

Moving In and Out of the Foundation Phase Teaching Specialization: Lack of Career Counseling in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT This case study reports on the impact of the lack of career counseling in South African universities, particularly in the Faculty of Education. Students are not sure of which specialization to choose, as a result they keep changing specialization up to the end of the first term. Some register to specialize in teaching in the Foundation Phase (FP) but after qualifying as teachers they do not teach where they are supposed to teach. Therefore the study aims to further investigate how the lack of career counseling in this university impacts on the FP teaching specialization. Using a qualitative approach located within an interpretive paradigm, the study used a random sampling to identify information rich cases. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data. The study revealed that some students moved into the specialization out of desperation and when they get employment in other grades they do not hesitate to use that chance and move out of the specialization. Some students displayed lack of knowledge about the realities of dealing with young children. The study recommends that having career counseling in place during registration could eliminate the number of people who enter the specialization without knowledge and passion.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the study is on the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students who already have degrees but do not have a teaching qualification. PGCE is a one year qualification when done on a full time basis and two years if done on a part time basis. Most students who register for this qualification are students who completed their initial degrees and sought work for not less than three years and a few students are fresh from universities. Other students hold Honours' and Masters' degrees in their respective fields but they are still unemployed. They could not get employment in the field they are qualified to work in and resorted to the teaching profession out of desperation. When presented with an opportunity of training for a year to become teachers they grab it without considering if they really like to be teachers, especially FP teachers.

As the coordinator of FP (Foundation Phase) specialization in one South African universities, one of the duties of the coordinator is to approve admissions into FP specialization. There is no point where students are advised on the decisions they make regarding the choice of specialization and regarding their choice of teach-

ing as a career. As long as they qualify for admission they get admitted. Only students who do not qualify who plead to be admitted get the chance of getting counseling about the outcome of admitting them. Generally speaking there is a lack of counseling in the faculty.

Criteria for Admission

To get enrolled into the programme one has to have a junior degree. The degree must have at least three teaching subjects to be considered for FP, Senior Phase (SP) and Further Education and Training (FET) teaching specializations in any of the South African universities. Some students have less than three teaching subjects. As a result they are considered for the FP specialization hence other specializations require three teaching subjects. FP specialization accepts applicants with two, one and even none of the teaching subjects. These applicants are considered if they have modules with the underpinnings relevant to FP teaching. These underpinnings are Psychology, Sociology, Social Work, Nursing Science and others with relevancy to teaching young children. They should have done these modules up to the second year level to qualify for admission. The specialization of these people is determined by the nature of subjects they have in their initial degrees. No matter how much they like teaching in upper phases if their subjects deny them they eventually fall into the FP specialization.

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This qualification was introduced in order to fill the gaps, to address this shortage of teachers generally and shortage of FP teachers in particular. The long existing teaching qualification, the Bachelor of Education degree which is a four year long qualification does not produce enough teachers for the country. This qualification was believed to be a way of speeding up the process, by training matured individuals who are degreed. Mail and Guardian of 14 March 2011 reports that *"it manifests clear that the present system of teacher training is failing to produce sufficient numbers of new teachers for the education system. The figures speak for themselves. Depending on which pupil: teacher ratios are used, the shortfall for 2008 was between roughly 9 000 and 27 000"*. One news papers poses a question *'Why are teachers leaving the profession and why are so few joining it? (Mail & Guardian, 14 March 2011)*. This could be the people who entered into the specialization with blurred knowledge of what it means to be a teacher. Career counseling could have curbed the moving in and out of the teaching specialization and of the qualification as such.

Literature Review

There is a shortage of studies on the lack of career counseling locally and internationally, let alone literature on the impacts of the lack of career counseling in a field of education. This study aims to address the gap that exists in this field. This study is believed to be groundbreaking in reporting on the impact of the lack of career counseling focusing on the FP teaching specialization. Most studies accessed stem from international literature. Studies such as Chen (1999), Sajid (2010) and Salleh and Mustapha (2010) report on the lack of career counseling in different fields of work.

What is Career Counseling?

Career counseling has to do with work-related counseling. In the 1970s this concept was known as vocational guidance. *"The title contained an assumption that people had a vocation, literally a calling for a particular type of work, if only it could be identified. A further assumption was that one such decision was all that was needed; the decision and the vocation were for life, perhaps even if with one*

organisation"(Good 2008:409). Gordon (2005) defines career counseling as an interpersonal process focused upon assisting an individual to make an appropriate career decision. Currently the concepts vocational became career and guidance became counseling.

