

Primary School Teachers' Engagement in Reflection-On-Action during Lesson Preparation and Planning in Lukulu and Mongu Districts of Western Province in Zambia

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Abstract:-The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore primary school teachers' engagement in reflection-on-action during lesson preparation and planning in Lukulu and Mongu districts in Western province in Zambia. The research instruments used in this research included classroom observations, focus group discussion, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using the inductive approach using constant comparative data analysis as proposed by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The study revealed that there was no evidence that primary school teachers in Lukulu and Mongu districts of Western province in Zambia engaged in reflection-on-action during lesson preparation and planning.

Keywords: Lukulu, Mongu, reflection-on-action, primary school teachers, lesson preparation.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world researchers and educationalists (e.g Collins, Muinat & AbduRaheem, 2015; Akiri & Ugborugbo, 2009; Akbari & Allavar, 2010) have reaffirmed the notion that primary school teachers are among the most significant and influential assets in the educational system and that they greatly determine the quality of education that is being provided to the society. This is so because primary school teachers are regarded to be the torch-bearers of the human race on whom the future of the schools, communities, countries and mankind deeply depends (Sidhu, 2005). Sidhu (2005) further observed that the reputation of any educational system in the world and its influence on the community greatly depends on the kind of teachers found in it. This implies that the quality and effectiveness of the education system is clearly determined by the quality of teachers found in that educational system (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Among the qualities of effective and successive educational system and primary school teachers is reflective practice. Reflective practice as a classroom instructional practice has been time in immemorial been acknowledged as one of the characteristics of not only effective and successive educational systems in the world but also effective teachers (Rarieya, 2005; Yanuarti & Treagust, 2015). Therefore, primary school teachers around the world are being

encouraged to be reflective practitioners because of the fact that reflective practice has greater potential to improve the professional practices of primary school teachers (Stallworth, 2012; Farrell, 2007; Gimenez, 1999). Fook and Gardner (2007) also indicate that when primary school teachers are engaged in reflective practice they become aware of the beliefs and assumptions underlying the practices. However, Reiman (1999) warns that when teachers are not engaged in reflective practice they are more likely to rely on routine teaching.

The concept of reflective practice is not only attributed to Dewey (1910) but also Schon (1983/1987). Donald Schon (1983 and 1987)'s work made a unique contribution to the concept of reflective practice in that he was able to show that reflective practice was in two frames of time. According to Schon reflective practice involves reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. However, of interest to this study is reflection-on-practice of primary school teachers. Reflection-on-action is the reflection that occurs before and after an action (Schon, 1983/1987). Moon (1999) adds to say that reflection-on-action is a form of reflection that involves verbalised or non-verbalised thoughts that are usually done by the reflective practitioner. Additionally, Ghaye and Lillyman (2008) indicate that reflection-on-action is a deliberately and conscious activity that is conducted privately or publicly and is principally designed to improve future action.

The study attempted to contribute to knowledge base by providing empirical evidence on the engagement of primary school teachers in reflection-on-action as they prepare and plan their day-to-day lessons in Lukulu and Mongu districts of Western province in Zambia.

Research questions

- i. Was reflection-on-action part of the factors primary school teachers use when preparing and planning their lessons?
- ii. Did primary school teachers question the way they prepare and plan the lessons?

II. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative interpretivism research paradigm was used in guiding this study. This was because it considered reality to be in the minds of the people and a case study research design was used. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 32 primary school teachers teaching at grade six levels in Lukulu and Mongu district of Western, Zambia. Data collection instruments for this study included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, classroom observations and reflective journals. Inductive data analysis particularly using constant comparative data analysis as proposed by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) was used in the analysis of data for this study.

III. RESULTS

Reflective-On-Action during Lesson preparation

In separate semi-structured interview and focus group discussion, primary teachers were asked to indicate the factors they considered when preparing and planning lessons for their grades. Analysis of the responses from the respondents to the semi-structure interview and focus group discussion question revealed that primary school teachers consider a lot of factors in the preparation and planning of lessons. However in the responses reflective practice was not mentioned as one of the factors in the preparation and planning of the lessons. It is evidently shown that primary school teacher do not reflect-on-action as they plan and prepare their lesson plan. One of the respondents, a primary school teacher with 18years of teaching experience during the semi-structure said:

.....When aim preparing and planning the lessons of the day always look at the method I will use, the ability of the pupils and the teaching /learning aids to be use in that lesson.....(Pr.Sc.Tr.07)

