The Need for Changing Control of Teacher Colleges in the Quest for Teacher professionalism in Tanzania

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Abstract: *In Tanzania today there is ongoing debate concerning the need to change control of teacher colleges in order to educate teachers who are competent professionals. In the current setup teacher colleges are highly controlled by the government; whereby most of the decisions are centrally made. However, despite strong government influence on curriculum, assessment and management, yet teacher colleges are criticized for training ill trained teachers. This paper discusses the impact of imposed curriculum change, assessment system, authoritarian teacher college culture as well as principals' roles on preparing student teachers to become creative and supportive of the learning of each individual student. To enable teachers to take a proactive part in their profession, this paper raises the issue of providing teacher colleges with more autonomy.*

Key Words: teacher professionalism, teachers' college, control, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

In order to meet the demand of changes taking place in education since mid 2000, the question of educating teachers who will be recognised as competent professionals is becoming an important agenda in Tanzania. Generally, the decline of quality of education is linked with ill trained teachers who characterise Tanzanian schools. Teacher colleges prepare teachers for primary- schools and lower classes of secondary education (forms I and II). However, the colleges have been criticized for producing poorly trained teachers. From this perspective, there was unsuccessful move to affiliate teacher colleges with universities in an attempt to raise the quality of teachers' preparation. It seems the government needs to have a strong control of teacher colleges.

Initial teacher education is considered the first step towards preparing professional teachers (Hansen & Simonsen, 2001), and it provides a strategic opportunity for ensuring that all teachers are ready and able to teach for sustainability when beginning their career (Ferreira, Ryan & Tilbury, 2007). For this reason, initial teacher education is of paramount importance in educating competent teachers, and any defects arising during this period are extremely difficult to correct afterwards (Kansanen, 2002). However, teacher colleges have remained essentially the same for the past fifty years in spite of numerous reform and innovation efforts (Portman, 1993). If fact, having worked in teacher colleges for more than fifteen years, the

author sees a slight difference between teacher colleges and secondary schools in
many aspects.

The concept professionalism is elusive and has often been viewed differently by
researchers. For example, Rizvi and Elliott (2007) discuss teacher professionalism
in terms of four dimensions that are; teacher efficacy, teacher practice, teacher
collaboration and teacher leadership. A brief description of each dimension is
provided. The first dimension places emphasis on teacher confidence in their ability
to control their work. The second dimension refers to the way teachers teach and
ensure learning of each individual student. In the third dimension the focus is on
teachers working together professionally. The question of professional learning
community is covered in the fourth dimension whereby teachers have to take the
role of influencing others in improving practice in schools. Kennedy (2007)
emphasises on individual accountability as core in teacher professionalism. Along
the same line, Ambrosie and Haley (1988) describe professional teachers as the
ones with expertise, autonomy, and commitment for studentsø learning.
Furthermore, for teachers in accordance to Bottery and Wright (2000) expertise and
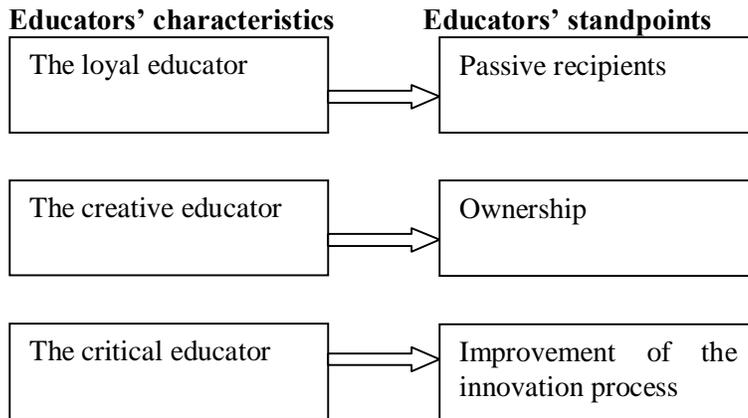autonomy are becoming central aspects in the agenda of professionalism.

