including the quality of the education provided, especially in the basic education system, (Marope, 1995) contends that the government of Botswana embarked on an aggressive process of improving teachers and teaching. The Government of Botswana was not alone in this mammoth task, but there was collaboration and support from donor agencies from various countries. Notable and more relevant to this study, was the United States International Development Agency (USAID) which collaborated in the establishment of the Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana in 1981 under the auspices of the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP).

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The establishment of the Department was one of the collaborative efforts between the government of Botswana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve primary education. The project ran from 1981 to 1991.

At its inception, the Department offered two in-service programmes: a one year Diploma and a four-year Bachelor of Education degree in Primary Education. The first intake for both programmes was in August 1982. The first Diploma group graduated in October 1983 while the last graduated in October 2000. About 231 students graduated from the Diploma programme. The first B.Ed. group graduated in October 1985. Until October 2006, more than 1000 students have graduated from the B. ED (Primary) programme (University of Botswana, 2007).

The Department of Primary Education reviewed its Diploma and Degree programmes in April 1995 with an eight member Ad-hoc Committee. The Committee had representation from the DPE, Colleges of Education, Teacher Training and Development and Teaching Service Management in the Ministry of Education. The review was necessitated by the following factors:

During NDP 7 the Ministry of Education decided that Primary Teacher Training Colleges upgrade the Certificate programme they had been offering to a Diploma. This meant that both DPE and Colleges were to prepare Diploma graduates for primary schools, a role the DPE had been monopolizing for a very long time (Republic of Botswana, 1991).

The Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 had future implications for both the Diploma and Degree programmes. For instance, Department of Primary Education B.Ed graduates could no longer be deployed to Colleges, not only because the Colleges were fully staffed but also because the minimum requirements for a College Lecturer were changed to a Master's degree (University of Botswana, 2000). This meant that while DPE has been training teacher trainers, its main focus should now be to train classroom teachers and educational managers in the primary education sector.

The third factor was that the Ministry of Education presented a specific request to the Department of Primary Education to address its special needs in the primary education sector. The request included the following (University of Botswana, 2007):

The programmes should change their orientation to include specializations in the identified areas of need, namely: Remedial Teaching, Special Education, Infant Education Methods, Guidance and Counseling, Teacher Advising and Practical Subjects.

The programmes should establish priorities to strengthen instruction in the areas of Mathematics, Science and English.

The current system of admission into the programmes through the Mature Age Entry Scheme to be reviewed to accommodate the academic requirements for Diploma level training in Primary Teacher Training institutions which is at least a minimum of 3 O' Level subjects (MOE letter dated 21 June, 1994).

The current B. Ed Primary programme was revised and introduced during the academic year 1999/2000 to produce graduates who can contribute, more meaningfully, in the development of primary education as a foundation of education (University of Botswana, 2005). The review of the programme then was a response to the professional and personal needs of the students of primary education. The revision was done to:

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- Make the programme more relevant to the world of practice rather than being too abstract.
- Accommodate changes taking place in the schools and primary education field in general.
- Update in-service teachers with modern teaching skills so that they can fit in the demands of Vision 2016.

As the University of Botswana moved into semesterisation or development of an academic structure characterized by semester courses, the Department of Primary Education had yet another opportunity to review its programmes to be in accordance with the new university Mission/ Vision/Values statement which envisages the University to “be a leading academic centre of excellence in Africa and the world”.

As a response to the National Development Plan 8 which had as its main objective “to raise the quality of primary education” through training heads of schools as instructional leaders, the B Ed Educational Management programme was developed such that it accommodates other areas of education besides primary (Republic of Botswana, 1997). In other words, instead of confining the program to the in-service of primary school managers, it was opened up to accommodate other sectors such as secondary school managers, police, Botswana Defense Force and Prison’s institution managers, and vocational institutions, as long as they met the entrance requirements.