In another semi-structure interview, a respondent with 3years teaching experience indicated that:

During lesson preparing and planning, the factors I put into consideration include the method to be used, the content and the ability of learners. Obviously include the age of the learners.(Pr.Sc.Tr.24)

Other responses from the semi-structure interview held with the respondents include:

I plan my lesson basing on the teachers' guide and pupil's textbook. (Pr.Sc.Tr 08)

In planning and preparation of the lesson, the major factor I consider the work previously covered with the learners, the method and ability level of the pupils. (Pr.Sc.Tr.24)

During the focus group interviews primary teachers were

asked to indicate the views on the focus they considered as they prepare and plan their lessons. The following excerpts were the responses:

....Sometimes, we plan our lessons on the basis of our assumptions of pupils' knowledge and how they understand the previous lesson. We also look at what our pupils do. (FG. 1, Pt.05)

Additionally in focus group interview the participants agreed that:

The focus of the lesson Preparation and planning is based on the annual work plan. From the annual work plan, we derive our schemes of work, weekly forecast and lastly the lesson plans. Therefore, for us the annual work plan is the factor that we consider so much as all these other factors embody led in this annual work plan. (FG. 03, Pt.02)

Age of the leaner, abilities teaching/learning aids, time and locality of the school are important factors one needs to consider as he/she is doing lesson planning. (FG. 02, Pt.01)

Primary school teachers never questioned the way the prepared and planned their lessons

With regard to the response given to the question that looked at factors the respondents considered when planning their lesson plans, a probe question was asked to find out whether the respondents considered the reflective practice as the basis of their preparation and planning. The analysis of response indicate that all the 32 respondents did not consider reflective practice as the basis of their lesson preparation and planning as show from the following interview excerpts.

During the semi-structured interview, one respondent said:

....You know..just as I said that I do not know anything about this concept you are calling reflective practice, then how can it be a basis of my lesson preparation and planning.(Pr.Sc.Tr 10)

Similarly another respondent said:

....Reflective practice has never been a basis of my lesson preparation and / planning.....(Pr.Sc.Tr.23)

During the focus group interview held with the respondents all the participants in the focus group revealed that reflective practice has never being a basis in their lesson preparation and planning. As indicated by the response below.

In one focus group discussion held the responses were as follows:

.....How can I use something I have never heard about.....? (FG. 04, Pt.03)

With me what I can see is that I do not think someone can use such a concept.... (FG. 01, Pt.06)

Primary school teachers involved in this study were further asked to indicate whether they discussed their lesson plans with their colleagues. The analysis of response from the respondents indicated that all the 32 participants had never discussed their lesson plans with their colleagues as indicated by the interviews excerpt below:

In one semi-structure interview, a respondent with 12 years teaching experience said:

Discussing of my lesson plan with my colleagues, no....I have never done that. We do not discuss our lesson plans with colleagues at this school. (Pr.Sc.Tr.11)

In another semi-structure interview held, another respondent said:

I do not I would be in that position of discussing my lesson with my colleague. Uuumm no.....these teachers full of gossiping, your mistakes would be known by every in the village/school. You know what I mean sir.....(Pr.Sc.Tr.25)

Similarly another respondent said:

.....Although, this has never happened think it is a good idea, where you sit down with your colleague plan or discuss how best the lessons can be taught.....To me it is a good idea but you know the problem...time we are very busy at this school...You start but the chances of failing are very high.(Pr.Sc.Tr. 22)

During the focus group interview held the following were the respondent with regard to whether the respondents discussed their lesson plans with their colleagues after planning.

Most of us we do lesson preparation and planning at home and during the night, and when you go for work you are already geared to teach, also you may find that your colleagues are teaching in the morning or come in the afternoon, So it is quite difficult .Let me say this not the culture of discussing the lesson plans with the colleagues.(FG.03, Pt.03)

Additionally, in another focus group discussion, it was committed that:

When we have written the lesson plans, what happens is that we take them to the school administration usually for date stamping. I do not think if the school administration has the time to go through the lesson plans be have never being told that my lesson plans are being fault.....(FG.05,Pt.05)

Similarly it was observed that:

Some of these practices cannot happen in Zambian primary schools; they are for western school where ever thing is in place and where even a primary school teacher is specialized. In Zambia it is not possible. (FG.06, Pt.01)

