Teachers' Professional Development in Ethiopia through Higher Diploma Programme (HDP)

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Abstract: Continuing professional development such as in-service training is one of the most pressing concerns of all the factors that affect quality of education. On the other hand, courses taken in higher institutions influence learners very little and any effect may be ''washed out'' in the first year of teaching (Zeichner and Tabachnik, 1981 cited by Higgins and Leat, 2001). In view of the above points, this study has been designed to explore issues in relation to Higher Diploma Programme (HDP). The study was conducted at St. Mary's University College (SMUC) and Kotebe College of Teacher Education (KCTE). Twenty-five HDP graduates from each institution, HDP leaders and tutors took part in the study. Two forms of interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were used to obtain the data. The results of the study showed that the HDP, although relevant, has had some drawbacks. Based on the findings, recommendations were drawn.

Introduction

It was thought to be vital to emphasize that training and teaching were mutually dependent; one does not stop developing as a teacher when one becomes a trainer (Hayes, 2000). The inseparable nature of teaching and training necessitates the emerging of continuing professional development in the realm of teacher education. Professional development takes many forms: graduate degree, collaborative action research projects and teaching academies or in-service days (Sadker and Sadker, 2000).

Continuing professional development is indispensable due to the following reasons: first the issue of globalization and complex social changes brings multiple demands on teachers. Thus, a well-educated, flexible, highly competent teaching force is required to handle these changes and to foster practices which are responsible to the education needs of all trainers (Dadds,

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2001). Second, learning is a continuous process. Learning does not finish once trainers leave a course; they must continue the process of adapting to the new in their own classrooms (Hayes, 2000). This is because the effect of teacher training institutions up on trainers may be somewhat less than might be hoped, and any effects may be 'washed out' in the first year of teaching (Zeichner and Tabachnik, 1981 cited by Higgins and Leat, 2001). Third, continuing professional development promotes critical dialogue among teachers. Learning is a social experience, so professional growth is usually fostered through exchange, critique, exploration and formulation of new ideas (Dadds, 2001). Furthermore, if teachers allow themselves to become students of their own extraordinary self-education, they would be very well placed to facilitate the self-education of others (UnderhillL, 1992). This implies that student achievement is dependent on the efforts teachers make to move themselves through various developmental stages. In relation to this, Sadker and Sadker (2000) stated that money spent to increase teacher qualification through professional training improves students' academic performance more than money invested in other areas.

Hayes (2000) kept on saying that the goal of any teacher development must be to give teachers the power to make informed choices about how best to teach in their own classes. To attain this goal, Nunan (1989, p. 112) forwarded the following points, as principles for teacher development program.

1. The content and methodology of the program should be perceived as being personally relevant to participants.
2. Theory should be derived from practice. In other words, teachers should be encouraged to derive theoretical principles from a study of classroom practices, rather than being exposed to a set of principles and being required to apply these
3. The approach should be bottom-up rather than top down.   This suggests that teacher development program has to be initiated by teachers themselves.

4. Teachers should be involved in the structuring of the Professional development program.
5. Teacher should be encouraged to observe, analyze and evaluate their own teaching.
6. Professional development programs should provide a model for teachers of the practices they wish to encourage i.e. they should practice what they preach.

In line with this, Sadker and Sadker (2000) suggested that the best professional development program links subject content with teaching skills; uses a problem solving approach; reflects research findings; and sustains and supports over time.

In view of the points above, the higher diploma program (HDP) was introduced in 2003 as a compulsory qualification for all teacher education (MoE, 2003). The program has been assumed to provide teacher educators with a practical program to support their development as effective teachers and reflective practitioners with enhanced professional status (ibid). The HDP candidates were expected to achieve the objectives stated in the HDP handbook and the objectives have been believed to be achieved through the delivery of four modules and the school experience, each divided into a number of sessions using active learning and continuous assessment.

Thus, the aims of this study are to assess the implementation of the objectives and to evaluate the overall nature of the programme.

