



Impact of initial teacher education for prospective lower secondary school teachers in Rwanda



Sawa Iwakuni

Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University, 1-5-1 Kagamiyama, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima 739-8529 Japan

HIGHLIGHTS

- Holistic analysis of three levels of the ITE curriculum was conducted.
- Curriculum was not constructed based on the theory of how student teachers learn.
- Different domains of knowledge were fragmented in intended and implemented curriculum.
- Reflective practice was not well structured and supported.
- Initial teacher education produced qualified teachers without accompanying quality.

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ABSTRACT

Rwanda has prioritized quality education by taking measures to increase the number of qualified lower secondary teachers. However, having a qualification does not necessarily guarantee higher quality teaching, as what matters is the process of how qualification is acquired. This paper explores quality of initial teacher education (ITE) for lower secondary teachers in Rwanda, focusing on intended, implemented and attained curriculum. The main finding is that the ITE curriculum is not constructed based on the theory of how student teachers learn, characterised by disregard of student teachers' prior-knowledge on teaching, fragmentation of different knowledge domains and lack of reflective practice.

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1. Introduction

Rwanda has set out a long-term development plan called Vision 2020 to transform Rwanda from an agrarian subsistence economy into a knowledge-based, middle-income country by 2020. In the Vision 2020 plan, it is highlighted that Rwanda's principal asset is its people and that special attention must be paid to the quality of education because it has been declining due to low-calibre teaching staff (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [MINECOFIN], 2000). In order to achieve the vision, the Ministry of Education has developed the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) which sets out a mission to transform Rwandan citizens into skilled human capital for the socio-economic development of the country by ensuring equitable access to quality education. In the ESSP, one of

the highlighted sector outcomes is improved supply of qualified, suitably-skilled and motivated teachers and trainers to meet the demands of expanding education access (Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 2013). However, none of the outcome indicators of the ESSP, except for the one which measures the quality of in-service training for English skills, monitor the quality of training. This implies that the process of how teachers are trained or deemed qualified is underestimated in the ESSP at the expense of a rapidly growing supply of *qualified* or *trained* personnel. This implies that Rwanda may continue to increase the number of *qualified* and *trained* teachers without accompanying quality.

This study seeks to investigate the impact of the initial teacher education (ITE) programme for prospective lower secondary school teachers in Rwanda in order to find effectiveness of the ITE in terms of producing qualified teachers of a high quality. The finding of the study is that the ITE fails to produce quality teachers who can reflect upon their behaviours or choose the best teaching and

E-mail address: sawa3838@hotmail.co.jp.

assessment strategies to achieve a set of learning goals. The major reason for this is because the ITE curriculum is not constructed based on theories of how student teachers internalise new knowledge or how the behaviour of student teachers can be changed. The programme does not emphasise critical reflection as a key for accommodating new knowledge into existing student teachers' views on teaching. Moreover, the ITE programme offers different domains of knowledge without integrating them and expects student teachers to accomplish integration on their own. As a result, the programme produces teachers who teach in a traditional teacher-dominated way by cutting and pasting the fragmented knowledge from the ITE without integration into the overall curriculum.

Unless the ITE programme is reformed, it is unlikely that Rwanda will be able to achieve sufficient education quality to meet the development objectives of the national vision for 2020. This conclusion emerges from a three-pronged qualitative review of Rwanda's ITE that focused simultaneously on the intended curriculum (what is supposed to be taught in ITE), the implemented curriculum (what actually happens during ITE), and the attained curriculum (what student teachers actually do with what they have learned when they themselves become teachers). In this study I first reviewed the curriculum at each of the three levels and then analysed the interrelations and incongruences among the three levels. To my knowledge, there are no previous studies that have simultaneously focused on all of the three levels of curriculum for ITE in the context of developing countries.

Section two provides the background of the increased demand for qualified teachers at a lower secondary school in Rwanda and section three provides a review of ITE in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). With this background, section four provides an outline of the study, followed by the main findings of the intended curriculum in section five, findings of the implemented curriculum in section six, and findings of the attained curriculum in section seven. Section eight discusses interrelations and gaps among the different levels of curriculum and the fundamental problem of the ITE curriculum. Based on these findings and discussion, section nine highlights the recommendations for the development of the ITE programme in Rwanda and general implications for international communities.