During further interview questions, primary school teachers were asked to indicate whether they have ever asked questioned the way lessons are planned and prepared. The analysis of the responses from the respondents revealed that all 32 participants have never questioned the way they plan prepare their lessons for the learners. The following interview excerpt represents the responses from the semi-structure interview held with the respondents. One interviewee a primary school teacher with 7years teaching experience said:

In these schools which you see, there standard procedures and formats that we follow when preparing and planning our lessons, so it is very difficult to question such procedure and formats, we just follow what has been provided for us. So I have never had the time to question this.....(Pr.Sc.Tr.15)

During another semi-structure interview, the respondent said:

The lesson plans that we use were designed by experienced teacher/administrators who have being in the system for sometimes, they have introduced with different pupils and teachers, so their formats are the best.....(Pr.Sc.Tr.16)

In another semi-structure, it was commented that primary school teachers do not question the way lessons are planned and prepared s shown by the interview excerpt below.

We do not ask the way we plan our lessons.... (Pr.Sc.Tr.26)

In the few group discussion held with participants, it was revealed that all the participants were involved in the focus group discussion did not question the way they planned and prepare their lessons as indicated by the following interview excerpts. In one focus group discussion it was revealed by one participant when she said:

Hmmmm.....it is difficult to question the way the lessons are being prepared and

planned at this school. Let me just say in short that I have never thought the one can question the way lessons are planned and prepared..... (FG.01, Pt.01)

During another group interview, another participant revealed that:

The way we plan and prepare the lessons is perfect. The formats are very simple and specific; there no need is to question such perfect formats. (FG.05, Pt.04)

During participant's observations conducted it was observed that the participants did not reflection-on-action during their lesson planning and preparation sessions. In most observations it was discovered that participant did not put much thoughts as they just follow previous lesson plans. When one participant was asked why he should use the previous lesson plans, he indicated that:

I have being teaching this same grade level

for four years now. I have prepared and planned so much lesson plans, There no need for me to start think hard when I have already my previous lesson plans. So what I do is just to present the lesson a new plain paper. The contents, objects and methods have not changed, may be when there will be a change in the syllabus. (Pr.Sc.Tr 01)

The above excerpts indicate that this participant does not think through before lesson planning as he just get old lesson plans and write them on another plain paper.

In another interview the participant revealed that when she is allocated a class, she would ask for lesson plans for that class from friends and starts copying them on a new plain paper.

The analysis of schemes of work, weekly forecast and lesson plans revealed that there has been no different in the way lesson plans are planned from those of the previous years. The lesson plans below indicate the scenario obtained on the ground.

LESSON PLAN

Grade: S10C (6)
 Topic: Governance
 Sub-topic: what government does
 Reference: Longman Social Studies P.P. bk Pg 17
 Specific outcomes: By the end of the lesson + S BAT

- Discuss how the executive, the legislature and Judiciary work
- Explain what each branch of the government does /

Date: 30th May, 2016.
 Subject: Social Studies
 Duration: 40 minutes
 Week: 4
 T/L Aids: chart

Lesson Development			
Stage	Teacher's activities	Learner's activities	Teaching points
Introduction	Revise the previous lesson.	Participate in the revision	Name the three branches of government. • legislature, executive and judiciary
Step 1	facilitate a discussion on how executive, legislature and judiciary works.	Participate in the discussion	With the help of a char The executive, collect tax, decides how to spend tax, keep law and order defend the country. The legislature have the Power to make new laws The law courts make sure that people obey the law
Step 2	Explain what each branch of government does.	Pay attention to the	• The executive branch of government puts laws into practice • The legislature make new laws • Judiciary, the law courts make sure that people obey the laws
Summary	Go through the main points of the lesson	Participate fully.	

LESSON PLAN

Grade: Six (6)

Topic: Governance

Sub-topic: What government does

Reference: Longman Social Studies PPBK Pg 17

Specific outcomes: By the end of the lesson + SBAT

- Discuss how the executive, the legislature and judiciary
- Explain what each branch of the government does /

Date: 12 July, 2017

subject: social studies

duration: 40 minutes

week: 4

T/L Aids: chart

Lesson Development

Stage	Teacher's activities	Learner's activities	Teaching points
Introduction	Revise the previous lesson.	Participate in the revision	Name the three branches of government. • legislature, executive and judiciary
Step 1	facilitate a discussion on how executive, legislature and judiciary works.	Participate in the discussion	With the help of a The executive, collect tax, decides how to tax, keep law and defend the country. The legislature have power to make new laws The law courts make that people obey the law
Step 2	Explain what each branch of government does.	pay attention to the	• The executive branch of government puts into practice • The legislature makes new laws • Judiciary, the law courts make sure people obey the law
Summary	Go through the main points of the lesson	Participate fully.	