Description of the HDP as per the HDP Handbook

As has been said, Higher Diploma Programme was introduced in 2003. It started in all Teacher Education Institutions in Ethiopia as a new compulsory qualification for all teacher educators. The aim of the Higher Diploma Programme for teacher educators is to improve the quality of education in Ethiopia through a licensing programme that will develop the skills and professionalism of teacher educators.

The objectives will be achieved through the delivery of four modules (the reflective teacher education, developing active learning, improving assessment and action research) and the school experience, each divided into a number of sessions using active learning and continuous assessment.

The Higher Diploma Programme is based on practice; the Higher Diploma candidates work as a group, supported by Higher Diploma Leaders(HDL) (volunteers and/or Ethiopians who have completed the HDP as Higher Diploma Tutors(HDT)). The group is responsible for generating ideas, focusing discussions, making mutual teaching observations, providing peer support and feedback and presenting research findings.

Successful completion of the HDP will be based on evidences provided in the portfolio. Candidates will develop the portfolio during the programme. The final portfolio of evidence for moderation should include: fifteen reflective activities, ten lesson plan, records of four formal lesson observations of the candidates by the HDL / T, active learning project, school placement project, action research project, continuous professional development plans, all end of module self assessment and the final self assessment.

Method

At St. Mary's University College (SMUC) the higher diploma programme has been given to those lecturers who have been found in the Teacher Education Faculty. The total number of lecturers who have attended the HDP was thirty and they were classified into two groups. The first group, consisting of eighteen lecturers, started the HDP on September 2006 whereas the second group, consisting of twelve lecturers, began the HDP on January 2006.

At Kotebe College of Teacher Education (KCTE), three groups attended the programme. Each group consisted of lecturers ranging from fifteen to twenty.

Of the total number, twenty-five candidates from each institution participated in the study. The majority of the subjects (80%) were second degree holders whereas the remaining (20%) were first-degree holders. Again, the majority of the subjects (75%) have had education background. In addition to the candidates, Higher Diploma Leaders and tutors took part in the study.

Focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to secure relevant data. Discussions were made with small representative groups. Focus group discussion consisting of eight major items was held with six sub-groups-each containing of six to eight graduates. In addition to the FGD, the higher diploma leaders and tutors were also interviewed. Two interview forms one for the HDP leaders and the other for the tutors were used in the study.

At last all data were coded, categorized, organized and carefully analyzed. In analyzing the data qualitative method was used.

Results and Discussion

Importance of the Program

In the FGD held with the graduates of the HDP, participants disclosed conflicting perceptions, which have been observed regarding the importance of the Higher Diploma Programme. Few participants concluded their account of this case as follow:

> This programme would be helpful for those lecturers who have been involved in business faculty and who did not have pedagogical training at all. But for lecturers who have had education background, it is useless (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

Contrary to this, the majority of the participants reported the following concern regarding the significance of the programme:

> Continuing professional development has become important for all teacher educators, but HDP seemed to occur spontaneously and it does not involve conscious planning or intention (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

It has to be underscored that continuing professional development is indispensable in the teaching realm and most participants stated that having such a programme was essential for their professional growth; however, the implementation seemed to have many drawbacks. The strong resistance of the graduate to the programme, the nature of the modules, the competence of leaders and tutors and the duration of the programme were some of the major constraints mentioned.

Level of Participations in designing the Program

The Focus Group Discussion held with the participants revealed that practitioners did not take part in the process of designing the HDP programme. All the participants taking part in the focus group discussion noted the following points:

- We are forced to pass through such a program in order to get a license of teaching.
- Practitioners were not involved in the process of designing the programme. (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

Teacher professional development should be a bottom up approach; initiators for Teacher Professional Development should be teachers rather than authorities. In connection to this, Nunan (1989) recommends that the approach should be bottom up rather than top down. This suggests that teacher development program has to be initiated by teachers themselves. Contrary to this, HDP was initiated by Ministry of Education and it was introduced as a new compulsory qualification for all teacher educators and possession of Higher Diploma certificate will become a requirement for every

teacher educators (MOE, 2003). This showed that HDP was imposed upon teacher educators. This might not make the Higher Diploma Programme indigenous to Ethiopia. This further implied that before putting HDP in place, ideas should have been discussed, criticized and rejected among teacher educators so as to reduce resistance from teaching staff.