In this paper, it is argued that there is a need to change control of teacher colleges in
order to give way for preparation of professional teachers. The paper links practice
in teacher colleges with two aspects of professionalism: expertise and autonomy.
This paper is limited to these two aspects as they appear to be central on the
discussion of how to prepare professional teachers. According to Shon (2006)
professionals are expected to have expertise to do their work which is a reflection of
its identification with a distinctive body of knowledge. Because of this expertise in
knowledge, organizations that employ professionals are not typically based on the
authority of supervisors, but rather on collegial relationships among peers
(Ambrosie & Harley, 1988). The expertise professional also needs autonomy which
entails the freedom to make decisions about their work (Meena, 2009). Shon (2006)
adds that expert professionals assume collective responsibility for the definition,
transmittal, and enforcement of professional standards of practice. In this paper we
will relate professional practice in teachersø colleges in connection to imposed
curriculum change, assessment system, authoritarian teacher college culture as well
as principalsø roles in supporting teacher professionalism. In concluding remarks,
we argue the importance of shifting more responsibility of teacher molding onto
teacher colleges themselves.

PROVIDING TEACHER EDUCATORS WITH AUTONOMY IN CURRICULUM MAKING AND CHANGE

The curriculum for grade ÷Aø certificate and diploma in secondary education is
designed and developed by the Ministry of Education and Vocation Training
through the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE). This means that decisions about
the curriculum are centralized. In most cases those who are involved in making
decisions about the curriculum are politicians, university academics and curriculum
developers. It seems this model of decision making is used to ensure uniform
delivery and maintenance of standards (cf. Marsh, 1997). However, centralized

curriculum control has significant implications for teacher professionalism. Here I wish to point out that it is not easy for the teacher educator to educate student teachers to become a professional actor while their work is centrally controlled, but rather they tend to be mechanical implementers of the curriculum (Sjöholm & Hansén, 2007). For these reasons, there is a need to provide educators with more autonomy as part of their professional identity. According to Giroux and McLaren (1987), there is a need to reverse the traditional practice of considering teacher educators primarily as technicians, i.e. pedagogical clerks, who are incapable of making important curriculum decisions, such as critically mediating the objectives of the National Curriculum to the contexts and particularities of their own classroom.

When a new curriculum is introduced in a teacher college, the educators adopt different strategies. According to the characteristics and actions of teacher educators three types of teacher educators could be found in teacher college: loyal, creative and critical. The characteristic feature of the loyal educator is his or her concern that curriculum change has to be implemented as prescribed. These educators have responded automatically to the curriculum as fiats and accept it as an authority that requires unquestioning obedience and compliance (cf. Elliott & Morris, 2001). The characteristic feature of the creative educator is associated with the tendency to own the curriculum innovation. Thus, creative innovators always strive to interpret curriculum requirements in order to internalize them and introduce a creative way of attaining the prescribed objectives. These types of educators tend to realise their freedom in implementing the curriculum. On the other hand critical educators as term insinuates, are critical of the whole process of curriculum change. They question top-down decisions. They would like to be given more authority in curriculum change. Figure 1 illustrates educatorsø characteristics and the corresponding standpoints on top-down curriculum change.

Educators' characteristics   **Educators' standpoints**

| The loyal educator | ⟶ | Passive recipients |

| The creative educator | ⟶ | Ownership |

| The critical educator | ⟶ | Improvement of the innovation process |

Figure 1: Curriculum innovation model based on educators' personal characteristics and corresponding standpoints, adapted from Meena (2009)

From the above characteristics and actions of teacher educators it seems teacher educators do not work in common consensus. However, what remains true is that top-down curriculum change has never been successful (Meena, 2009). From this perspective teacher professionalism has to go hand in hand with the ability to make sound decisions on curriculum. The teacher educator is always also a teacher; the only difference is that he or she works in the second order perspective. It is therefore important for teacher educators to be expert rather than mechanical implementers of decisions from other practitioners.

PROVIDING TEACHER EDUCATORS WITH AUTONOMY IN ASSESSMENT
Assessment system in teacher colleges is under centralized control of the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA). In the course of study colleges are responsible for continuous assessment, which contributes about 50 per cent to the final examinations set by NECTA. The National Examination has made teacher educators and student teachers use past examination papers to guide the learning process: teaching what is tested rather than testing what is taught (cf. Emsheimer & Mtana, 2004). This practice has significant implications in assessing student teachers competence. Berliner (2005) found that tests and examinations fail to assess what teachers really know because there is no mechanism to follow up answers with teachers, inquiring of them what they mean when they answer test items correctly or incorrectly. This is seen in the next teacher educator statement:

> Teaching is still traditional as we are facing a shortage of timeí you know, examinations determine our teaching so we are trying to cover the syllabus. In fact, we do not help students to understand what they have learnt. We are only preaching meaningful learning, but no practice.