Since its inception in August 2002, the B. Ed programme has attracted clients from various education sectors such as secondary and primary departments, police, vocational colleges, and general educational administrators from various sectors. Candidates for the program are both from within and outside the country. The DPE feels highly indebted to the community and the Botswana education system in particular. To this effect, by developing the B.Ed Educational Management Programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE), DPE is responding to an important need at school and other education institutions for improving the educational management.

The objectives of the Department of Primary Education include inter alia, to:

- provide leadership in the improvement of basic education, in collaboration with other departments and the Ministry of Education.
- strive toward becoming a centre of excellence dedicated to improving the quality of teacher education and teaching in the primary schools.
- prepare personnel for higher posts of responsibility in the field of primary education who are capable of being agents for the improvement of primary/basic education.
- contribute to the body of knowledge about the educational enterprise in Botswana through research and evaluation undertakings.
- strive toward becoming agents of innovation and changes in the field of primary/basic education.
- provide leadership skills for the education sector (University of Botswana, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The Government of Botswana has invested heavily in education and training since attaining independence from Britain on the 30th of September 1966, but very little information is

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generally known about the impact of these investments. One of the aims of education in Botswana, which resulted from the report of the National Commission on Education 1977, was to improve primary education as the foundation of other levels of education. As one of the strategies to meet this goal, the Department of Primary Education (DPE) of the University of Botswana was established in 1981. The establishment of the Department was one of the collaborative efforts between the governments of Botswana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve primary education. The USAID project, which was responsible for this goal, was called the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP). The project ran from 1981 to 1991.

Data for assessing the impact of programmes could be obtained in many different ways for different purposes. One of the ways used is a tracer survey that was applied in this study. There were four main reasons why graduate tracer surveys are conducted, mainly to:

- Get valuable information for the development of institutions;
- Evaluate the relevance (and quality) of higher education programmes;
- Contribute to the accreditation process; and
- Inform stakeholders, students, parents, teachers and administrators on the worth of the product (Teichler & Lenecke, 2005).

Although there had been many changes that took place in the programmes offered by the DPE such as increase in student numbers, termination of certificate and diploma programmes, semesterization, introduction of the B. Ed Educational Management, increase in staff, acquisition of higher qualifications by staff, introduction of more courses, review of courses and programmes, and many others, there has never been an attempt to evaluate the impact of the DPE programmes on primary education in the country. It is therefore the purpose of this tracer study to evaluate the impact of the Department of Primary Education programmes of the University of Botswana in the education sector of Botswana. The main objectives of this Tracer Study are to:

- assess the impact of the B.Ed Primary and Educational Management programmes on the careers of the graduates;
- assess how the graduates perceive the B.Ed Primary and Educational Management programmes in relation to their academic and professional developments;
- assess the graduates' perceptions of the study conditions and provisions while at the University of Botswana;
- determine the extent to which the programmes equip graduates with the knowledge, attitudes and skills relevant to their job requirements;
- establish the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes;
- ascertain the relevance and usefulness of the programmes; and
- make recommendations on the way forward.

Methodology

This study adopted a combined quantitative and qualitative research design. The population for this study comprised of 663 graduates of the Department of Primary Education degree programs who completed their studies between 1995 and 2006. The target population for this study was 200 of the 1995 to 2006 cohorts (graduates). Tracing the graduates proved to be a lot of work as it involved studying records at the University of Botswana Admissions Office, the

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Department of Primary Education of the UB, Teaching Service Management, Teacher Training and Development. Another method of tracing them was to ask other Alumni for their colleagues' whereabouts.

A survey questionnaire and a structured interview schedule were used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire collected data on graduate biographical data, information on study and training, study provision and conditions, programmes and courses, and impact of studies on career. The interview was deliberately used to validate the survey data because as it is useful when one needs to explain and illuminate or interpret quantitative data.

