

Title Comparative analysis of Zimbabwean and Lesotho's teacher education affiliation schemes

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‘An education system is only as good as its teachers’ (Orbell, 1980, p.27)

Introduction

This paper is premised on the long established centrality of teacher quality in education provision and the growing importance of quality assurance in higher education. Orbell in the opening quote above was drawing on an observation made by Dr Henry Carr, the first African inspector of schools in 1898, who noted that ‘the best designed education system would remain nothing more than a blueprint without good teachers to implement it in the classroom’ (Carr cited in Orbell, 1980, p. 27). The undertaking of this paper is to consider how two different systems address the issue of teacher quality in this knowledge era. This is an era when our higher education institutions are increasingly coming under the spotlight in terms of their contributions to enhancing the competitiveness of its citizenry in the race for a new range of competencies such as adaptability that the new economy requires (Materu, 2007). In his introduction to his seminal paper on Quality Assurance in Africa, Materu goes to note that the growing importance of quality assurance in higher education institutions in Africa

comes at a time of growing recognition of the potentially powerful role of tertiary education for growth, and it is a natural response to public perception that educational quality is being compromised in the effort to expand enrollment in recent years; growing complaints by employers that graduates are poorly prepared for the workplace; and increasing competition in the higher education market place as numerous private and transnational providers enter the scene.

(2007, p.7)

Yet, it has to be noted that this recognition of the importance of quality assurance in higher education is nothing new and has been a feature of teacher education since the late 1800 when schemes of associations between colleges and universities were envisaged as the instrument for assuring the quality of teachers produced for the education system. In Britain, the system became formalized after the Second World War and was extended to university colleges in Africa, such as the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland's affiliation with the University of London. In Zimbabwe, the Scheme of Association dates back to the establishment of the Institute of Education (currently the Department of Teacher Education) which was to focus on research, in-service training and consultancy, in addition to ‘working with training

colleges' by providing 'benchmarks for excellent teaching, learning, research and accreditation services to the teacher education community' (DTE, 2013, p.2).

Conceptual elaboration

The scheme of association between teacher colleges and universities, an established practice in the British Empire's higher education system, becomes the sharp focus of this paper. The paper reports on the first set of reflections from interviews with management in teacher colleges in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, on the practices, the benefits and the limitations of this age-old uncontested academic exercise, juxtaposed against an increasingly paradoxical era of the growing emphasis on quality and standards in higher education in Africa at a time when enrolments are expanding rapidly while resources are declining sharply (Mhlanga, 2008). The key focus was to interrogate, through the eyes of the teacher college managers and senior practitioners, the extent to which this academic exercise is adding value to the range of competencies required for teachers in this *knowledge era*. Practitioners in the two institutes expressed high values for the impact of the affiliation schemes on their practices and see the affiliations continuing to benefit their colleges. However, a closer insider perspective analysis of the practices in the two schemes revealed that the schemes have been retained in vastly differing degrees of stringency in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, resulting in enormously different quality assurance impacts in the two countries, particularly on the levels of collaborations among practitioners and on student-teacher competencies gained in the two schemes. Whether the practice can become more than just a burden - or in the words of one college manager '*mokhokakhoale*' - is the biggest question in the case of Lesotho. And despite the massive impact on practices in Zimbabwe, the un-conclusion is that the hard slog of establishing internal quality assurance mechanisms remains a highly illusive accomplishment in that country as well.

Fundamentally, the basis of association is that the University agrees to establish a particular award for which it is not itself teaching, and to frame and administer a scheme of examination of students submitted for that award from an institution approved by the Senate of the University (Orbell, 1980: 31).

The University frames and administers a scheme of examination of students submitted for that award from an institution approved by the Senate of the University, and determine

- (i) minimum academic entry qualifications;
- (ii) the syllabuses being taught at the institution are deep and adequate in time;
- (iii) the course of study extends over a stipulated number of years or terms;
- (iv) the teaching staff have the qualifications, experience and competence;

- (v) the institution is equipped in facilities including the library, laboratories;
- (vi) the scheme is self-sustaining and accounted for with regard to examiners' fees, travel, consumables, etc.

