



Research Article

The Uphill in technical Teacher upgrading in Malawi: enhancement TEVET outcome programme

Noel Kufaine

Department of Technical Education, University of Malawi, P/b 303, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi

Author E-mail: noel.kufaine@yahoo.com, nkufaine@poly.ac.mw

Abstract

There have been efforts to achieve TEVET reform in Malawi whose emphasis has been to develop TEVET training system, capacity building, teaching and learning methods. The Enhancing TEVET Outcome programme was designed to upgrade technical teachers in order to improve the training outcome. The study looked at the technical teacher upgrading programme purpose, detailed explanation of the unit organisation and implementation. The study also explored the perceptions of the different student and program implementers. The study sampled the first two cohorts from the ETO programme and interviewed 20 graduates from the programme and four (4) principals from technical colleges two (2) from public and two (2) from private where students were based. The study reveals that technical teacher training is complex and upgrading and professional development is inevitable. From the results it shows that the technical teacher upgrading programme concentrated on mastery of teaching methodology only. However, from the principals' response there is change being experienced after the programme. The technical teacher development programme that promotes two areas of mastery represents a new paradigm and needs to be understood before implementing.

Keywords: Upgrading, professional development, skills, knowledge

INTRODUCTION

As the country forges forward with its implementation of Vision 2020, it must improve the quality of its human resource. Vision 2020 placed great stock in the improvement and provision of TEVET as an important objective in achieving economic progress. To ensure quality TEVET programmes the quality of the teacher is critical (McKinsey and Company 2007) among other important attributes such as training equipment and learning and teaching materials (NEC, 2003).

Technical and Vocational Education is perceived to be a key for development (Gom, 2012). The TEVET expectation has led to different efforts by governments through its education agencies to make Technical and Vocational Education accessible, equitable and successful. The governments and the society at large has placed enormous trust and resources in the hands of Technical and Vocational Education institutions to provide knowledge for public benefit and human development. (Gom, 2012)

But TEVET system in Malawi and elsewhere in the region is accused of producing people of lower quality than that required by the market. (TEVETA, 2009) However, there have been efforts to achieve TEVET reform in Malawi whose emphasis has been to develop TEVET training system, capacity building, teaching and learning methods and recourses. Hence, this reform was designed to respond to industry and offer opportunities for gainful employment outside formal sector.

TEVET is provided in public technical colleges, community-based training centres, private technical colleges and the apprenticeship training system which combines on-the-job training with courses in college. (TEVETA, 2009) Most of public formal TEVET is provided in seven public Technical Colleges (TCs) that provide long-term initial vocational training courses. These can be divided into: i) the 'regular' programmes, sponsored and regulated by government through TEVETA and provided through apprenticeships; and ii) 'parallel' programmes, run by Technical colleges. These include apprenticeship, non-apprenticeship and a variety of short courses. Apprenticeship-based programmes in Technical Colleges start with one year of initial training at the institution, followed by three years, each with one term in college and two terms to the industry (TEVETA, 2009).

The Upgrading programme discussed in this document is ETO (Enhancing TEVET Outcomes). The upgrading programme was aimed at achieving Enhanced TEVET Outcome through the preparation of an appropriately skilled TEVET management and instructional team who were expected to effectively deliver competency-based, demand-driven curricula in self managed public technical colleges.

The technical teacher training and upgrading programme involved all the public technical colleges and public college instructors. The modules were adapted from programmes offered by Red River College in Canada with inputs from Malawian counterparts. The technical teacher training was initiated because it was established that the Malawi TEVET systems lacks appropriately trained teachers in pedagogy and skills to produce highly trained students for employment and self employment.

According to Moll et al. (2005) technical subject instructor is expected to demonstrate two competencies, one in teaching methods and the other in professional. However, the implementation of ETO programme does not demonstrate the same.

Problem and Justification

It is argued that in TEVET there is a need for continuous reform and upgrading of skills that teachers possess, the facilities for training should be as close and similar to the facilities found at the workplace, and that the institution–industry link should be made more mutually beneficial.

The challenge with TEVET teacher program is that the training programme is expected to address the two forms of competencies. This implies that technical teacher upgrading programme is expected to approach it the same way.

Therefore, TEVET teacher upgrading programme requires both pedagogy and technical skill competency to be comprehensively addressed in order to satisfy the upgrading objectives. Further, since it is also expected to focus on 'hands on' practical training in order for the students to acquire skills that are necessary for the industry, the approach requires participation approach of learning.

This paper explores technical teacher training and the implementation of the ETO teacher upgrading programme funded by CIDA and implemented by Canada and Malawi training partners. Therefore this discussion is guided by the following questions.

1. How do technical instructors conceptualise technical teacher training in Malawi?
2. What are the ETO programme experiences and achievement to technical college instructors?
3. How did these ETO programme achieve its expected goals?