Gordon and Habley (2000) assert that approaches to assisting with career choices should emphasize personal responsibility and empowerment to enable independent, purposeful, deliberate, rewarding and attainable goals. In most cases students make choice because of influences by immediate people. Gordon and Habley (2000) further state that approaches to assisting with career choices should consider social and family goals, leisure interests and geographic choices as well as occupational preferences. Social and family background of the student has an impact on the choice students make regarding careers and specializations. When given guidance this fact should be taken into consideration.

Importance of Career Counseling

According to Gordon (2005), career counseling assists students to self reflect, restructure beliefs, mature and deepen their personalities. Career counseling is important for the mental and career development of students. In the developmental continuum, making a choice about career is an important factor in the establishment of self identity as Good (2008:410) states. Mara and Mara (2010) state that career counseling involves developing attitudes and basic skills needed in any organization. Making a career choice is a search for satisfaction, identification and autonomy. Students choose FP teaching specialization but do not get satisfaction and do not want to identify with teachers of young children. Career counseling helps in increasing awareness and purpose for the desired work. Career counseling should not end there. It also should help individuals in improving their standard of work even in the toughest working conditions and atmosphere. After getting the desired employment most organizations do not give necessary support to help teachers develop. As a result they find themselves baffled with many activities which they cannot cope with. This is another gap that is caused by the employers. Teachers look for the loop hole and then leave the employment. Career counseling and development could help teachers face the

challenges and be able to solve some. When done properly career counseling can do wonders in an individual's personality and performance at work. It does not only enhance his work skills but brings out his hidden resourcefulness. Career counseling takes care of various aspects like personal insight, support and even a better understanding. Other than these, it helps in building high motivational level by understanding the individualistic wants. The best part about career counseling is that it inspires every individual to make a career for themselves in field in which their interest and passion lies.

Career counseling helps one to get into the career knowing what they are putting themselves into. Career counseling could help students to balance between their professional and personal life, understanding their own strength and keeping their vision and values ahead of anything else. If the person's inner needs are not being met by work, then there is no motivation except perhaps basic survival. Even the highest abilities, without the right motivation to exercise them, are useless and potentially destructive, stultifying for the person and frustrating for the organization (Good 2008:410).

Gordon and Habley (2000) maintain that '*career counseling introduces individuals to theories such as trait and factor, developmental decision making and social learning theories. In particular the trait and factor theory allows students to project their preferences on occupational titles and roles assigns individuals to modal personality styles, including realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional.*'

Career counseling is the art of honing career that is developed at a very early stage in every individual. Ginzberg et al. (1951) and Super (1990) as cited by Gordon and Habley (2000) argue that career development occurs generally from childhood through fantasy to young adulthood. Therefore career counseling is a way of career crystallization, specification, implementation, stabilization and consolidation as Gordon and Habley put it. Students who get into the specialization without undergoing these stages are likely to quit. Since theories prove that career development develop at a young age, students should be encouraged to pursue their careers and not change because of the circumstances.

Career counseling is not only important to students who are choosing careers but also to

policy makers. '*Policymakers are recognizing the importance of career counseling in assisting to achieve policy goals related to lifelong learning, employment and social equity*' (McMahon 2006:1). This statement bears testimony to career counseling as one way in which people can have lifelong employment. Policies would not be implementable if people who are expected to implement do not have passion of their career. In many cases people resist change and this could be the reason of being in an employment position by default.

Impact of the Lack of Career Counseling

Studies report that employees are unlikely to live long in any kind of employment if they have no passion about it. People who have an alternative qualification are even worse. Once they get the desired employment they quit. Students find it difficult to say goodbye to their past life roles as Chen (1999) maintains. This results to the shortage of teachers in the Foundation Phase.

According to Sajid (2010), in Pakistan it is reported that there is a lack of career counseling. Literacy rate is so low that people are not equipped with enough education so how they can be self guided about the career direction and the dilemma of our country is that even many educated people don't think about this critical issue. The impact was that many parents forced their children to choose the field they decided for them. Whether they had the abilities or not, they had to conform. This would impact negatively on the entire organization.