Orbell goes on to note that for that, in this terms the University sets out to assure itself of the quality of students admitted into the programme and the intensity of the curriculum on offer, among others while the college is mainly free for the development of the programme and the teaching techniques. It would then appear that such an arrangement is mutually beneficial

The scheme of association in Zimbabwe is governed by very explicit guidelines and tight monitoring practices while Lesotho has a loosely run professional collaboration guided by old collaborative traditions and highly implicit terms as will be noted. The main question guiding this study was 'how do the two vastly differing schemes compare in terms of their impact on quality assurance in teacher education in the two countries?' Particular focus of the comparative analysis was on the extent to which the schemes promoted mutual collaboration and respect in line with the need for 'greater freedom and greater responsibility, and ultimately on the impact of the schemes on internal quality assurance mechanisms. This leads to the underpinning of this study that is defined by a conviction that for quality assurance to take root in the two countries one needs to examine the details of practices in terms of their implications for collaborative learning and the creation of a community of practice.

Some theoretical considerations

In this continuing work on quality assurance in higher education, I draw on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and particularly in higher education (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000) on the creation of communities of practice on internal quality assurance mechanisms. Over the recent past, the socio-cultural theories of learning of Lave and Wenger (1991) has provided a tool for analysing professional growth amongst teacher educators as a 'situated learning practice' in which learning to become a better practitioner is best attained in the context of practising to excel as a teacher educator within one's context. Lave and Wenger (1991) focus on legitimate peripheral participation (through apprenticeship) as a way of learning the 'culture of practice' through apprenticeship in a community of practice. The model enables participation in authentic activities and the creation of an identity that moves an individual towards becoming more centripetal to a practice (Barab & Duffy, 2012).

Research has shown the importance of capacity building that is situated in a practice. The notion of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) has raised the importance of

situated cognitive development. It emphasizes the elements of a community of practice, where participants would reflect on their tacit understandings to create shared knowledge from their experiences through interactions. This implies that quality assurance also needs to be premised on a highly collaborative and interactive approach, rather than one party talking down to the other. The community of practice between university and college lecturers is seen here as key to creating an ownership that will be central to creating ownership in the internal quality assurance mechanisms.

Lave and Wenger's theory highlights the importance of the 'reification tools'. These tools are borne of the duality of congealing theory into practice. The Participation-Reification duality is concerned with meaning. Meaning is created through participation and active involvement in some practice. Reification is a way of making an abstract and concise representation of what is often a complex and frequently messy practice, thus making it easier to share within the community. The participation-reification duality has been the focus of particular interest in this field (Hildreth & Kimble, 2002).

In this theoretical space, professional learning communities are based less on traditional regulatory functions of quality assurance and schemes of association and more on supportive and participatory practices based in real context and authentic activities. The internal quality assurance mechanisms and ownership of initiatives depend on the creation of ongoing networks of peer practitioners. Teachers face a battery of challenges that unsurprisingly can deter progress towards excellence even in the face of professional support. Therefore, there has been suggestions that teachers need to have a clearly defined content teachers need, *as a bare minimum*, as well a set of well defined minimum skills, unlike the current laissez-faire where anyone can enter the profession. For example, Kuriloff (2015) suggests the following key attributes of teachers for selection into the profession:

- Inter-personal skills
- Resilience in the midst of unsupportive administrators
- Ability to motivate unwilling students
- Commitment under poor working conditions

As it is, we are admitting countless teachers who will never make a go of it, this despite research proving that teachers are at the centre of educational quality. Therefore, in reflecting on the scheme of associations in the two countries the study assessed the practices along with the focus on promoting a community of practice that can sustain the innovative practices identified into ongoing internal quality assurance systems and practices.

Methodological considerations

A case study design was developed in order to gain insights into not only what was happening in the practices of lecturers within two different contexts of schemes of affiliation but also to gain insights into their impacts and constraints. As Yin (2003) has argued case studies are particularly useful for studying pertinent issues within their natural context:

In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (2003:1)

Therefore, case studies are valuable for illuminating complex social phenomena such as the impact of quality assurance mechanisms on teacher practices.

Case study, in its most rigorous form, requires more than finding an interesting ‘case’. Yet images normally attached to case studies are not always of studies that can inform practice, let alone policy. As Yin (2003) notes, case study research has come to be stereotyped as the weakest and most imprecise of the social science methods. He argues, however, that case study research provides an opportunity to investigate phenomena within their real-life context and that they can be quite rigorous in design, particularly when involving multiple case studies, and also including quantitative evidence. In the analysis of different practices the case study approach has been used in order to understand rather than evaluate the impact and constraints of quality assurance practices within schemes of affiliation in two different contexts.