HDP leaders and tutors were asked about the resistance of the graduates not attending HDP. The responses of the interview obtained from the HDP leaders confirmed the issue raised above. Below were the sample responses that might show this point clearly:

- HDP was externally imposed.
- It did not have incentives. (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

Apart from the points stated above, the strong resistance from the part of the HDP graduates might be due to the weakness of the programme or due to the fact that it was not initiated by them

Furthermore, teachers who completed the HD Programme did not get any promotions or rewards. Had it had any promotion, subjects would not have shown strong resistance to the programme.

Thus, it appears safe to say that HDP was introduced in the teaching community without a vigorous professional debate; it did not result in promotion and it appeared to have certain technical weaknesses. All these might cause strong resistance from the part of the teacher educators.

Modules

It was underlined in the HDP handbook that the objectives of HDP would be achieved through the delivery of four modules and school experience, each divided into a number of sessions using active learning and continuous assessment (MoE, 2003). Thus, so as to explore the nature of the modules, participants in the FGD were asked to comment on the nature of the modules and school placement and they forwarded the points below:

- Similar activities were presented repeatedly.
- Concepts provided in the modules were too elementary.
- Modules are not comprehensive.
- Modules are inclined towards one stream of specialization.
- Some activities of the modules lack clarity. (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

In view of the points stated above, the activities embodied in the HDP modules were found to be repetitive. The results of the interview held with the HDP leaders were in line with the issue under discussion. The repetitive nature of the tasks might make subjects lose interest in the programme.

Tasks presented in the HDP modules were not up to the level of the graduates' competence. That is, ideas included in the HDP modules were below the standard; it did not challenge the participants. This might make participants be lenient to the programme and they could not be committed to attend the HDP sessions. This was a prevailing fact among HDP participants.

School Placement

The objective of school placement was to enable HDP graduates to recognize the practical experiences of the partner schools and to create strong bondage between higher education institutions and the partner schools. However, subjects seemed not to be enlightened about the

objective of school placement. The following accounts of the participants revealed this view:

- Since we know the condition of our elementary school situation, school placement was not essential.
- School placement was found to be less important (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

From the above quotation, it is possible to say that the objectives of school placement were not understood. In the world of dynamism, everything is in a state of change; education in general and elementary schools in particular are not exceptions to this. Accordingly, the experience participant had about elementary schools earlier could also be changing. Thus, the school placement could have helped the participants get first hand information about our elementary schools today and the reflection sessions held with the teachers of the partner school might help them share experiences. Regardless of this fact, participants found school placement unessential component of the HDP. This might imply that there was no proper orientation regarding briefing objectives and informing the importance of the programme on the part of HDP leaders and moderators.

HDP Leaders and Tutors

The background of the HDP leaders and the tutors could also be another factor that hampers the effectiveness of the programme. In connection to this, the subjects participated in the focus group discussion stated their common experiences below:

- Leaders and tutors did not have professional training.
- Training should be given by expertise in the field of education and not by volunteers who do not have the required knowledge of the program.

- HDP tutors were not better than HDP candidates (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

In conformity with this, the interview held with HDP leaders (non-foreigners) and tutors have confirmed this issue.

- By the virtue of their being white, they came here to Ethiopia as HDP leaders.
- Most foreigner HDP leaders did not have education background (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

Teaching requires advanced technical and pedagogical skills; however, there is evidence that HDP leaders' skills were at very low ebb. And their method of delivering contents would be questionable. In such kind of progamme, HDP leaders and tutors should have been people with long years of teaching, versatile mind, good command of the language. However, this is not the point in our case and the situation made participants lose interest in the whole programme. In relation to this, Hayes (2000) stated that the method of conducting the training must be experiential and reflective rather than Transmissive.

In a similar vein, concerning the ineffectiveness of the programme, the following summary of the data obtained from foreigner HDP leaders evidenced this:

- Lack of comprehensive training on the HDP leaders.
- Absence of committed HDP leaders (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

In the light of the points above, most higher diploma programme leaders and tutors did not have special skills, background and knowledge (different from candidates) that enable them to run HDP sessions. Furthermore, they were unable to acknowledge the qualification, background and experience of adult learners and adjust lessons accordingly. All these might happen due to the

fact that HDP leaders have been recruited as leaders on the basis of volunteers instead of competence or academic background.