2. Background of the increased demand for qualified teachers at lower secondary schools in Rwanda

After the 1994 genocide, Rwanda faced critical shortages of teachers both in terms of quality and quantity because the education system was particularly targeted during the genocide and many teachers and educated people were assassinated by the warring factions (Mukamusoni, 2006; Obura, 2003). In contrast to the decreased number of teachers, enrolment in secondary education increased from 50,000 in 1995 to 170,000 in 2003 (World Bank, 2003 cited in Richardson, 2006), which occurred as a result of the population who had fled to neighbouring countries starting to return home in late 1994 (Saito, 2011), and the effect of Education for All initiatives. In order to overcome the shortage of teachers at the secondary school level, the Government of Rwanda established Kigali Institute of Education in 1998, which enrolled its first cohort of pre-service trainees in 1999 (Mukamusoni, 2006).

The population entering lower secondary school again expanded dramatically after the introduction of the Nine Years' Basic Education Policy (free compulsory education policy for six years of primary and three years of lower secondary education) in 2008 (MINEDUC, 2008). While the transition rate from primary school to lower secondary school in 2007 was 54.6%, it reached 87.9% in 2008 (MINEDUC, 2012). In addition to the quantitative needs of secondary teachers, their quality needs were also

increased, as only 8.3% of teachers teaching at the secondary level held a bachelor degree in education and 28.4% held either non-education degrees or diplomas (MINEDUC, 2007). Two colleges of education that offer a diploma of lower secondary teaching were established in order to increase the number of qualified teaching staff. These colleges were later merged into one campus which is currently known as the Rukara Campus of the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE Rwanda). In 2013, the percentage of qualified teachers working in secondary schools reached 69.3% (MINEDUC, 2014).

Increasing the supply of qualified teachers is still a priority in the education sector in Rwanda, as indicated in the ESSP (MINEDUC, 2013). However, qualified teachers do not necessarily provide quality teaching as the process of being qualified determines the quality of teachers. The next section discusses the general challenges of the ITE that the countries in SSA are faced with.

3. Initial teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Previous studies in SSA have revealed that trained teachers do not necessarily teach better or guarantee improved academic performance of learners (e.g. Fehrler, Michaelowa, & Wechtler, 2009; Heneveld, Ndidde, Rajonhson, & Swai, 2006; Nannyonjo, 2007). The quality of ITE in SSA is reported to be poor in both its input and process. Available resources and classroom environment are limited, and the quality of teacher educators is low with many having little or no prior classroom teaching experience (Hardman, Abd-Kadir, & Tibuhinda, 2012). The teaching and learning processes in ITE as well as assessment methods are judged to be too theoretical, overly content-laden, and deemed to be merely a transmission of factual knowledge (Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor, & Westbrook, 2013; Hardman et al., 2012). Teacher educators' teaching methods are reported as being far from what teacher educators themselves promote prospective teachers to use (Kunje, 2002). According to Blume (1971), 'Teachers teach as they have been taught, and not as they have been taught to teach'. Therefore the misalignment of implemented curriculum in ITE and intended school curriculum may reduce newly qualified teachers (NQTs) to teaching using a traditional teacher-centred method, instead of using the promoted pedagogical approach at school. A lack of monitoring and supervision of teaching practicums in ITE is another barrier, which again causes teachers to revert to the way in which they were taught rather than adopting the new approach obtained through ITE (Akyeampong et al., 2013; Hardman et al., 2012; Kunje, 2002). Furthermore, there is often no time allotted at the college for student teachers to discuss challenges they faced during their practicums; therefore, student teachers are unable to bridge theory and practice (Akyeampong et al., 2013).

Similar issues are reported in ITE in Rwanda in its input and process. Teaching and learning materials are lacking, a bulk of teacher educators do not have direct teaching experience at school and the process of teaching and learning is too theoretical (Bennell & Ntagaramba, 2008; Lynd, 2010). Specific issues of ITE for lower secondary school teachers in Rwanda are identified by the World Bank (2011) as too little time allocation for internship and for the lessons of pedagogy and teaching practice and theory. The report also highlighted that teacher educators do not have any prior experience as lower secondary school teachers.

Due to the above-mentioned poor inputs and process, ITE in SSA does not yield effective outcomes on student teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Coultas and Lewin (2002), for example, found that trainee teachers' attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning did not change significantly from attending ITE. Akyeampong et al. (2013) found that ITE induced misplaced confidence that once know-how of a single 'correct' teaching approach is acquired

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