In her speech the former Minister of Basic Education, Naledi Pandor (2005) states that there is empirical evidence that the richer the learning environment in schools, the better children learn. The environment cannot be rich if teachers who are teaching in that phase are not passionate about their job. Counseling student about career will expose facts about a particular career in question and these facts will inform the decisions to be made by the student about what they want to do. In the study conducted by Salleh and Mustapha (2010) on the influence of contextual aspects on students' career planning and development, the results showed that contextual factors have influenced the choice of students' career decision. The authors highlight two facts such as the lack of role models in the family and lack of career information received at home influenced the respondents' career

choices in technical fields. In some cases parents put pressure on students by choosing the career for them. In due respect students take the specialization and in the middle of the study, they realize that it is not their calling. If career counselors were there to lead the student, the situation would have been avoided.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws from the Systems Theory Framework (STF). According to McIlveen and Patton (2007), the STF “provides a broad view of career and positions the individual and his or her unique characteristics amid overlapping systems of potential interpersonal, social, and environmental influences upon career”. This framework is embedded on the theory of constructivism. It looks at how individuals construct their own meaning about experiences and their own reality as Patton and McMahon (2006) maintain. There are many systems that work together to form a STF and these are individual system, social systems, environmental system and the story.

Individual System

The individual system is at the centre of the STF. The individual is a confluence of unique features and consists of influences such as gender, values, ability and disability, interest and beliefs skills and personality world of work to mention a few. These are the sources of influence which interfere with the choice of career an individual make.

Social System

According to McIlveen and Patton (2007), these are the proximal social systems with which the individual interacts. This system consists of the influences such as family, peers, community educational institutions media, work place etc. Students get influenced by people around them and end up taking wrong decisions or decisions which will suit them for a short term and does a life-long damage.

Environmental-societal Systems

These are geographical locations, socio-economic status, employment market, political decisions and historical trends (McIlveen and

Patton 2007). Students sometimes could be attracted by the geographical location of the school, should a vacant post appear they go for the job because of convenience.

Story

This is the last system in the framework. Story is used as the metaphor for understanding career as Bujold (2004) and Inkson (2007) in McIlveen and Patton (2007) state. The unfavourable conditions students go through when they look for the jobs they are trained to shape the choices they make. Because they do not want to suffer the same difficulty, they end up getting themselves into any kind of career which is not their dream jobs. Some would say I have spent many years looking for a job and now I am ready for anything that comes my way. This is how sometimes work places are full of people who are not really interested in working in them.

This theory was deemed relevant to the study because it looks at all the possible influences that might influence the choices of career students make when they are still training as teachers. This theory informed the development of the semi-structured interview schedule and the analysis of data. Questions that were asked were around what influenced students to choose Foundation phase as their teaching specialization

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study located within the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm is deemed relevant to this study because it is associated with human sciences where people’s behaviours, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are investigated as Cohen et al. (2007) state.

Foundation Phase students including some who have graduated were selected to participate in the study. They were randomly selected. Seven of the respondents were pre-service students and four were in-service students. The total of thirteen students was subjected to a preliminary interview. This interview was meant to identify students who are in the specialization by default. Eight students were a group of students who were in the specialization because they love working with young children and other got into the specialization because of some reasons which the study will reveal. All the students who entered the specialization because of the passion

were excluded in the study. Therefore this study did a follow up on five students who mentioned other reasons rather than passion. This five includes three in-service and two pre-service Foundation Phase teachers. These two in-service teachers work in a township school. One of them is teaching in the intermediate phase and the other one is teaching in the Foundation phase.

A semi-structured interview was used to gather data. This method of data gathering was chosen because it allows the respondents to speak without limits and it also allows the interviewer to do follow-up on the answers given by the respondent which Henning (2004) calls a two-way communication. It also allows the interviewer to deviate if need be. This instrument is believed to be the best in investigating the impact of the lack of career counseling in higher education

Data were transcribed and analysed according to Giorgi's (1970) phenomenological steps. In the first step transcripts were read to get an idea. Secondly, transcripts were read to identify the transactions and each transaction signified a unit of meaning. Thirdly, the redundancies in the units of meaning were eliminated. Fourthly, the respondents' language was transformed into the language of science and lastly the insights were synthesized into factors that cause teachers to move in and out of the Foundation Phase specialization.

Research Problem

The researcher was aware that students do not get counseling before they get enrolled into any specialization. Although there are orientation programmes to give students a clue of what specializations are about, that is still not enough to students. They never get settled, they change specialization almost to the end of the first quarter. Students get into the phase without knowing what they are getting themselves into. Therefore, this article therefore seeks to answer the following question:

- What is the impact of the lack of career counseling on Foundation Phase teaching specialization?

FINDINGS

From the findings of the study five themes emerged. These themes were: choice of specialization out of desperation, lack of pre-requisites,

monetary incentives, lack of teaching posts in the foundation phase, convenient lectures and young children taken for granted.