Since case study research involves the study of a particular phenomenon or concern within a real-life setting, it lends itself well to situations where it may not be possible, or desirable, to distinguish the issue under investigation from its context (Yin, 2003). The aim was to give insights into the complex social phenomena being studied, in context and as much as possible from the perspectives of those being studied (Merriam, 1988). A multiple case study design was adopted to explore how the impact and constraints of schemes of affiliation play out across

several contexts. As Creswell (2003) explains, one common concern or phenomenon is addressed, but multiple cases are used to illustrate that concern. The multiple cases are thus instrumental in addressing a particular concern, rather than of solely intrinsic value (Stake, 2000). As Yin notes (2003), the use of more than one case anticipates and addresses possible criticism of the validity of the findings from a single-case design. He argues (2003:53), “the contexts of two [or more] cases are likely to differ to some extent. If under these varied circumstances you still arrive at common conclusions...they will have immeasurably expanded the external generalisability of your findings.”

An observation and documentary analysis of twenty-eight cases of academic exercises from eleven teacher colleges in Zimbabwe and three instances of academic exercises in Lesotho formed the basis of the reflections. Much of the analysis was guided by grounded theory with intensive reflections towards emergent themes forming the core of the findings. In addition, a total of ten (10) questionnaires in Zimbabwe and twelve (12) questionnaires in Lesotho were distributed among senior managers, with return rates of sixty percent (60%) and seventy-five (75%) respectively.

Sampling

Selection of cases and participants

The selection of cases was purposive and more specifically informed by observed different practice in Lesotho and Zimbabwe. Further purposive non-random sampling was used to obtain samples of participants within each case that would be ‘information-rich’ (Patton, 1990) and would be able to inform the research questions. Therefore, the participants were not selected in order to be representative of any wider trends in a specific population. Senior managers and academic leaders such as deans and programme coordinators formed the basis of interviews which were followed up with other lecturers in assessing how the impact was filtering down to the rest of the college communities.

Methods of data collection

Several methods and multiple sources of data were used, including interviews, document collection, informal observation and questionnaire. The use of interviews in this study was to provide more depth to issues that had already emerged and to the context in which they had done so. But as with the questionnaire, interviews depended to a large extent on ‘rapport,’ as well as

the sincerity and motivation of the respondent (Cohen & Manion, 1984). Describing the attributes of ethnographers as interviewers, Cohen and Manion (1984: 275) define 'rapport' or 'trust' as 'a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee that transcends the research that promotes a bond of friendship, a feeling of togetherness and joint pursuit of a common mission rising above personal egos.' The rapport that I established with the lecturers was built on shared values and a common interest to improve practice among teacher educators. I therefore made it a point that I did not only take information from the colleges but also intended to share elements of good practice.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with college management while questionnaires were administered to college academic leaders. During visits observations were made about the colleges and the quality of interactions and participations were noted.

Data analysis

Transcripts and other texts

Full reports were written up from detailed notes taken during the interviews using the tape recorder to capture live texts. The practice was to expand the detailed notes into narratives as soon as possible after the interviews. In order to analyse data meaningfully while keeping the relations between the parts intact, *a priori* codes were used to assign units of meaning to the descriptive and inferential information compiled during the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus responses were clustered and then resorted in relation to these major categories. Miles and Huberman (1994) specify three classes of code – descriptive, interpretive and pattern – for the analysis of text such as interview transcripts.

Close reading of the texts was used in order to yield additional issues and themes that were incorporated into the coding frame during an ongoing process of refining and up-dating. In this way, inductive coding was used in order to avoid confining or limiting the reading and analysis of the transcripts (Creswell, 2007) and allowing for a more emic approach to addressing the research questions.

Ethical issues and Limitations

Informed consent was sought out by describing the purpose of the study in details. Collegiality and voluntarism were emphasised and the latter probably overshadowed the former in that the return rate for the questionnaire was particularly low.