A professional teacher educator is expected to be able to judge the quality of students through assessment. In addition, a professional teacher educator is expected to design relevant assessment tools for student teachers. However, this important role is downgraded because teacher educators seem to rely on national examination.

ENHANCING CULTURAL ASPECTS WHICH SUPPORT PROFESSIONALISM
The internal climate of teacher colleges is characterised by high level of hindrance and authoritarianism. This has contributed to a culture, for example, whereby there exists a large social or power gap between tutors and teacher trainees. On the other hand the authoritarian nature has caused teacher trainees to wait for directives from tutors. As Lewin and Stuart (2003) observed, in African countries teacher colleges have an authoritarian culture, stressing discipline through strict rules, regulations and moral training, often with daily evening worship. This climate does not provide an opportunity for teacher trainees being transformed from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants.

Stenberij (2002), for example, observed that in order to maintain obedience there are rules for the student teachers; if they are late they are not allowed inside the classroom but have to wait outside. They have to ask permission to go to the toilets

and if they talk with a low voice, they are told to go outside. According to her, these rules imply that student teachers are not capable or self-reliant enough to take responsibility for their own actions, so like children they need rules. Here one can ask if student teachers are not responsible for even their own actions, how they would be capable of creating their own meaning to the information that they receive in class. It is for these reasons there is a need to change the internal climate of teachersøcollege.

In teacher colleges time management is a problem. In fact, the colleges have been criticised for their misuse of time, having unplanned activities and problems in time-tabling (Chediel cited in Galabawa, 2001). The simple rule for opening and closing of the colleges according to the prescribed teaching days is sometimes not even adhered to due to financial problems which affect the supply of colleges with the necessary resources. Teaching and learning is also interfered with by unplanned internal and national activities. This is a paradox, as one would expect teachersø colleges to provide an appropriate model of time management to student teachers.

ENCOURAGING PRINCIPALS TO BECOME TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER
Principals of teacher colleges need to see their role differently. As leaders in a changing society they have to be transformative by helping students to reflect on and develop the knowledge, relationships and moral capacity central to professional competence (cf. Macpherson & Kenny, 2008). The problem as Msolla (2000) found out is that college principals spend more time on administrative than leadership tasks. Thus, they put attention on responsibility assigned to the office. It is for this reason they neither teach nor supervise student teachersø project work. As a result of this, they appear to know little of what is happening in the classroom. Focusing on the principalsøroles, Fullan and Stiegelbauer pointed out that:

> The principal is the person mostly likely to be in a position to shape the organisational conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structure and climate and procedure for monitoring results (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991: 76).

Although principals have an important role in preparing professional teachers, their work is greatly guided by centralized decisions. In this condition it seems what matters is how they implement top-down decisions rather than their creativity. In general the authorøs experience in teacher colleges indicates that principals are loyal implementers of centralized decisions. To meet the demand of a changing society perhaps it is ideal to encourage principals to become transformative. Transformative leadership in the classroom is characterized by willingness for experimentation and creative production (Weiner, 2003). Therefore, it is a responsibility of college principals to provide working environment where teacher educators may become creative. The essence of transformative leadership clearly assumes that leadership involves relationship, influence, and some notions of virtue or rectitude (Burns, 1978). At this juncture it can be seen that, if transformative leadership were to be used it would radically reconstruct our teacher colleges.

CONCLUDING REMARKS
In this paper it was argued that initial teacher education is the first step towards educating teachers who will be recognised as professional actors. However, the strong government control of teacher colleges has significant implication in achieving this goal. Teacher educators are passive recipients of decisions made by other experts. Obviously for teacher educators to become professional actors it is important for them to have strong control of their work. In addition, they ought to be a role model on teacher professionalism because they are also teachers and this is having an important impact on student teachersø view of teaching profession. While teacher educators are supposed to be agents of change, in this paper it has been clear that teacher educators are facing challenges in implementing centralized decisions. Therefore, there is a strong need of providing teacher colleges with more autonomy by working under an independent board or collaborating with universities.

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