Literature

According to McKinsey and Company (2007) the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. In order to achieve quality McKinsey and Company (2007) argues the importance of getting the right people to become teachers, developing them into effective instructors, and ensuring that the system is able to deliver.

Professional preparation of teachers through formal training gives them an opportunity to acquire professional knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes that are unlikely to be acquired through experiential training alone. (McKinsey and Company, 2007). This means the source of professional knowledge in TEVET is either formal training or experiential training. According to Eraut (1994) professional knowledge is knowledge possessed by professionals which enables them to perform professional tasks, roles and duties with quality. Schon (1983) puts it as a systematic knowledge base which means specialised, firmly bound, scientific and standardized.

However, teaching requires knowledge as episteme and phronesis. Korthgen et al. (2001) argues that educator with episteme knowledge has knowledge at their disposal and should be in a position to use such knowledge in a manner that student will benefit. On phronesis knowledge, it is urged as knowledge which is not concrete with existing or concrete scientific theories. However, the contemporary teacher education According to Korthgen et al. (2001) discourages transmission of knowledge from teacher to student but opt for exploration. Further, Korthgen et al. (2001) argue that teachers should assist learners to explore, refine their perceptions and have opportunity to reflect on their practical experiences.

However, in the present environment, it is argued that different individual skills sets are needed. A more diverse of many generic skills such as the ability to think logically, to plan precisely, to anticipate difficulties and to be innovative and creative so as to develop and update the necessary capacities and skills needed (ILO, 2003). It is clear that, this skill mix forms an essential component of a sustainable institutional and economic environment in which public and private enterprises enable growth, generate employment and income opportunities for all citizens. Consequently, there is a demand for a more skilled labour force, with more autonomous, adaptable and multi-functional workers, (Glaser, (1993). But the question remains: what incentives can be established to encourage training providers to organize training around this enhanced labour market and societal orientation?

According to Sharma (2012) teacher development programs usually targets the needs of beginning teachers. Which is not the case in the current situation, the change of technology has influenced upgrading course to catch up with latest technologies, (Palmieri, 2004). Therefore, teacher development programs should be designed to promote and nurture excellence in teaching-learning process, to support teachers in carrying out original, innovative and high quality research and conducting research about teaching and learning, (Sharma 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The study was set to find answers to the question the study was putting forward. The study employed an interpretive research paradigm within a qualitative research methodology, (Creswell, 2007). The study involved the analysis of the technical teacher situation and its goals as well as process and procedures in technical teacher upgrading. The technical teacher upgrading was analysed on the point of the problem to which the programme is responding as well as the foundation of the training programme. In line with the upgrading approaches the document critiques some culture currently in practice which is prohibiting success in the technical teacher upgrading.

As a qualitative study, it involved interviewing twenty (20) students and four (4) principals who were identified using purposive sampling and document analysis of the technical teacher upgrading programme. Data analysis was achieved by using qualitative data analysis approach, (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Technical teaching

The study has revealed that TEVET teachers use to commence and end their teaching career with just the basic training received during pre-service teacher training programme without any programme to ensure that their technical and pedagogical skills are in accord with the changes in their various occupations. Those graduating from the Technical colleges were not trained teachers but they are employed straight to be teachers based on class performance.

It also revealed that teachers graduating with degrees from University of Malawi have no continuing professional development programme outside the university, despite the practical skill deficiency in the University of Malawi programme because it is academic rather than professional in nature. However, University of Malawi remains the foremost technical/vocational teacher education institution in the country.

It is also revealed that the TEVET system is filled with teachers whose knowledge level is below the current technical demands in their respective occupations and their pedagogical skills are insufficient for the prevailing professional standards. In cases where teachers desire retraining, there is no continuing professional development programme available for upgrading their professional knowledge. Others are found lacking prerequisite merits to upgrade.

About, 84% of the respondents indicated that undertaking pedagogical training after acquiring subject matter expertise was the most effective model for training TEVET teachers. This model allows the trainees to complete occupational training, undertake a prescribed period of work experience before committing to a career in TEVET teaching. The expectation is that at this point the prospective teacher is more mature and presumably in a better position to identify teaching as a career, unlike those integrated soon after graduating where the learner is usually a school leaver with little knowledge of the career.

Further Training of TEVET Teachers

After completing the ETO programme, 44% of TEVET teachers indicated that they are aiming upgrading qualification preferably through University of Malawi Bachelor of Technical education. The majority (50%) were not sure about further training or upgrading their qualifications due to lack of finance as their reason. Of course others lack prerequisite to inter into university of Malawi. All indicated that there were incentives for professional upgrading. All the principals concurred

on the importance of upgrading programmes for technical teachers.