The two different schemes

It is important to note from the onset that because of the vastly different cases of Lesotho and Zimbabwe in which one had maintained a very explicit programme while the other had minimal control, the case of Zimbabwe will dominate the reflections in the cases. While the policy documents for the Scheme of Association between the University of Zimbabwe are very explicit on the nature of the provisions for the association, there is much ambiguity and implicitness about the affiliation between the Lesotho College of Education and the National University of Lesotho. Reference to the Lesotho College of Education's Act which allows for the College to establish an affiliation with another Higher Education Institution of its choice is the best that one is able to extract as a policy directive in this regard. However, interviews with senior members of the colleges in both Lesotho and Zimbabwe revealed that most held very firm beliefs that the scheme was beneficial to the colleges and provided a basis for quality assurance of teacher education in the two countries. Much will be said about the practices in the two schemes in the later sections of this paper, but suffice it to note here that these vastly differing policy directives for the scheme raised serious questions about how effective they were in providing quality assurance and particularly in establishing internal quality assurance systems.

I will conclude this note on the cases by quoting from a section of the Senate Sub-Committee Handbook for the Regulatory Framework for Associate/Affiliate Institutions in the University of Zimbabwe which states that in this associateship relationship, 'the university confines its role in the provision of professional guidance and supervision to Associate Institutions to ensure that they operate at a level appropriate to their own nature and purposes which need not be at University level' (Cited in DTE, 2007, p.3). To that effect, the stated assumption of the scheme of association in Zimbabwe is that teacher quality can be encouraged by giving colleges 'greater freedom and greater responsibility' for their professional decisions, including in curriculum design and assessment.

Zimbabwe's Case

As already indicated the Scheme of Association in Zimbabwe is guided by a very explicit policy that is reviewed regularly, the latest reviews being in 2013 followed by one again in 2011. This is a long established scheme that dates back to the 1950s in its present format when the Institute of Education was established as a self-sustaining entity within the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in order to undertake research, professional development of teachers and the monitoring of academic standards in both basic and secondary education, including through awards of diplomas. The establishment of the Institute of Education was driven by a vision 'to increase University involvement, influence and intervention at all levels of teacher education' while maintaining 'institutional autonomy and the development of democratic procedures for making professional decisions' among colleges (DTE, 2013, p.1).

Starting with only two secondary teachers colleges, the Scheme of Association has now expanded to twelve primary and five post-primary teacher colleges, a situation that prompted the change of name from Institute of Education to Department of Teacher Education in order to 'enable it to take over focused training of lecturers at both undergraduate and post-graduate' for quality human capital (DTE, 2013, p. 2). DTE currently offers bachelors and masters degrees in early childhood development, primary education and practical subjects (with music, arts and design as additional options) while degrees in post-primary education, including doctoral degrees are reserved for the Faculty of Education. However, it is particularly at the specifics of actual practices that the scheme has retained in its colonial emphasis on tight supervision of programmes in Associate Colleges.

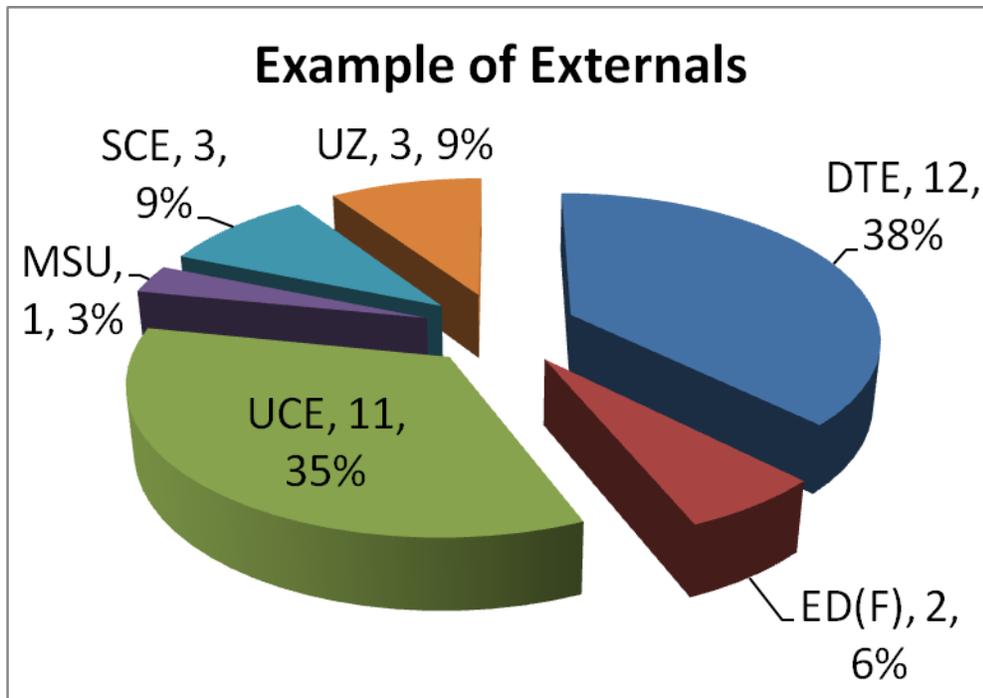
The Scheme in Zimbabwe is coordinated by a senior lecturer in the Department of Teacher Education (DTE) who answers directly to the overall director who is entitled chairs the scheme of association. The Chairman oversees the externalization process in particular and thus appoints and works with the Chief Examiner who is usually an expert on quality assurance and assessment outside of the University of Zimbabwe while the coordinator monitors and advises a number of colleges on curriculum design and assessment issues and organizes the appointment of external examiners to the entire range of subjects. External examiners review the question

