

Teacher Qualification and Performance in Bomi and Margibi Counties, Liberia

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.803003>

Received: 01 February 2024; Accepted: 12 February 2024; Published: 27 March 2024

ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess teacher qualification in public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties, Liberia. Teacher Qualification in this study is considered as Academic Qualification and Teaching Experience. Participants were 133 teachers and 8 principals from 16 public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the teachers, while a purposive sampling technique was used to select the principals for the study. A cross-sectional survey design, documentary review, brief observations and mini-interview were used. A semi-structured self-administered questionnaire, in addition to the open ended questions for the mini-interview was mainly used to collect the data. Research findings revealed that nearly half of the teachers studied in Bomi and Margibi Counties have teaching certificates required to teach at the primary level. However, there is a considerable number of teachers teaching in public primary schools that don't have the required certificates. This stresses the need for teacher training to still be prioritized. The study also revealed that most of the teachers with the academic qualification to teach, never had teaching experience besides the mandatory teaching practices (practicum) done during training. Findings suggest that although more teachers hold the minimum teaching certificate (C Certificate), teacher training should still be prioritized as there are still more teachers in the classrooms without any formal teacher training. Continuous professional development (CPD) should also be carried out regularly to boost the competency level of teachers who already hold the teaching certificate, but have little teaching experience.

Keywords: Bomi, Margibi, Teacher, Qualification, Experience, Performance

INTRODUCTION: TEACHER QUALIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE

Teacher qualification in this study focuses on the academic qualifications of teachers and training experience or competency. Teacher qualification refers to the academic qualification a teacher possess through a formal teacher training. According to the Liberia Education Reform Act, the C Certificate is the least standard set by the Ministry of Education for all teachers in Liberia to be considered fit for the classrooms. Liberia Education Reform Act (2011). While teacher experience is considered as the time the teacher spends on actual teaching. Both teacher qualification and teaching experience determine the quality of teaching which leads to an acceptable performance by teachers. Hence Teachers and the quality of their teachings are now widely recognized as the most critical of many important factors that combine to create overall quality of education Leu and Prince-Rom also indicated that education quality will not be met if there are unqualified and inexperienced teachers in the classrooms.

In a report by Shriberg (2007) on the topic "Teaching Well? Educational reconstruction efforts and support to teachers in postwar Liberia" it is indicated that teachers in Liberia lack adequate qualifications and less experience to teach. The study lamented that the children of Liberia, especially those at the primary level are taught by unqualified and inexperienced teachers. This certainly is negatively impacting the learning outcomes of Liberian students.

Despite these reports portraying a gloomy picture of the Liberian educational system, the Government of

Liberia along with her national and international partners has always strived to improve the quality of teachers in public schools. This is mainly done through the three government-owned rural teacher training institutes, Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute (KRTTI), Webbo Rural Teacher Training Institute (WRTTI) and Zorzor Rural Teacher Training Institute (ZRTTI), that are regionally located and also teacher training colleges in other government-own universities like the University of Liberia and the Tubman University. The issue of ill prepared teachers even got compounded by the fourteen-year civil conflict that ravished all sectors of Liberia. With the reactivation of the teacher training institutes, a study is required to assess the impact of training provided thus far, hence this study.

Objective of the study

To assess teacher qualification in public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties in Liberia.

Research Question

What are the qualifications of teachers in public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties?

Justification of the study

The result of a research project ‘situational Analyses of Education and Fragility in Liberia’, carried out by Mendizabal et al. (2011) of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) on the status of education in Liberia, indicates that the quality of education offered to the children of Liberia is very poor. The performance of teachers remains questionable. Absenteeism, low commitment and retention of teachers are serious factors. The report contends that if sustainable actions are not taken, the low quality of education is likely to negatively impact the provision of skills needed for personal and national development of the country. The report predicted several factors that could be responsible for this low quality of education. The researcher embarked on this study to assess teacher qualification and the impact on their performances since the rural teacher training institutes were reactivated since 2008.

Significance of the study

The findings from this study may provide insight to the Ministry of Education, policy makers, school administrators and other researchers on the status of teacher qualifications and performance.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE (QUALIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES)

Employee qualification is a wide subject matter with many dimensions to it. Different institutions and localities have different criteria used to determine and put to use the qualifications of employees. In China, for instance, employee qualification is looked at in terms of the academic qualification. Once someone has the necessary academic qualifications then he/she is deemed fit for the profession he or she is in. This has been considered at different levels in Chinese education, right from the nursery level to the university level. The qualifications considered are mainly those obtained from recognized institutions (China Education Center, 2003).