Choice of Specialization Out of Desperation

Findings point out that many teachers teach in the foundation phase not because they have passion. Some students, after many years of trying to get employment in the fields they are trained for, take teaching as their final resort. Not because they love teaching but because they want to remedy the situation and do damage control. Many young children are sitting in classrooms where teachers really do not like working them.

Some of the students do not even complete their certificate. They get employment after a long time of seeking the job. Some are holders of bursaries. Getting enrolled into the specialization does not stop them from seeking the job they are passionate about. One student who is now working as a social worker stated:

One respondent stated:

"Teaching was not my first priority. I did a degree in psychology hoping that it will yield good results for me. Five years after the completion of the degree I decided to do a teaching qualification. I needed a job desperately".

"I got the job I desired so much. Being enrolled into the PGCE was just to keep myself busy and at the end of the day I knew it is of benefit for me because I was going to end up with two qualifications. Now that I got my employment in a relevant field I am quitting".

This makes it clear that the field has people who are there because they were disappointed somewhere else and then decide to join teaching particularly the teaching of young children because they think it is not taxing to work with young children

Lack of Pre-requisites

Other students get enrolled into the Foundation Phase specialization because they do not qualify to teach in other specialization. Some specializations require applicants to have at least two teaching subjects in their initial degrees. If they do not have those modules they are considered for foundation phase specialization where people who have majors like psychology sociology, social science etc. are found suitable. Because they are desperate they agree to special-

ize in foundation phase. This is evident in one respondent who said:

"I entered the specialization because the modules I had in my initial degree allowed me to specialize in the foundation phase".

Many people who have a shortage of sufficient pre requisites for the intended specialization end up in the foundation phase specialization

Monetary Incentives

There are some other factors which draw students into the foundation phase specialization. Some students qualify to do specialization in upper grades but because there are some incentives in the foundation phase specialization then students choose to specialize in the education of young children. One respondent stated:

"I was attracted by Fundza Lushaka bursaries. Many people I spoke to said there are bigger chances of getting the bursary if you specialize in the Foundation Phase. I was also willing to work in rural areas since the awarding of the bursary uses this as one of its criteria".

Students are in need of money therefore they get tempted to specialize in the field they are not passionate about. In the context of South Africa foundation phase classes were marginalized long ago and are now receiving attention from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and Higher Education Institutions (HEI). There is a lot of money that have been injected into this field. At higher education students who specialize in it are granted bursary as the way to increase the number of teachers who teach in this field.

Lack of Teaching Posts in the Foundation Phase

Some students have a passion of teaching in the foundation phase but they were unfortunate to be given posts in upper grades. One respondent mentioned that:

"Foundation phase teaching is my passion. When I was looking for the job I was told that the teaching post available is in the intermediate phase so I had to go for it".

In some cases teachers are there but they are not properly utilized. They teach in grades which they are not trained to teach. The statement

above proves that the placement of teachers by the districts promote foundation phase teachers to teach in the grades they do not qualify in. they do not focus on the teachers qualifications they focus on the need more. The quality of teaching is then affected. Some learners are taught by someone who knows nothing about teaching in higher grades, a person who does not have specialization whatsoever, therefore learners are at risk of not benefiting from that educator. Some newly qualified teachers are not sure if they really want to teach in the foundation phase they do not wait until they get what they qualify for, but if they were properly counseled they could wait until they get employed in the relevant field.

Convenient Lectures

These are people who come to the specialization to fill the space available for desperate people. They then exit the specialization having not met the requirements for the award of the certificate. Some students move in and out of specialization because of convenience. One respondent said:

'I changed to specialization because foundation phase modules start at 15h00 and end at 16h30, unlike FET specialization where all the modules end at 18h05. I am a married woman I need to go home early and take care of my children.'

This student initially registered for FET specialization but after observing that FP classes finish earlier she decided to change the specialization, not out of passion but to be in the comfort zone.

Young Children Taken for Granted

Students displayed the lack of knowledge of what it means to be a teacher of young children. Others were attracted by the fact that young children do not talk back. They are easy to handle. Most students pointed out that during their training they never realized that handling young children is a complicated task. After some time they deregister and look for specializations which deal with grown up children. One student responded:

"I thought teaching young children is not demanding than I thought it is with grown up children. I found it very hard to make them

understand what I was saying. The most difficult part is to make them pay attention when you talk to them."

Other students, after going out for observation, they come back wanting to change to foundation phase specialization. After realizing that it is hard to deal with high school children, they look for specialization where they will feel at ease. One student said:

"I found very big children and I was scared of them, they were passing nasty remarks."

Female students are scared of grown up boys because they propose to them, so to avoid this drama, they end up opting for foundation phase specialization.