papers and externalize the internal and external marks while also reporting on trends and practices in their subject areas. In addition to a visit by the Pro-Vice Chancellor, usually once in three years, there are regular visits by the coordinator to monitor the college readiness for the once-off visit by a team of external examiner and an appointed Chief Examiner.

The university tightly controls the entrance requirements to the programme, which in the case of the diploma programme stipulate a minimum of five 'O' level passes with a credit, including English and Mathematics. The curriculum is also tightly monitored and includes the following:

- Theory of Education (EDF)
- Professional Studies (Curriculum studies)
- Main study
- Teaching practice
- Inclusive Education
- Curriculum Depth Study (Research)

The colleges, on the other hand are responsible for the curriculum design in consultation with the Department of Teacher Education (DTE). The colleges also set a pool of questions that are compiled into a paper by DTE while the results are presented to the academic board and Senate of the University, the latter the only similarity with the case of Lesotho. The appointment of external examiners would normally include university lecturers (UZ) in their various fields of expertise such as English or Science lecturers, lecturers from other colleges and universities (MSU) as well as lecturers in the Department of Teacher Education and Educational Foundations (ED(F)) as illustrated below.



The externalization process involves examination of a wide range of infrastructural provisions and academic exercises including students' coursework, examination scripts, practical work and projects. These and comments on the relevance and intensity of the syllabus coverage would then be reported to the Chief Examiner who would then oversee the meetings presenting the results and a general meeting in which reflections are shared on the exercise.



Figure 1: Typical examination room in the UZ Scheme

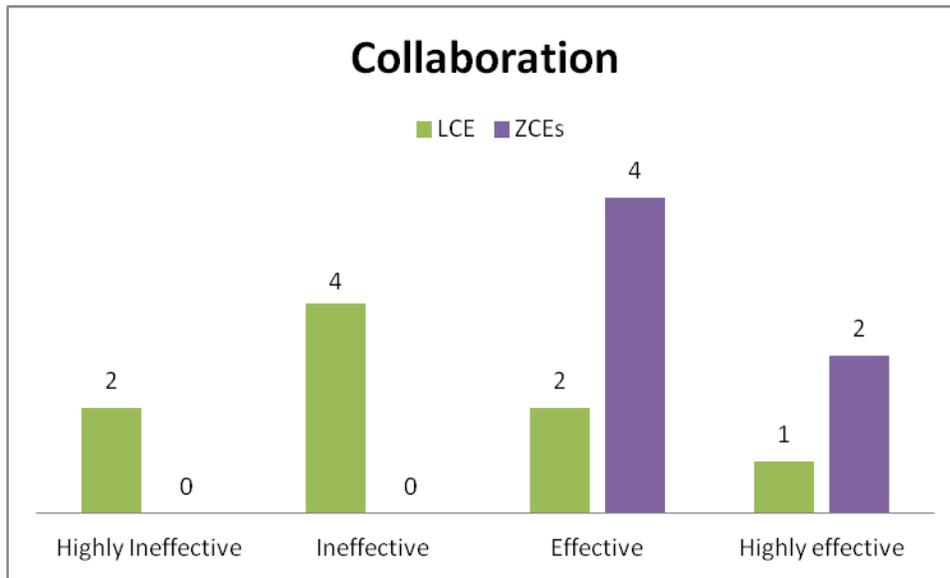
Results

Knowledge of the policy document guiding the schemes differed vastly in the two countries. For example, while no one could cite any document in Lesotho, all respondents in Zimbabwe cited the Handbook for Quality Assurance in Associate Teachers' College, including the year in which it was revised (2015).