The above lesson plans clearly indicate that there was no reflection-on-action. This is because the teacher only transferred the content of the lesson plan for the year 2016 on to the new paper and 2017.

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Reflective-on-action was not done by primary school teachers

The findings of this section of the study revealed that primary school teachers did not engage in reflective-on-action during lesson planning. The analysis of data from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis showed that the respondents did not consider reflective practice as the basis of their lesson planning. This was however contrary to the study conducted by Disu (2017) and Minott (2006) in which the participants considered reflective practice as the basis of their lesson planning.

Overall, Participants in this study mentioned that they considered factors such as the content of the topic, methodology, age and ability of the learners and location in the lesson planning and this was also noted by Disu (2017) and Minott (2006) in their studies. Disu (2017) and Minott (2006) considered participants in their study who think about content of the topic, methodology, age and ability of the learners and location in the lesson planning as being reflective practitioners. However, Zeichner and Liston (1996:7) questioned 'is any thinking about teaching that teachers do reflective practice?' The response to their own question is a 'no' suggesting that 'not all thinking about teaching constitutes reflective teaching' (Zeichner and Liston, 1996). Thinking about the content to be taught, age and ability of the learners and methodology to use during lesson planning does not mean that the teacher is being reflective but technically focused thinking and the teacher is said to be a technician (Zeichner and Liston, 1996). In addition, Farrell (2007) cautions that while most teachers usually engage in thinking about their work before the start teaching a lesson while many may think of it as reflective practice, it is just the composition of fleeting thoughts. This is acknowledged by Cimer and Palic (2012) in their study when they said that teachers usually think about their experiences but this does not mean that they are reflective. Reflective practice is not 'just thinking hard about what you do' (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995).

The respondents were further asked to indicate if at all the discussed their lesson plans with their colleagues. Data analysis indicated that there was no difference in the responses given by the participants from Lukulu and Mongu in that they all indicated that they never discussed their lesson plans with colleagues. This is in line with the findings from the study conducted by Pellerin and Paukner (2015) in which they found that participants lack of collaboration between the participants. In the study by Pellerin and Paukner (2015) it

was revealed that participants in the study perceived their fellow teachers in Chile as lacking collaboration or unwillingly as the felt more comfortable working in isolation. This finding by the study was opposite to Disu (2017)'s findings in which the respondents discussed their lesson plans with colleagues. The collaboration among primary school teachers is essential in that it is central to gaining skills of reflective practice as indicated by Harrington (2009) that when teachers collaborate among themselves they become aware of reflective practice and this led to the improvement of classroom practice and students performance (Dufour, 2004 and Bradley, 2015 cited by Disu 2017).

Lack of collaboration among primary school teachers in this study may be attributed to the type of teacher training that the participants underwent in colleges of education that emphasised more on competition than cooperation. Due to this type of training teachers are afraid to share their weaknesses with colleague in fear that they would be considered to be incompetent (Pellerin and Paukner, 2015).

With reference to whether the respondents in this study questioned the way they prepared and planned their lesson plans, it was revealed that all the respondents from Lukulu and Mongu districts did not at any given time questioned the way they prepared and planned their lesson plans. According to Sigglen-Damen and Romme (2014) one of the most significant components of reflective practice is questioning that involves the uncovering of the basic assumptions and blind spots in one's thinking. This means according to Zeichner and Liston (1995) that when a teacher does not ask questions on the values and goals, the context of the teaching process and his assumptions than the teacher is not involved in reflective practice. Ash and Clayton (2004) caution that when questioning is not part of the reflective practice than there is a greater risk that beliefs may continue to be biased or encapsulated in stereotype or misconceptions.

V. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that primary school teachers did not conduct reflection-on-action during lesson preparation and planning. In addition, it was clearly shown by primary school teachers involved in this study did not question the way the prepared and planned the lessons.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

- i. There is need for collaborative lesson preparation and planning among primary school teachers.
- ii. There is need to strength Continuous Professional Development programmes in primary schools.
- iii. There is need for capacity building in reflective practice among primary school teachers.

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