Work Experience of the TEVET teacher

TEVET teachers interviewed, 30%, reported that they had acquired industrial experience of between 12 to 36 months; 34% had work experience of more than 5 years and 36% had no work experience because they were recruited soon after graduating. All the teachers acknowledged the importance of industrial work experience. They all lamented that without adequate initial work experience and regular updating a teacher will fail to reflect and demonstrate the appropriate work context to students. About two thirds of the respondents indicated they felt more comfortable teaching theory than practical. This could be a reflection of inadequate industrial work experience.

In spite acknowledging the importance of the industry in their teaching career, most teachers moan that their links with industry was either weak or does not exist. There is need for a symbiosis relationship with industry, therefore something needs to be done to improve links and better working partnership between institutions and industry to ensure training remains relevant.

Technological Change

Technology is constantly changing and this forces TEVET teachers to constantly face changes within their teaching domain. This makes the aspect of professional development or upgrading inevitable, to ensure that there is balance between the class and the labour market. Respondents indicated that they cope with changing technology through the Internet and workshops and seminars. It is interesting that over half of the respondents proposed the internet as their avenue for staying in touch. This allows for individually driven self-learning and suggests that respondents are already aware of the need to personally be responsible for their lifelong learning.

They all appreciated the need to adjust the contents of their teaching and not necessary wait for curriculum changes which have generally a longer revision cycle than the evolving technology. However, this does not respond to the hand on aspect for the learner to appreciate the application of the concept.

Enhancement TEVET Outcome programme

The study revealed a number of deficiencies in technical teachers which are affecting quality delivery. However, the ETO programme only attempted to inculcate the education foundations and pedagogy to existing instructors both from public and private technical colleges. The designed programme did not attempt to address the technical or content and industrial skill.

The principals reported that, the programme was adapted from one college in Canada and it appears this college does not offer technical subjects. This means that the design of the program was not in Malawian technical teacher upgrading requirement context. Hence, the project ended up implementing an upgrading programme to teachers who critically needed content and professional development more than the pedagogy. This brings a doubt to the calibre of the technical teachers to be entrusted with the responsibility they assume.

The programme evaluation reports from the teachers were very positive because they benefited as individuals and the programme awarded them an international teaching diploma. However, since ETO programme was just an upgrading not preparation of technical teacher, the professional deficit on the ground remains a challenge.

All the principals indicated that they observed change in the way teachers are presenting themselves even before the ETO programme was concluded. This means pedagogically the ETO diploma upgrading programme was successful.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although, the respondents have passed through various teacher training sessions, the one preferred by most respondents is where an individual first acquired subject matter expertise and industrial work experience before undertaking pedagogical training. This has the advantage of individuals entering the teaching profession when they are more mature to make the right career decision. This means procedures must be followed however, in the selection of would-be trainees. From stunted industrial work experience cited it would appear that many entered the profession immediately after acquiring their technician diploma without any work experience.

The majority of teachers had inadequate work experience, which is clearly an undesirable situation. With the reported weak institution-industry links, these teachers are unlikely to find viable and conducive opportunities for acquiring more work experience. Every effort should be made to ensure that, before recruitment into the TEVET teaching profession

trainees have been exposed to a prescribed working experience in relevant industry. This will form the necessary threshold to build upon once they become teachers.

Most teachers expressed the desirability of establishing active links between training institutions and the labour market to ensure the relevance of their training programmes. Unfortunately the same teachers reported weak links currently existed between their institutions and the labour market. Indeed institution managers and policymakers speak about this situation often. Much needs to be done to achieve the desired cooperation between institutions and the labour market.

We cannot ignore the efforts by the government of through formulation of policies and all that goes along with implementing them, but the constant change in TEVET industry still remain a challenge. The study has revealed that the industry faces a number of problems relating to TEVET graduates, one of which is unskilled human resources. Also, that the technical colleges are not doing enough as far as provision of TEVET is concerned. The blame cannot be put on the technical colleges alone because they also have reasons for their failure to provide quality TEVET, one of which they claim is limited resources. In this regard, the industry is equally to blame because they are involved in formulation of relevant curricula to ensure that knowledge is industry oriented.

The ETO programme was aimed at enhancing TEVET outcome, this was only going to be manifested if a TEVET programme is responsive to the current needs in the sector. The upgrading programme was implemented to teachers who critically need the professional development even more than the pedagogy. The TEVET sector is currently challenged by the continuous change in delivery methods in general and technology change in particular. Therefore the approach in responding to these needs will only be effective if the programmes are accommodative. This is an approach where respective domains and approaches are combined.

Under this circumstance, an entirely new package of technical teacher training concept is required. New set of skills and new methodologies for delivery are needed as among the greatest shifts in paradigm in teacher education. The new paradigm is required, preferably the one adaptive in nature or integrated approach so that both pedagogy and professional skills could be addressed concurrently.

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