There was general explanation for the high rating of the scheme in Zimbabwe that the practice guaranteed quality in the design of programmes, including 'in the setting and maintenance of high academic standards, from syllabus development, approval, setting minimum qualifications of staff, standardisation of exams, moderation or external examination of students work for both teaching practicum and academic exams, provision of expertise in capacity development of lecturers among other activities'. Another area where respondents expressed high value for the scheme was in its provision of 'clear guidelines for key activities'. Indeed the handbook provides very close guidelines on the key activities which include the entrance qualifications '5 'O' level passes at Grade C or better including English and Mathematics' (DTE, 2007, p.12). This is a critical element of quality assurance that is provided by the scheme to ensure that those who enter the doors of teaching are of the highest standard possible. Deborah Ball has raised a query

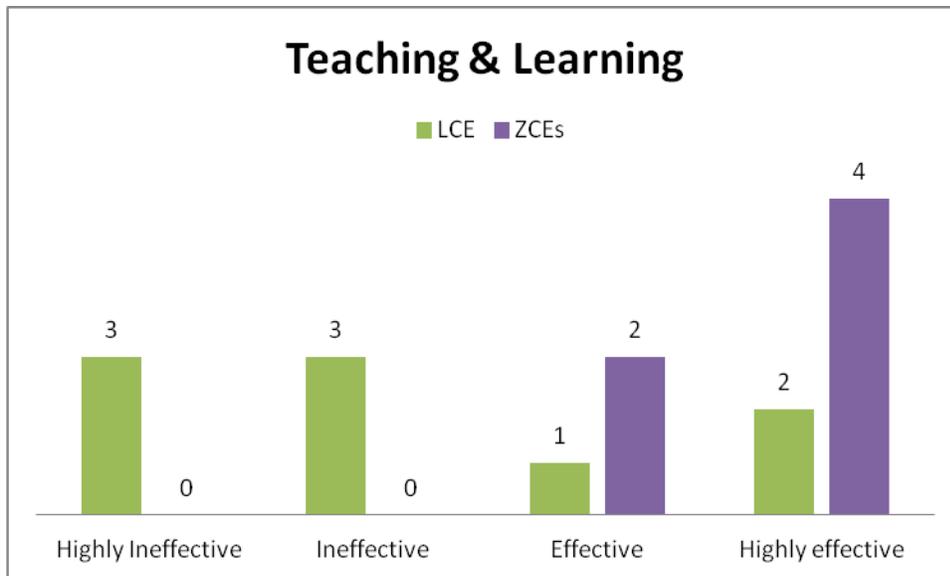
around the lack of explicit focus on the quality of entrants to the teaching profession where there is an implication that anyone can become a great teacher irrespective of their aptitude.

A key question in the questionnaire was on the impact of the schemes on collaborations within the colleges and amongst teacher educators in the regions as reported below.