To a larger extent the questionnaires were pre-coded. Data inputting into the computer was done followed by analysis through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

The researcher after interviewing some subjects immediately developed a case record per interview. The themes emerging from the data were then identified. Coding of the case records was then conducted. This involved identifying text segments, placing a bracket around them and assigning a code word or phrase that accurately describes the meaning of the text segment (Creswell, 2005:238). Content analysis then done with data from interviews. As alluded to by Creswell (2005) and Baker (1999), content analysis is often used where studies seek to understand values and social perspectives on issues. Content analysis was appropriate in analyzing data from interviews as the study sought to establish perspectives of various subjects on academic programmes. All the data from interviews, documents and questionnaires were triangulated and interpreted.

Findings of the study

These will be discussed under the following headings: factors influencing decision to enroll at the University of Botswana, study provision and conditions at the University of Botswana, usefulness of study programme to current job, overall usefulness of studies at Department of Primary Education, extent studies were helpful, likelihood of choice, usage of knowledge gained during studies, expected abilities and attitudes in current job, extent of satisfaction with professional studies, usefulness of the following elements to work, extent of satisfaction with professional studies, importance of occupation, and recommendations/the way forward.

Factors influencing decision to enroll at University of Botswana

The majority of the respondents agreed that the following factors were important to them in making the decision to enroll at the University of Botswana in the Department of Primary Education for the B. Ed Primary and B. Ed Educational Management degrees: availability of scholarships; reputation of Department; practice-oriented study programme in my subject; chance for specialization in my subject; admission standards and my prior grades; and advice by my parents/relatives, except for the availability and quality of on Campus accommodation which they felt was not important.

Study provision and conditions at the University of Botswana

There were different experiences expressed by respondents with regards the study provisions and conditions at the University of Botswana and these included: assistance/advice for final examinations; opportunity of out of class contacts with teaching staff; academic advice offered; chances to participate in research projects; teaching quality; structure of degree programme;

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testing/grading system in examinations; possibility of individual structuring of studies; provision of supervised practical work experience; contacts with fellow students; chance for students to have an influence on department policies; quality of technical equipment (PC, measuring instruments, etc); quality of equipment of laboratories/workshops; supply of teaching material; equipment and stocking of libraries; quality of lecturers; variety of courses offered; quality of course content of major; practical emphasis of teaching and learning; and infrastructure. Most of the respondents in this study were not happy with the study provision and conditions at the DPE although the differences in opinion were not that large in most cases, for example, 49% said the quality of lecturers was good while 41% said it was not good, 39.7% said the quality of course content of major was bad while 38.8% said it was fine, and 43% believed infrastructure was good and 41% were of the opinion it was not.

Usefulness of study program to current job

Any programme of study should be responsive to the job market requirements. The respondents in this study rated the usefulness of the study programme they undertook at the Department of Primary Education to be very useful to their current jobs. However, there are some areas whereby the differences are not that big or they have implications that need to be addressed; for instance, 55.4% say that the course content of the major in the field of studies was useful but 35.3% believe it was not and when one is speaking of content and such a large number says it is not useful, there is need to do something. Another concern is the small difference whereby 42.5% say the courses were relevant to their work while 41.8% say they were not.

Overall usefulness of studies at DPE

Any study that is offered by an institution or one undertakes should be of benefit. Graduates who went through studies at the DPE believe that overall they have found the studies useful in the following: for finding an adequate job after finishing studies; for fulfilling present professional tasks; for your future professional development/career; for the development of personality/education; while there was a tie at 45.3% for the preparation for work situation; and a small difference of 46.8% disagreeing ad 44.6% agreeing for promotion in your job.

Extent to which studies were helpful

Study programmes should help graduates in many ways and in this study many respondents found that the programmes were helpful in fulfilling the following: finding a satisfying job after finishing your studies; for your long-term career prospects; for the development of your personality; develop your confidence in your job; to be informed about your job; and gain more skills and knowledge in your profession. However, the differences of opinion with regards finding a satisfying job after finishing studies was very small with 42.5% agreeing while 38.8% disagreeing.

