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Teaching as a Career Choice: Comparing the Persistent Challenges in South Africa and Seychelles

Abstract

Both Seychelles and South Africa are experiencing serious challenges with regard to providing for the need to employ the required number and quality of teachers – needs that are differentiated according to specific areas of competencies. In the paper, it is argued that each of the education systems of these two countries should have a well-planned recruitment strategy and particular attention should be paid to preparing a recruitment message that will attract possible candidates. Each of the education systems has been found to be lacking in several aspects of the recruitment message, such as the social status of the teaching profession and the comparison of teachers' remuneration. It has been found that South Africa is better placed than Seychelles in respect of only two factors, namely teacher training opportunities and better comparable remuneration packages of teachers in South Africa. It is clear that all of the stakeholders should be involved in the recruitment of teachers. Other developing education systems can learn from the experiences of the two countries.

Keywords: recruitment, teachers, education systems, teaching profession in Seychelles, teaching profession in South Africa

Introduction

The availability of the required differentiated number and quality of teachers depends on the correct planning of the required teacher cohort, the continuous implementation of a carefully planned recruitment and selection strategy, and the availability of suitable and sufficient preservice and in-service training opportunities for prospective and practising teachers. The recruitment message should include particular information concerning the following: the status of teaching as a profession in the respective countries; the availability of employment for teachers in both of the education systems; the levels of teachers' remuneration; the nature of the available education infrastructure; challenges regarding the languages of teaching and learning; the qualifications and training opportunities that are available; the learners' discipline; and the professional conduct of teachers (Gore et al., 2015).

Recruitment of teachers

Recruiters should use applicable methodologies to communicate with possible candidates and especially consider using Internet-based technologies (Chungyalpa & Karishma, 2016, p. 5).

The following factors are important: the status of the profession; the availability of employment positions; the levels of remuneration in relation to comparable professions; preservice and in-service training opportunities and funding of such

training; and the general positive and negative characteristics of the profession (Gore et al., 2015).

The status of teaching as a profession

All professionals want to be respected in the community when juxtaposed with other professions, and teaching professionals are not an exception. Historically, teachers were highly regarded in the community and often served in leadership positions. However, currently, teaching is quite often regarded as an ‘ordinary’ career that does not deserve particular respect (Kassiem, 2007). This trend will obviously influence the appeal of teaching as a career choice.

Remuneration of teachers

An increase in the cost of living is a reality across the world and poses significant challenges to the lower- and middle-income groups. Teachers’ compensation packages vary between countries but, in general, teachers are categorised as being in the middle-income groups, and in some countries even in the lower-income groups. Young prospective professionals compare the remunerations of different careers before they make decisions regarding their career choice. In order to be able to compare the income of teachers in the two countries, it is important to compare it to particular income numbers.

The level of learner discipline

The general perceptions about a specific profession and the articulated experiences of professionals in that profession determine the decision of interested individuals to choose that particular profession as a career. It is an indisputable fact that an environment with poor learner discipline limits quality teaching and learning and leads to difficult work conditions for teachers (Oosthuizen, 2015; Wolhuter & Steyn, 2003). The learners’ quality of discipline has a significant impact on the school environment and will negatively influence the level to which possible newly interested individuals consider the teaching profession as a career (Kassiem, 2007; Rademeyer, 2014). Learner discipline is a significant source of concern. In both countries, incidents have been reported where learners and parents have threatened teachers and have even used physical violence against them. These tendencies are some of the reasons why young prospective candidates hesitate to enter the teaching profession.

The language of teaching and learning

The majority of teachers prefer to teach in the language in which they are the best qualified and proficient. Teachers usually perform with increased productivity when they teach in their home language or first language. The language proficiency of the teacher is even more important in teaching subjects with a specialised vocabulary, such as science, mathematics, or technology. Needless to say, teachers experience much frustration and the quality of teaching and learning is severely compromised if they are not proficient in the language in which the learners ought to be taught. This often occurs in education systems that are characterised by multilingualism, and the more so in cases where the learners themselves are not proficient in the language of teaching and learning either (Van Rensburg, 2006, p.

98). Thus, it stands to reason that many teachers who are expected to teach in a second language could easily leave the teaching profession and take up another career in which they could use their mother tongue as a medium of functioning in the workplace.

As a result of French and British influences on the history of Seychelles, although many people are fluent in English and French, most people have a French-based creole as their home language. Contemporary Seychellois Creole has gradually been influenced more by English, which has led to a further mixing of languages. The official languages of instruction at the primary level are predominantly English, with some French and Creole. At the secondary level, the official language of teaching and learning is English, relegating Creole to non-academic status. This fact has a negative influence on the effective use of Creole as a language of teaching and learning. Recognising this trend, it can be reasoned that many teachers may not consider teaching at upper primary or secondary levels since Creole is not officially recognised or valued in the education system. The dominance of English as the language of teaching and learning could explain the difficulty in finding Seychellois teachers who are proficient enough to teach, using English (Mahoune, 2018).

South Africa has 11 official languages, and sign language is now also accepted as a language in its own right. In terms of the South African Constitution (South Africa, Act 108 of 1996) and the South African Schools Act (South Africa, Act 84 of 1996), the learner's mother tongue is acknowledged as his or her language of teaching and learning, provided that it is feasible and attainable to use it as language of teaching and learning. This means that learners of minority groups would probably not be taught in their mother tongue. In the South African context, it is neither economically nor administratively possible to use all 11 languages as languages of teaching and learning in one school. Also, not all 11 languages have been developed to a level where they can be used as languages of teaching and learning. Furthermore, there are not enough trained teachers who can teach all the subjects in all 11 languages (Steyn et al., 2017).