The findings of many research studies have indicated that the more qualified an employee is, the better he/she is expected to perform. This is found to be true about teachers, who arguably are expected to be the custodians of knowledge that directly impact the lives of their students. In a study conducted by Olabode and Olugbenga, (2012) to examine the effect of teacher qualification on the performance of senior secondary school students in Physics, it was revealed that the performance of teachers with high qualifications was better than those with low qualifications. He said that this was seen to be true in the good

performance of students taught by teachers with higher qualifications and the poor performance of students taught by teachers with lower qualifications. This indicates that the level of qualification a teacher possesses impacts his/her performance.

Like any other profession, a teacher needs also to be a professional and skilled person. A teacher needs to master skills like delivery techniques and non-verbal forms of communication that are very common between a teacher and students. The understanding of these forms of communication and other related practical aspects in the teaching profession are necessary to substantiate the academic qualifications that someone may have to become a teacher. All these are summarized in a word 'experience'. Experience is indeed an important aspect in any work related environment, including the teaching profession. Experience is built after a series of doing and re-doing a certain piece of work Rogelberg et al., (2010). Most of the time, gaining experience at work place is likened to competence building that employees end up engaging themselves into. This is always an indirect way of building competence forcefully because someone has to accomplish a given task.

A study conducted by Zuzovsky (2003) further emphasized the need for employees to possess certain level of experience. Findings from the research she conducted in Israel to ascertain the impact of teacher qualification on the achievement of their students, revealed that, there exists a positive relationship between experience teachers have and their effectiveness in the classroom. She stressed that though teachers with less experience tend to perform poorly than teachers that have been in the teaching profession for a longer time; experience level tends to fade off after a few years.

A related study by Opara (2008) further confirmed that teacher qualifications and experience are related to their performance and the academic achievements of their students. Opara stressed that this is even true with technical subjects.

Although many research findings have shown significant relationship between the academic qualifications and experience of teachers to their performance and the achievements of their students, there are however other research studies that have disputed this assertion.

For example, Buddin and Zamarro (2009) indicated that experience and educational backgrounds of teachers have little effect on their performance as classroom teachers. In a longitudinal study conducted to examine whether teacher licensure test score and other attributes affect elementary students' achievement in Los Angeles, they emphasized that there are other factors that influence classroom activities. They further emphasized that there exists little relationship between a teacher's college major or scholastical aptitude.

In another study, Cara and de Coulon (2008) indicated that while it is true that qualified teachers are likely to perform better than unqualified ones, the level of qualification sometimes raises concern that might impact the performance of the teacher. They revealed that over qualification of teachers can interfere with their ability to build confidence in their students. For example, if a teacher's qualification is at a post graduate level, 'learner's confidence may be undermined'. What actually matters in addition to the degree one holds is the excellent teaching skills that teachers need to carry out their duties.

In the Analysis of Different Education Policy Reforms in Uganda (1922-2000) by Bazilio (2019) mentioned that the teaching methods a teacher applies, as well as teacher qualifications influence the performance. Teaching methods are key in imparting knowledge to students and hence very important when it comes to determining the performance of teachers. Here one can look at teaching methods like use of diagrams to explain a point and even use of physical examples where necessary. This way, one can easily tell whether a teacher is performing well or not.

Qualifications of employees, both theoretical and practical, have been found very necessary for one to be

able to perform well. Every job requires certain qualifications to be considered for one to be able to perform successfully. This has been found even more effective when the job to be performed is of technical nature. Jobs performed by accountants, doctors and even investigation assignments are examples of jobs where the more employees increase their performance the more qualified they become.

Like other types of jobs, teaching also requires one to be qualified. Good qualification for teachers is also important when performance of students is to improve.

A Similar study conducted by Leu and Price-Rom (2006) indicates that the regular involvement of all teachers in their capacity building process should be prioritized throughout their careers. They emphasized that this can be done through the in-service training program, a training program intended for employed teachers without formal qualifications.

This view is further buttressed by Nabhani and Bahous (2010) in the Article ‘Lebanese Teachers’ Views on Continuing Professional Development’. They assert that continuing professional development of teachers affect their practice and could help them be qualified to a certain extent in a classroom. The educational development of any nation to be effective, teacher personnel development must be upheld. That means, the capacity building of teachers should be sustained which may lead to the improvement of the classroom activities for better performance and behaviors towards working.