DISCUSSION

Career counseling was going to disclose the realities of being a teacher of young children as most students were unsure of what it means to be the FP teacher. Students enter the specialization out of desperation. After completing their studies they teach in upper phases and not in the Foundation Phase. They only enter in to the specialization to get a certificate, after obtaining the certificate they do not want to teach in the phase they qualify for. They move out of the specialization to teach older children they have passion for. Students lack admission requirements for other specializations then they opt for foundation phase teaching. This has a negative impact on young children. The specialization draws people who have little or knowledge of dealing with young children, who fail to give children love at this critical stage of their lives. This may result to a high drop-out rate in future. In the Foundation phase teachers with love for children is one of the major characteristics. Teachers who love playing with children, this kind of teachers will then develop love for school and motivate them to pursue their studies.

Findings highlight that some students are attracted by Fundza Lushaka bursaries. Higher education institutions should find a way of awarding these bursaries. They should not be used to attract students into the discipline because anyone who wants to get money ends up in a wrong place. At least they should wait until everyone is settled in a right specialization and then start awarding bursaries accordingly.

Findings reveal that there are teachers who have a passion for teaching in the FP but because the vacant posts were available in inter-

mediate phase they were employed to teach there and not in the field they qualify to teach. This results to a shortage of qualified teachers in the FP. When employing teachers, district offices of basic education should adhere to the qualifications of the teacher. Counseling of students would prevent this because students would know the harm this would have to them as teachers, to children they would be teaching, to the DBE and to the university itself. Given this position the student would have displayed their perseverance skills and assertiveness. Well counseled students would wait until the positions they qualify for are available.

The Systems Theory Framework supports the findings of this study. Findings reveal that students are influenced by some systems in their decisions of making a choice of career. They themselves as individual after suffering from unemployment for a long time they resort in taking careers which are not their dreams. The society has a big influence on the students' choices. The study reveals that their counterparts advise them to go for certain specialization because of incentives involved. The environmental system such as the employment market also plays a role in the choices students make. If positions are in upper grades the study findings reveal that they go for them having not considered their qualification.

CONCLUSION

The study indicated that universities should develop a way of enrolling students into foundation phase teaching. There should also be structures available to recruit and retain those who have chosen to specialize in the foundation phase. This will stop students from registering and deregistering after some time and this will help the system to develop and be able to retain teachers who are trained as foundation phase teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving in and out of the Foundation Phase specialization is caused by the lack of career counseling in Higher Education. This impacts negatively on the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Higher Education Institutions (HEI). HEI produce FP teachers every year, however there is always the shortage of teachers in the phase. These teachers which universities

produce, when they complete their qualifications they are wrongly placed by the department itself. They qualify for FP teaching but they teach in upper grades because teaching posts were available there. If the student was well counseled about the importance of teaching in the FP when they are given such posts they would have ignored them stating clearly to those who give them these positions that are FP teachers. Counseling these students would have made them assertive and know the importance of the decisions they make. This takes a passionate teacher to say, a teacher who is not driven by convenience but by the love of working with young children. This also impacts on higher education itself. As we produce these teachers we want to see them teach in the phases they qualify to teach. We want to visit them and conduct studies to conduct investigations. This helps us to gauge our programmes. We use this information to identify the gaps, flaws and strengths of our programmes. This makes us review our programmes and our teaching strategies to produce better teachers. When the teachers we produce are not in the right place to us this becomes a limitation. Teachers who get admitted into the discipline out of desperation are not an asset to young children. This could impact on the learners' academic achievement. Students should be given a test or should undergo a certain process to measure their willingness to teach young children. This should be part of the counseling process to see if they really fit in the field chosen. Teacher trainers too should have a vision of training teachers who are passionate about working with young children.

Lack of counseling causes a problem to students who later realize that they are in a wrong place, in a long run it becomes a problem to the Department of Education (DoE), the employer since this act of moving out of the specialization causes shortage of qualified teachers in the FP. If the DoE is affected, children too fall the victim. Although qualified FP teachers are produced every year by higher education institutions, there is an outcry by the public that the through put of FP teachers is not meeting the demand of the country. It is therefore a concern that production of teachers at higher education hardly mitigates the situation since learners at junior primary schools are still taught by either unqualified or under-qualified teachers.

During registration there should be an information desk with a professional trained to guide

students regarding career choices. This is where facts about specialization are revealed to students. During orientation programmes knowledge about each specialization should be passed on to students to enable them to choose the right specialization. They should be made aware of the impact of getting into the specialization and leaving it after getting the desired qualification and the impact it has on the entire education system and individual children.

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