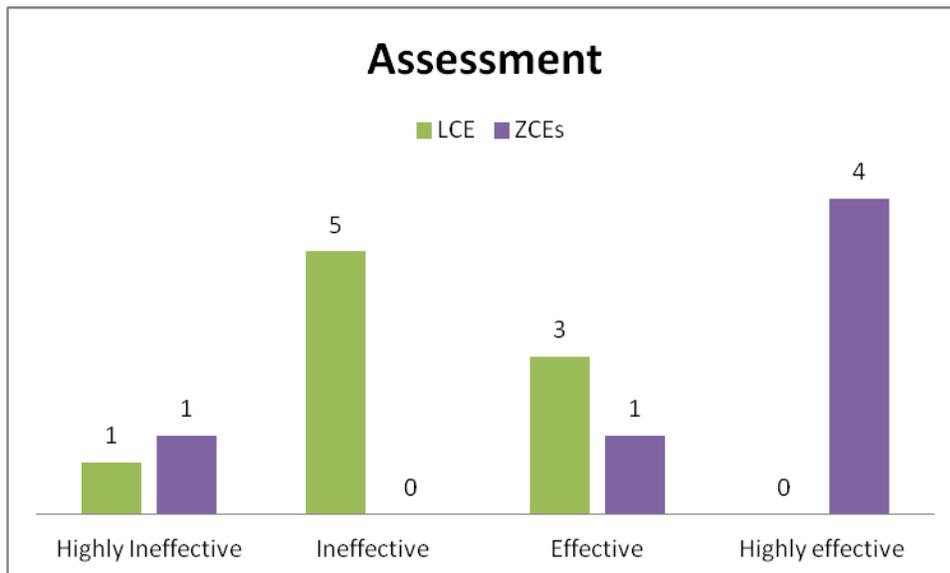
There clearly was a high value for the collaboration initiated in the meetings and as a result of follow-up workshops such as the training of teacher-educators in research methods by university lecturers in Zimbabwe. In contrast, there was a very explicit call in Lesotho for the university to play a more intensive role in assisting college lecturers in areas of research and innovation. It has to be noted though that innovation in Lesotho can be found in the college where lecturers have initiated extremely ground-breaking practices with freely available learning management systems while the university may possess its own tool which has not progressed to the extent that the college lecturers have managed with their minimal resources.

Another key question was on the impact of the schemes on teaching and learning which again illustrated the far more positive impact in Zimbabwe.



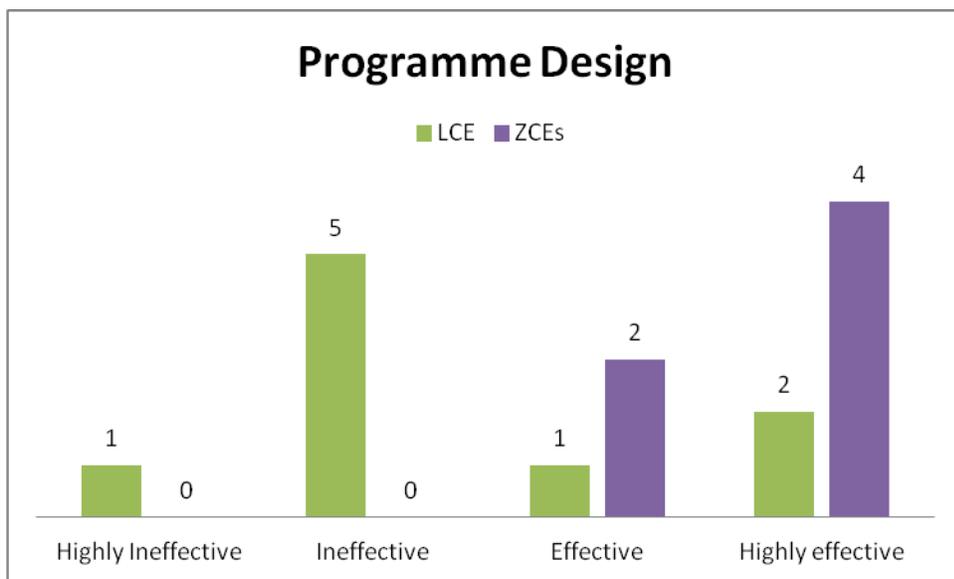
Despite the high rating of the teaching and learning aspect in Zimbabwe, respondents did note that the high staff turnover in the University of Zimbabwe was landing the scheme with fairly inexperienced DTE members who were not adequately experienced to guide the colleges.

There was a slightly more even comparison regarding the assessment practices in the two cases as illustrated below.