In addition to the professional development of teachers, setting up of national professional standards to guide the activities of the teachers should also be considered. For example, teachers in the United States, Egypt, Pakistan, and Liberia are among countries that have national professional standards for teachers Ginsberg and Arrington (2016). The national professional standard for Liberian Teachers was developed with the support from USAID-funded Liberian Teacher Training Program (LTTP) approved by the Ministry of Education in October, 2007. This standard according to Ginsburg and Arrington has been used as the basis for teacher education curriculum development in Liberia.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a cross-sectional survey design was used. The survey design was intended to establish the relationship between Teacher Qualification and Performance. The size of the study population was 8 public primary schools in Margibi County and 8 in Bomi County and it included 205 teachers and 8 principals (213 in all). Using the Kenya Projects Organization (KENPRO, 2012, August 25) sample size determination. the sample size was 133 teachers and 8 principals (141 in all) as indicated in the table below:

Table I: Sample Size by Category

	Teachers	Principals
Bomi	71	4
Margibi	62	4
Total	133	8

Table 1 indicates that a total number of 133 teachers was randomly selected while 8 principals were purposively selected from 16 public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties. The total number of respondents were 141 (71 teachers & 4 principals from Bomi County and 62 teachers & 4 principals from Margibi County). The data were collected using semi-structured self-administered questionnaires for the quantitative approach. This instrument was used to collect data for Training Experience (component of Teacher qualification). A documentary analysis was also done as a qualitative approach in other to view the credentials/certificates teachers have to be suitable to teach at the primary level. It was intended to measure

academic qualifications (one of the components of teacher qualification) of teachers. A mini interview was also used as a qualitative approach to supplement the quantitative data collected on Teacher qualification and Performance of teachers. This was intended for the researcher and the heads of schools to have face-to-face interaction. Open ended questions were used.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS (Qualification of teachers)

The objective of this study sought to assess teacher qualifications in public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties, Liberia. Teacher qualifications in this study is featured as academic qualification and training experience of teachers. The findings are summarized in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table II: Academic Qualification

	Bomi County	Margibi County
Teachers with Level C certificates	35% (25)	48.3% (30)
Teachers with Level B Certificates	5.6% (4)	6.4% (4)
Teachers with BSc.	2.8% (2)	4.8% (3)
Teachers in training to become qualified teachers	7% (5)	12.9% (8)
Teachers without certificate	49.6% (35)	27.4% (17)
Total	100% (71)	100% (62)

Source: Primary Data

The findings in Table 2 about academic qualifications demonstrate that 35% and 48.3% of respondents in Bomi and Margibi Counties respectively have the Level C certificate, which is the minimum certificate required for teachers to teach at the primary level. The result indicates that there is slightly more Level C certificate teachers in Margibi than in Bomi County. However, the result indicates that there are equal number of teachers with the Level B Certificate (higher than C) in Bomi County (5.6%) than Margibi County (6.4%). For teachers holding the Bachelor of Science Degree, a university degree for teachers, Margibi slightly led Bomi. (Bomi, 2.8% and Margibi, 4.8%). As the table further indicates however, 49.6% of teachers in Bomi County and 27.4% in Margibi are just high school graduates and hold no formal teaching certificates. A few of the teachers (7% in Bomi County and 12.9% in Margibi County) are in training to become qualified teachers. The fact that a considerable number of teachers have Level C certificates could be an improvement in the qualification of teachers in Liberia, although the Level C certificate is the least on the hierarchy of teacher qualifications in Liberia. This finding could be a result of the primary pre-service and in-service training goal set by the Liberian Government to train 50 percent of Liberian teachers by 2010. In 2007, a nation-wide census was carried out to identify trained teachers in Liberia. The census result revealed that out of 22,253 teachers counted, 13,301 were untrained. However, there is a lot more to be done in training teachers for public primary schools in Liberia because the percentage of teachers found in the classrooms without certificates is significant enough to corrupt the minds of children that are taught by them.

To supplement and enrich the documentary analysis related to the qualification of teachers, eight (8) principals (4 from each of the two counties) were interviewed. Majority of the principals in the sampled schools indicated that they attach much importance to the quality of education teachers assigned in their schools have. They stressed that having teachers in their schools without at least the minimum qualification of level C certificate from a recognized teacher training institute can make their work impossible. For example, one of the principals said:

...I will even find it difficult to supervise my teachers if they are not up to the task of teaching by having the required certificate, so the training of teachers is a priority to me as head of this school...

Another principal said:

...There is a policy in government schools that teachers are sent for further training at the rural teacher training institutes to obtain the 'C' certificate, which is the minimum certificate required to teach at the primary level, and they are employed immediately after training...

Another principal backed this claim by saying:

... In fact teachers with the 'C' Certificate are further supported to further their education at the Bachelors level after serving their assigned schools for at least three years...