Likelihood of choice

The respondents differed in their answers; for instance, the majority agreed that they would not choose the same programme of study; choose the University of Botswana; choose the UB but not the Department of Primary Education; choose a higher degree level; not to decide not to study at all; and choose different courses.

Usage of knowledge gained during studies

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Respondents indicated that they use the knowledge they acquired during their studies in their current jobs in the following areas: Mathematics; natural sciences (physics, chemistry), material science, environmental Education; social sciences (psychology, sociology, politics); management of resources; legal issues (elements relevant to discipline/subject); knowledge of the English language; contemporary issues in education; integration of HIV/AIDS; and research.

Expected abilities and attitudes in current job

Respondents contend that the following abilities and attitudes were to a high extent expected from them in their current job: willingness to learn; ability to solve problems; reflective capability; ability to express oneself in writing; unconventional thinking; willingness to perform/commitment; ability to coordinate; ability to improvise; reliability; ability to work under pressure; independence; sense of responsibility; creativity; economic reasoning; determination; loyalty to the institution and its objectives; persistence; ability to cooperate; ability to assert oneself; self-confidence; adaptability; empathy; leadership qualities; and initiative. The extent to which they are expected is in the region of 80% and above.

Extent of satisfaction with professional studies

Respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the following characteristics of their professional studies: relevance of courses to my work; addressing possibility to work in a demanding job; student engagement in own learning; high quality of courses offered in the Department; support services of the Department; hands on approach; opportunity of pursuing continuous learning; equipment of the workplace; workplace surroundings (noise, space, climate); and quality of lecturers. However, the respondents were quite satisfied with the following: depth of content; working atmosphere; possibility to use knowledge and skills acquired during studies; promotion prospects; and the chance of realizing own ideas.

Usefulness of some elements to current work

Respondents pointed out that the following elements of the study programme were useful to their current work: course content of major; variety of courses offered; opportunity for specialization; research emphasis; practical emphasis of teaching and learning; and work experience (internships, etc).

Extent of satisfaction with professional studies

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the following characteristics of their professional studies: depth of content; working atmosphere; relevance of courses to my work; possibility to use knowledge and skills acquired during studies; addressing possibility to work in a demanding job; student engagement in own learning; high quality of courses offered in the Department; promotion prospects; support services of the Department; chance of realizing own ideas; hands on approach; opportunity of pursuing continuous learning; equipment of the workplace; workplace surroundings (noise, space, climate); and quality of lecturers.

Importance of occupation

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the following different characteristics of the occupation which were important for them personally. In other words, teaching was important to the respondent. They were satisfied with the following variables: largely independent disposition of work; opportunity of undertaking scientific work; clear and well ordered tasks; possibilities of acquired knowledge; job security; social status and respect; opportunity of

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pursuing own ideas; high income; chances of political influence; demanding job tasks; good career prospects; lots of free time; coordinating and management tasks; possibility of working in a team; and chance of doing something useful for society.

Recommendations: The way forward

- Less courses per level;
- More research skills to be taught;
- More emphasis on computer and information technology skills;
- Reduce programme duration from four to two years as in South Africa;
- Design courses that are relevant to students' fields of work;
- Provide IT materials and lessons;
- Courses should not be repeated;
- Strengthen student tutor system so that we can be helped;
- Develop professional skills and knowledge in management as we are expected to do management work at schools;
- Subject specialization to correspond with those offered in primary schools to meet the need of the syllabi;
- Train more lecturers to PhD level; and
- Lecturers should be encouraged to change attitude to the better.

From the findings of this study, it is clear that the establishment of the Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana was a noble venture by the Government of Botswana as its graduates helped improve the quality of education at primary school level throughout the country. This is so because the colleges of education were staffed with qualified lecturers who were able to produce quality teachers who in turn should impact positively on students' achievements. The study has also revealed the need to evaluate programmes regularly in order to offer interventions whenever they occurred. That very little evaluation of impact was done after such a long time indicates that a lot of damage which might have been avoided was not. For quite a long time, the DPE had been operating with some challenges which could have been arrested in time.

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