

Opportunities And Challenges Of Using ODL In Training secondary School Licenced Teachers For Education Programmes: Experiences From The Open University Of Tanzania

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Introduction

The expansion of primary education through Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) 2002-2006 in Tanzania has resulted in the growing number of graduates from primary schools. The introduction of free primary education has facilitated this great stride since 2000. This situation has led to the need to broaden access to secondary schools. According to Wedgwood (2006) cited by Oluoch (2006), the gap between the pupils expected to finish standard seven in 2008 has forced the government to set the target through the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP, 2004-2009) of having almost 50 percent (800,000) pupils joining secondary education by 2009 (SEDP 2005). It has been stated that the implementation of the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) in 1997 and the initial two sub-sector programmes, the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) and Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) are an expression of commitment by the government of Tanzania to meet Education For All (EFA) targets and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In order to enrol that big number of primary school graduates in secondary education, the government in collaboration with community has started building more day community secondary schools. Building such schools however, requires the need to expand other necessary related facilities on the basis of increased transition rates. One such important facility is the training of teachers who would meet the demands of both new and existing secondary schools that would be built and expanded.

In addressing this challenge the government made a decision to employ 3,500 form six leavers (A' level) for 2006/07 financial year. According to the government, "training of licensed teachers will become the main source of new teachers, with over 30,000 licensed teachers entering into school by 2010 which is almost half of the teaching force required by 2010 (URoT MoEC 2004c in Wedgwood, 2006:12 cited by Oluoch 2006). The question however would be the type of strategies and practices that would be instituted so as to meet the challenge to have trained teachers. This is a big challenge and the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) through ODL had the potential to deal with this challenge of shortage of secondary school teachers.

The Open University of Tanzania in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training have enrolled 1500 licensed teachers into B Sc (Ed), B A (Ed) and BBA/B Com (Ed) programmes provided the applicants have two principal passes in A level examinations. The collaboration was through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which came into being in 2006. This strategy of training of licensed teachers by ODL was expected to enable the Ministry of Education Vocational Training (MoEVT) to upgrade these licensed teachers without the problem of these teachers leaving their schools to go to conventional/residential universities for education and training.

Alternative Approaches to Teacher Preparation

The massive use of licensed teachers of form 6 graduates and training them using ODL is a new phenomenon in Tanzania and also by the Open University of Tanzania. The Open University of Tanzania using ODL is training two categories of teachers for secondary education, namely:

- University degree programmes which are supposed to take 6-8 years. These are concurrent degree programmes which combine subject content and professional preparation. The licensed teachers are required to study the same units but the earmarked period is 3 years. According to the MoEVT the sponsorship provided is for three years.
- The postgraduate diploma in education, for graduates with a general degree who want to join the teaching profession.

The curriculum of teacher training usually has four components: knowledge of the subjects that are to be taught, teaching methods, knowledge about how children learn and teaching practice. The licensed teachers were employed to start teaching in secondary schools lacking from the four components. The licensed teachers underwent a one month induction course using four modules (one to four) of 'Teaching and Learning', 'The Teacher and the teaching Profession', Adolescence and Schooling and 'School Organization and Management'. In the general introduction it is stated that the modules have been prepared to meet the requirement of induction course programme necessary for licensed secondary school teachers to be employed. The modules have been written to enable individual teachers to study on their own and carry self assessment and reflection in the teaching profession. So besides the short duration of the induction course the licensed teachers are expected to read the modules extensively together with other relevant materials to make them dynamic and progressive in the teaching profession. In these modules it is also stated that the teachers will also be supported by roving mentors as a means to strengthen their competence in the teaching and learning process.

Research Methodology

The programme of licensed teachers is in the second year. To my knowledge no research has been carried out whose findings we can use to inform our practice in the training of licensed teachers using ODL that would ensure quality of competent teachers for secondary education. In order to find out the opportunities and challenges of training licensed teachers I have carried out this small scale study/mini research on opportunities and challenges in training licensed teachers using ODL. The findings would assist in the training of licensed teachers using ODL and the implementation of SEDP.

In carrying out this mean research two main methods have been used, namely; focus group discussion with licensed teachers pursuing education degrees and sponsored by MoEVT and a questionnaire. Five groups in two different regions were involved in focus group discussions. These discussions were carried out during Teaching Practice exercise which I was involved in, in March 2008. The questionnaire was administered to 20 students during a three weeks' second face to face session for licensed teachers carried out in November/December 2007. The first face to face session of two weeks was carried out in April 2007.

The items addressed in the focus group discussions tried to solicit/gather information on the following:

- The motive of joining the teaching profession as licensed teachers;
- The reasons that have contributed to some students dropping out from the teaching profession and also from studies with the OUT;
- How the MoEVT is facilitating the studies with OUT;
- How the Open University of Tanzania is facilitating the studies of the sponsored licensed teachers; and
- How the work environment where the students are posted facilitates their work and studies.