In the same token, higher diploma programme tutors stated that they were recruited based of the participation they exhibited in the first session of the programme. In doing so, they were elected arbitrarily without considering their background, experience, skill and competence. Such cases made HDP tutors fail to cover the role of the higher diploma programme leaders. This might aggravate the poor implementation of the programme.

In view of the above points, it can be said that most HDP leaders and tutors might fail to show the value of the HDP and discharge their responsibility.

Duration of the Programme

The duration of the programme was found to be a noticeable constraint. The following sample descriptions were also referring to the participants' unfortunate times they had.

- The duration of the programme is too long.
- The whole programme can be condensed to few weeks/ months. (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff)

HD programme was found to be extended; it did not acknowledge the ability of adult learners. As it was stated in the foregoing section, most graduates of the HDP have had education background and the points raised in the program might not be far from their experience. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that, the duration (the lengthy nature of the programme) made the HDP boring and uninteresting.

Points missed in the HDP Modules

Most participants identified points should have been incorporated in the programme. As a result, the following suggestions were proposed.

- Managing large class size.
- Teaching ethics.
- Utilization and production of teaching materials. (FGD, SMUC staff).

The above findings revealed that the HDP might miss contents that should have been part of the HDP module.

Strengths of the HDP

In spite of all these weaknesses, participants taking part in the focus group discussion were asked to raise the merits of the HDP. The following summary of presentations brought out the points.

- It helped share experiences.
- It created awareness about active learning methods (FGD, SMUC and KCTE staff).

This portrayed that the programme helped candidates share experience. Discussions made in the HDP sessions could enable them to share their experience regarding classroom practice.

Furthermore, it was aired that the programme enlightened graduates about active learning methods in the classroom. This showed that active learning methods were essential components of the modules.

Conclusions

On the basis of the data obtained, the following findings were drawn.

- Teachers in higher education institutions were forced to attend the HDP; the programme was not easily entertained by the recipients since it was externally imposed. Teachers were deemed as peripheral aspects of the programme.
- HDP seemed to have certain drawbacks; to mention but few, the lengthy nature of the modules, the incompetency of leaders and tutors and the long duration of the programme were some of the major constraints mentioned.
- Modules were found to be too elementary and repetitive.
- There were no solid criteria to elect HDP leaders and tutors. To run HDP sessions, the skills of most HDP leaders and tutors might prove to be a little premature.
- The duration of the programme made participants hold no interest in the programme.
- Graduates of the programme stated that managing large class size, teaching ethics, utilization and production of teaching materials should have been included in the modules of the higher diploma programme.

Regardless of this, most participants noted that continuing professional development is essential for teacher educators. This suggested that the HDP might not have inherent problem if it has been properly managed. Thus, it is reasonable to provide such ongoing support to the teaching force; not just for new teachers but also for all teachers since continuing professional development should be an integral part of a teacher's life (Sadker and Sadker, 2000).

Given all this, this article ended with an optimistic view that the Higher Diploma programme would be improved in the years to come.

Recommendations

In view of the conclusions above, the following recommendations, which can be incorporated into future programme of this type, were forwarded.

To make education responsive to the growing demand, policy makers or authorities should remain in close touch with the practitioners before putting something in place; vigorous professional debate must be made.

So as to reap significant returns from the programme, most of the criticisms stemming from the implementation of the programme should be thoroughly considered.

Tasks incorporated in the modules should enable graduates to refine their teaching skills and apply them in the home classroom. To do this, the contents of the programme need to be revised; that is, some contents should be dropped and issues, which are essential to teacher educators, must be included.

Standardized criteria should be set to elect leaders and tutors. HDP leaders and tutors should be recruited based on academic background and experience. Leaders and tutors should need to be versatile; they need to get training prior to be involved in running HDP sessions.

The duration of the program should be taken into consideration and contents of the program, which have had too much redundant detail, should be avoided.

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