These responses from the principals of the sampled schools indicate that some level of importance is attached to the training of teachers to be assigned in public primary schools in Liberia. Although a lot more needs to be done to achieve this.

On the training experience of teachers assigned in public primary schools, the principals indicated that training experience is not a criterion for teacher employment in public primary schools in Bomi and Margibi Counties. These Responses back the data obtained from the quantitative approach. For example, one of the principals said:

...Most teachers assigned in public primary schools are selected by the District Education Officer (DEO) in consultation with the County Education Officer (CEO). The teachers are employed immediately after completion of the teacher training program at the training institutes. As a result, experience is not a pre-requisite for employment...

Another principal argued by saying:

...There are some teachers that were actively teaching before they were sent for the training. So the past experience boosts their teaching skills after the training...

Table III: Training Experience of Teachers

		Yes	No response	No	Total
Teachers encourage practical learning activities	Bomi	85.9% (61)	4.2% (3)	9.9% (7)	100% (71)
	Margibi	85.5% (53)	3.2% (2)	11.3% (7)	100% (62)
Teachers employed with at least one year experience	Bomi	7.1% (5)	11.4% (8)	81.4% (58)	100% (71)
	Margibi	21.0% (13)	16.1% (10)	62.9% (39)	100% (62)
Teachers properly lessons and the plans are inspected	Bomi	90.14% (64)	5.6% (4)	2% (3)	100% (71)
	Margibi	83.9% (52)	3.2% (2)	12.9% (8)	100% (62)
Teachers always receive awards for being the best teachers	Bomi	15.3% (11)	14.1% (10)	70.4% (50)	100% (71)
	Margibi	22.6% (14)	11.3% (7)	66.4% (41)	100% (62)

Source: Primary data

Based on the findings in Table 3, it is revealed that teachers assigned in public primary schools in Liberia encourage practical learning (Bomi: 85.9%; Margibi: 85.5 %.). That is, teachers actually involve students in

the classroom activities. The table further revealed that most of the teachers were employed not based on experience. That is, experience was not a prerequisite for employment in public primary schools in Liberia. (Bomi: 7.1%; Margibi; 21.0%). The result might be an indication that at the time teachers are employed in the schools their experience level might have been low. However, 90.14% of respondents in Bomi and 83.9% in Margibi Counties agreed that, teachers properly plan lessons for students and the plans are inspected by the right authorities. This could be an indication that the teachers have learned some level of lesson planning skills at the training institutes. Out of the total respondents 15.3% in Bomi and 22.6% in Margibi also claimed that they receive awards for being the best teachers in their various schools. This trend if nurtured, may encourage teachers to produce to their optimum with the hope that positive performance would be rewarded.

Experience of Teachers

On the aspect of training experience of teachers, as indicated in Table 3, findings revealed that majority of teachers in public primary schools in Liberia are not employed based on experience. Only 7.1% of teachers in Bomi and 21.0% in Margibi County confirmed that teachers are employed with at least one-year experience. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that experience is not considered as a requirement in the employment of teachers in public primary schools because teacher employment in public primary schools in Liberia is the responsibility of the Education Ministry. As more teacher trainees are now recruited across Liberia and sent to the rural teacher training institutes, they are immediately employed after graduation. Although many of the teachers lack the requisite experience, 90.4% of respondents in Bomi and 83.9% in Margibi claimed that they properly plan their lessons and these lessons are reviewed by the rightful authorities. Perhaps the ability of the teachers to properly plan lessons for students is as the result of the academic qualifications they have from the teacher training institutes. This finding supports other researchers who explained that the importance of lesson planning helps the teacher to organize and deliver lessons in line with set objectives. They emphasize that lesson planning makes the teacher to better be prepared for systematic classroom activities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the qualification of teachers which include the academic qualification and teaching experience is very key in the ability of the teacher to perform which could trickle down to the learners.

Based on the result from the research, nearly half of the teachers in Bomi and Margibi Counties have the required teaching Certificates to teach in public primary schools, but lack teaching experience. This lack of experience has serious bearing on their performance as teachers.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions made, the following recommendations have been advanced as the way forward for the case of public primary schools in Liberia:

1. That the current trend in the improvement of the qualification of teachers in Liberia should continue. This way, more teachers will become qualified with time, leading to better results when it comes to performance of teachers in class.
2. That continuous professional development (CPD) for teacher trainers of the Teacher Training Institutes should be prioritized to for their knowledge and skills to commensurate with time.
3. Further study to be conducted by other researchers on the impact of teacher qualification on the performance of students in public schools

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