Related to the last item of the focus group discussion were some items in the questionnaire. The major items in this questionnaire included the distance from the schools they are posted to the district headquarters where the majority of them have to travel to these headquarters on monthly basis to get their salaries. Also in this questionnaire students were required to indicate the number of teachers at their schools and the subjects they are teaching.

The findings from the above items for the focus group discussion and those in the questionnaire can assist the experience of using ODL as a tool for capacity building of the licensed teachers for secondary education hence translating research findings into practice of training using ODL and the implementation of SEDP.

Presentations of the Findings

The discussion on the findings of what has motivated them to become licensed teachers and joining studies with the OUT has also a bearing with reasons that have contributed to the drop out of about 50% of students either from studies with OUT and with being licensed teachers.

Motivation to become licensed teachers

Various reasons have been advanced by members of the focus group discussion. The reasons given have included the following:

- To get a salaried employment rather stay at home with parents and become dependent on them. The applicants had completed form 6 so instead of waiting for going for further studies in conventional universities, here was an opportunity to attend a one months induction teaching programme and thereafter be employed as licensed teachers. Also such a package would include studying an education degree with the OUT with full sponsorship, this was a great opportunity. They indicated that they were not sure of getting places at conventional universities (Government and private universities). They were not sure of getting a government loan as by then one of the conditions to get a government loan was to have a division one (for males and females) and division two pass for females. This condition was how ever waived for students training as teachers. The employer, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training promised to sponsor (accompanying good package) the licensed teachers to study with the OUT.
- Some members in the focus group discussion indicated that they not only applied for induction at OUT but had made such applications to other institutions of higher learning as trial and error. As they got early responses to the one month's induction course, they decided to join the teaching profession. The accompanying package of getting sponsorship from the MoEVT for those who would opt to study with the OUT attracted them more to the teaching profession as licensed teachers. To be licensed teachers would ensure them of sustainable employment and academic professional development.
- Another reason is on the basis of the low income of low income of the family of the licensed teachers. Getting employment of this category would be a relief to their families as there would be now in the family someone with a consistent monthly income. There are for example several cases where the licensed teachers in the group indicated that they are staying with relatives whom they depend on them for their education. There is case study of a student who had in 2001 registered with the OUT but because of family problems including caring for a sick parent and paying for education of his young sisters and brothers, she opted to stop studying with the OUT until 2007 when she resumed studies but through the licensed teachers programme of OUT.

Reasons contributing to high drop out of other licensed teachers studying with OUT

Members in the five groups in the focussed discussions gave various reasons that have contributed to some of their colleagues who have dropped from being licensed teachers at the same time studying with OUT. The following are some of the points.

- Some have opted to join conventional universities after getting admissions to such universities. As has been noted some applied to induction course of licensed teachers as trial and error and which ever opportunity comes first then one would use such opportunity. Some of the families of these licensed teachers' are in the position to sponsor their children to higher institutions of learning. A related reason are some students who opted to take a two year teacher Diploma course for the reason that it takes a shorter period of 2 years compared to 6-8 years. By then it was not known that the targeted training for licensed teachers would be 3 years.
- The second reason given by the panellists was a variety of unattractive conditions of service also plays a strong role in the drop out of licensed teachers. These include low salary, unattractive work locations and insufficient supportive supervision. The working environment in rural areas does not attract teachers. Most of the schools where the licensed teachers are posted are in very remote areas. There is a great shortage of staff houses and there are no good houses in rural areas for teachers to rent.
- The situation of unattractive working also contributes to the study environment becoming very difficult. Experiences by licensed teachers in the panels because of inadequacy of teachers in these schools situated in remote rural areas one has to teach many periods that do not even fit into the time table (The number of periods for the five days in the week is 42 but some of the panellist had to teach 52 periods per week and another had 49 periods per week). It was also noted that some teachers had to teach even subjects of their speciality (more than two subjects. Although most community secondary schools have few teachers, those who are in the working stations are overstretched as some of them are forced to teach subjects, in which they have no experience at all. This situation concurs with the findings from the questionnaire of the schools in rural areas where some subjects do not have teachers. Although most community secondary schools have few teachers, those who are in the working stations are overstretched as some of them are forced to teach subjects, in which they have no experience at all. This being the situation a licensed teacher studying with the OUT does not have ample time of studying if he has to do his work of teaching faithfully. He has at same time required to do the two assignments for a course he has registered for (more than 24 assignments per academic year if he has to complete the degree programme in three years). A licensed teacher has to also spend some time in doing tests away from his/her work station. When a licensed teacher is back from OUT activities s/he has to compensate for the lost periods to cover his scheme of work as dictated by the syllabus.