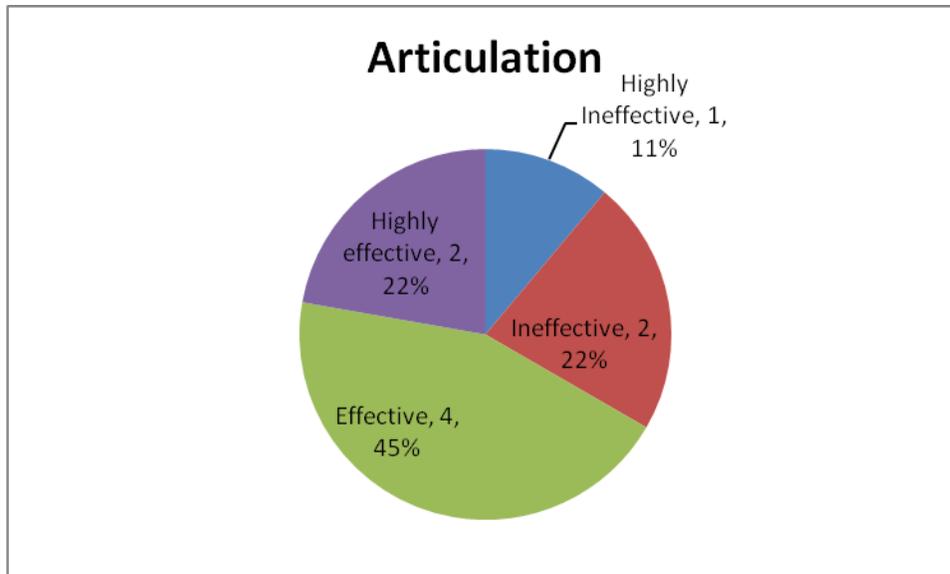


However, it is worth noting that lecturers did note that while there was quality assurance and supervision of assessment practices on the surface in Lesotho, this was occurred only as a once-

off presentation to the Faculty of Education, a process which some senior members of the college referred to as *mokhokakhoale* or burden to system. Complaints here related to the fact there were often delays in the finalization of examinations in the University which often had to attend to the scheme alongside other pressing matters of the University. This is in sharp contrast to the Zimbabwe case where DTE focuses on this exercise and there is much closer collaboration throughout the process. The respondents in Zimbabwe did have their fair bit of complaints on the system, particularly the quality of examination papers produced through the tightly controlled process of colleges pooling the questions which were then compiled into question papers at DTE. There were reports of errors in the compilation of the question paper, including significant overlaps and poor content coverage as a result of this practice.



A notable difference here in Lesotho relates to the fact that some measure of oversight on the programme design has been maintained with significant changes to programmes and curricular still subject to approval by the Faculty of Education and University Senate. Again the exercise could be much more closely monitored by the university, according to most respondents. That would then lead to much closer articulation with the university assuring itself of the intensity and relevance of the curricula at the college, as noted in the graph below.



Indeed, respondents at the college remarked that the University was now in the practice of changing entrance requirements of students graduating from the college without even communicating the basis of their decision to the college. The college management did appreciate the fact that the University had called upon both parties to review the articulation issues and deeply examine the curricula on offer at the college.

Discussions and conclusions

It is evident that the tightly controlled scheme in Zimbabwe has its limitations, including the evident lack of professional trust of college lecturers in the setting of examinations which resulted in a number of errors in the examination papers. But the greatest danger and cause for much despondency was the nature of the interactions in the meetings where there were incidents where University lecturers reportedly talked down on college lecturers and often did not listen to alternative views. This works against the concept of a community of practice. In addition, the frequency with which remarks of limited practices such as in the writing up of research reports indicates that the guidance provided by the university was not extensive enough to build in significant skills in some areas.

Despite the notable weaknesses in the Zimbabwe scheme, there was evidence of impact on duality of congealing theory in practice in that college lecturers were guided in their practices. Unlike the Lesotho case, the scheme in Zimbabwe is firmly grounded in the practice in the

college rather than examination results send to approval to the University lecturers who have no appreciation of the process and the context. This is the weakest aspect of Lesotho's Scheme, where process and context are removed by the presentation of examination results as numbers rather than people. Thus guidance on syllabus coverage and the balance between theory and practice is not possible. This removes the reification tools for assuring the practices at the college.

There are a series of issues to be considered in both cases. The need to consider closer collaboration between the college and university in Lesotho, including in the admission of students, is evident. The exercise needs to be more intensive and well coordinated in the university, but this would require resources to be allocated to the process. In Zimbabwe, a portion of the students' fees (US\$300) is allocated to the scheme enabling much closer coordination. Both schemes are, however, not close enough to enabling innovative practices to be initiated within the colleges, where in the case of Zimbabwe the colleges continue to regard the process from a regulatory perspective rather than an internal quality assurance exercise. It is important to conclude by noting, as respondents in both cases noted, that the schemes have a potential to provide quality assurance mechanism for this very important practice of teacher education, but need to build in meaningful innovation and collaboration across the higher education sub-sector.

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