The reality is that a diversity of languages is used in the communities of Seychelles and South Africa. In both countries, strategies are being implemented to use these languages as languages of teaching and learning, but with little effect. In both countries, the tendency is to use one language, namely English, as the medium of teaching, at least at the level of post-primary education. This, however, significantly complicates the work of the teachers. Parents and teaching authorities put considerable pressure on teachers to ensure that learners perform well academically. Thus, if a teacher is not proficient in the language of teaching and learning, the frustration of the teacher is increased. This reality in both countries may cause teachers to leave the profession and discourage young, interested candidates from considering teaching as a profession.

The conduct and behaviour of teachers

The media often reports on members of professions who transgress the relevant professional codes, and the teaching profession is no exclusion (Parfitt, 2017). It also happens that teachers are guilty of making undesirable and insensitive remarks on social media about teaching, their colleagues, the parents, or their learners, which

adds to the negative image of the teaching profession. Corruption, physical assault, sexual assault, truancy, incompetency, and unlawful remarks are further examples of negative cases reported on teachers' conduct (Maqhina, 2017).

In Seychelles, a report noted a concern about the conduct of learners and teachers with regard to a lack of mutual respect, problems with discipline, and a lack of responsibility (Bonne, 2016). The dedication of teachers towards education in Seychelles is a complex phenomenon and the development thereof should be actively supported in order to establish a professional, value-based dedication in the ranks of the teaching corps, especially in the case of beginner teachers.

In the South African context, it has been found that some teachers are not role models to their learners and should rather not teach (Wolhuter et al., 2012, p. 30). The South African Council for Educators is concerned about the drastic increase in the number and seriousness of complaints of physical and sexual offences against teachers which the Council is currently investigating (Jordaan, 2017; Mngadi, 2017; Oosthuizen, 2015). The following are some of the alleged complaints against teachers that have been received: corporal punishment, sexual offences, mismanagement, fraud, and violence against colleagues (Magwedge, 2017; Wakefield, 2015). The discussion indicates that in both countries, the concern is being expressed about the conduct and behaviour of teachers.

Findings

The social status of teachers has an impact – positively or negatively – on the image of the teaching profession. The social status of teachers in both countries has been found wanting. The only way to improve or change the social status of teachers is to positively adjust the opinion of society towards the teaching profession. This opinion can be changed by attending to the other aspects that determine the recruitment message or inherent image of teachers, such as improving the professional conduct and behaviour of teachers, improving the level of training and competencies of teachers, increasing their remuneration, enhancing their effective work performance, and acknowledging the implicit and explicit contributions of teachers in society.

The availability of reasonable and competitive salary packages is a significant aspect that is a primary consideration for possible candidates. Competitive remuneration packages should be offered to teachers. This seems to be the case, especially in the Seychelles education system. The following aspects, among others, should be considered when remuneration is being structured: the social status of the teaching profession; the qualifications of teachers; the changes in and increasing of living costs; the compensation of comparable careers in the private sector; work hours; and the wide-ranging and diverse responsibilities of teachers (Concordia University, 2019). Remuneration in public and private schools should compare favourably.

An environment of positive learner discipline increases the quality of teachers' working life and will, without a doubt, raise the level at which possible candidates consider choosing teaching as a career. Relevant programmes should be available to capacitate all stakeholders to execute their unique roles effectively in order to create an environment of positive learner discipline. These programmes should focus on individual human rights and the agreed-upon responsibilities of all involved, either

directly or indirectly. Attainable and sustainable preventative and reactive measures to develop and maintain an environment of positive learner discipline should be incorporated in the system and available.

The language proficiency of teachers and learners is a determining aspect for developing and maintaining academic success in education. Ideally, learners have the right to an education in their language of preference, and every measure should be put in place to realise this right. If only one particular language of teaching and learning is available to learners, every measure should be applied in order to ensure that the language proficiency of both the teachers and the learners will support the expected quality of education. This is especially applicable in the case of teachers and learners whose first language is different from the available language of teaching and learning.

The professional conduct of practising teachers is considered as an important aspect to convince possible candidates to consider education as a career. Therefore, clear guidelines should be established regarding teacher conduct and behaviour, and these guidelines should be discussed regularly with all stakeholders (South African Council for Educators, 2019). Teachers should be thoroughly informed concerning what constitutes unacceptable conduct or behaviour, as well as the consequences of such conduct and behaviour. Society should also be suitably informed of what is expected from teachers. It is logical that strict action, by the Council for Educators in South Africa and the Department of Education in Seychelles, against teachers who commit professional offences is essential.

Conclusion

The two countries under discussion are facing similar challenges regarding the provisioning of the required differentiated number and quality of teachers in order to ensure the delivery of meaningful and effective education. In this paper, it has been argued that such provisioning of suitable teachers should be based on, and guided by, a well-planned recruitment strategy. The strategy consists of different elements, but special attention should be paid to the recruitment message, which should be based on correct information. The information should give clarity about the status of the teaching profession, the employment opportunities, the comparison of remuneration for similar careers, the level of teaching infrastructure, the availability of training opportunities (including the funding of training of, and support services for, teachers), the level of positive learner discipline (which determines the level of work satisfaction), how the challenges of a diversity of languages of teaching and learning are being addressed, and information concerning the nature of the professional conduct and behaviour of teachers.

The relatively poor appeal of the teaching profession to possible and suitable candidates is a matter of concern in both countries. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to be constructively involved in all actions aimed at implementing an attainable, sustainable, affordable, and manageable recruitment programme through which the required number and quality of prospective candidates can be convinced to enter the teaching profession.

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