Issues of the facilitation by MoEVT to licensed teachers

The third item addressed in the focus group discussion is the facilitation of MoEVT the studies of licensed teachers studying with the OUT. All the members of the five panels complained that there are some problems with the MoEVT sponsorship. Apart from the MoEVT not adhering to the fulfilling the promised full sponsorship, it only providing tuition fees. The MOEVT sponsorship is not explicit to those being sponsored. Apart from the tuition fee other items in the sponsorship package is not known. With the salary of TZSH 132500/= per month (Equivalent to USD 121) it becomes difficulty for licensed teachers studying with the OUT to pursue OUT studies with a bit of comfort because of the following reasons:

- At the beginning of each academic year he has to travel to the Regional Centre and back to do registration and collect assignments for the given academic year and then travel back to his school which is usually in a remote area. S/he has to incur travel expenses from her/his meagre salary (Fares, accommodation and sometimes s/he has to do some photocopying).
- She has to again to travel twice to Zone Teachers' Colleges for intensive face to face sessions with the duration of about three weeks. In most cases these zone centres are situated at amore distant place and the licensed teachers have to pay for the fares and other travel expenses (Let us take an example of one case of a licensed teacher who resides in Mafia. The only reliable is by transport air and she has to pay TZSHS 86,000/= one way to DSM. If she has to go to teachers' College (i.e. Mpwapwa) then she has to part with TZSHS 12,000/= for bus fare.
- At times she has to travel to the Centre to get the marked tests and assignments which are not posted to addresses of individual students but the student has to collect them at the centre.

Another factor related to the low salary given to licensed teachers is the delay in receiving it and where to get it. The country has introduced a bank system whereby employees have to receive their own salaries through the bank and pay transport cost from their pockets. As the exact date of salary payment is not fixed, teachers from rural secondary schools may be stranded at salary pay stations for more than a day or two days. It should be noted that in 2004 the expenditure for a single teacher per month in rural areas was estimated at a cost of TZSHS. 150,000 (US\$150). For a teacher dependant (As we have seen some licensed teachers have dependants), the estimated expenditure was found to be TShs.324, 000 (US\$324), (Davidson, 2005 cited by Oluoch 2006). This finding is almost the same as another finding where teachers mentioned that the minimum salary for beginner per month should be at a range of TSHs250, 000-300,000 (US\$250-300) (HakiElimu and TTU, 2004 cited by Oluoch 2006). The figures above show that teachers are earning less than what is required for their human survival. The low salaries of teachers in Tanzania have also been noted by Lambert (2004).

When one compares the package for licensed teachers to that of HELB of the then MHEST, one can notice the grievances and misunderstandings that usually occur as a result of the financial treatment the licensed teachers get in the package of their sponsorship. There is no facilitation in book and stationary allowance, facilitation of fares and daily allowance so of the licensed teachers when they go for teaching practice, for geography and science practicals. The students doing science practicals got the facilitation after some struggles.

It can be argued that the promised sponsorship by the MoEVT and which is not well fourth coming can be one of the factors that have resulted in pushing some licensed teachers not to continue studying with the OUT. In the focus group discussion it was noted that there are dormant OUT students who because of the financial burden in carrying out university activities and some have stopped studying with OUT but are in schools teaching. I have been informed that there is a provision that allows licensed teachers to apply for other higher education institution after two years of service as licensed teachers and this might result more students dropping out from studying with OUT. When the two years elapse one might find the number of sponsored licensed teachers dwindling.

The support given by OUT of licensed teachers Studying the University

Members in focus discussion groups indicated that there some issues they were not happy with the facilitation of the OUT in their studies. Such issues included:

- Not getting the right information at the right dates when OUT activities are carried out. Some heads of schools refuse to allow licensed teachers to go to such activities when there is no official written document from the Regional Centre that show that the OUT activity is being carried out. A case in point of late communication to concerned students is the recent TP exercise whereby initially there was the information that the licensed teachers would have a separate almanac and that the information that TP would involve licensed teachers did not filter to regional centres early enough for students to get the information from the Directors of Regional Centres.
- Another problem is regards not getting some study manuals/materials hence getting some difficulties in doing assignments, tests and examinations. The case in point they cited was during the face to face sessions that were held in November/December, some of the students could not attempt some tests and examinations as they had not been issued with study materials that were to be studied for the particular evaluation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the discussion above and on the basis of the findings it can be concluded that if the MoEVT do not take heed of the issues that are raised by these students who are the training route of licensed teachers the number of drop outs of these teachers from the teaching profession and also studying with the OUT. The low salary that does not suffice survival coupled with the OUT study activities would deliberately push away these teachers from the university and the teaching profession. As a way forward the following recommendations are made:

- Give additional compensation and recognition to teachers in difficult postings. incentives for teachers to work in difficult and remote environments.
- The MoEVT should fulfil its promise of providing full sponsorship to licensed teachers studying at OUT.
- Mechanisms should be built by the MoEVT and the OUT to quality training of these teachers. The trainees must be supported by both OUT and MoEVT in academic mentoring and administrative support at the place of work.
- The OUT in collaboration with MoeVT with devise strategies in holding face to face session with licensed teachers that would make pupils in schools lose the services of teaching when carrying out OUT study activities.
- The improvement of living and working conditions, including housing and other incentives, have to seriously taken into account so as an encourage licensed teachers to take up posts in disadvantaged or remote areas and stay in these schools.
- The OUT should devise an almanac that can be known to licensed teachers well in advance. The importance of communicating information to licensed teachers early enough for them to do the necessary preparations would be of great importance.

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