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Teacher Preparation by Universities: Internal Stakeholders Perception of Teacher Education Curriculum Content in Makerere and Kyambogo Universities

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Abstract

Developing a teacher education curricular content is an enduring concern for teacher educators. A continuous method to providing quality teacher education curriculum content discloses the potential for teacher educators to produce high-quality teachers. Drawing on data from twenty teacher educators and sixteen student teachers in public institutions in Uganda, this article explored the perceptions of the teacher education curriculum content held by academic staff and student teachers in public Universities in Uganda. Using Pedagogical Content Knowledge Model as a tentative model of teacher preparation and Constructivism theory as an interpretive framework, the study was guided by one objective namely: (1) to analyze the perception of internal stakeholders about teacher education curriculum content offered in Makerere and Kyambogo Universities. This research adopted a qualitative, multiple case study design that was anchored in the interpretivist paradigm and directed by the social constructivism thinking. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews were participants from twenty teacher educators and sixteen student teachers who were purposively and conveniently selected. It was therefore concluded that both lecturers and student teachers viewed teacher education curriculum content positively viewing it as enabling learners to be equipped with specialized teaching skills, essentially directed towards teaching profession. Thus, recommendations to improve the stakeholder perception of the teacher education curriculum content are made and these include: teacher education curriculum review and the need to design a 21st-century teacher education curriculum by teacher trainers in corroboration with other university units rendering a training service to teacher trainees. This would bridge the gap of the disjointed teacher education curriculum content at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities hence strengthening the building blocks that produce a teacher.

Keywords: Curriculum, Internal-Stakeholder, Pre-Service Teacher, Teacher Education

1. Introduction

In recent years, the quality of teacher education curriculum has been a focus of concern in debates about the teacher education programme (See e.g., Mkandawire, Maulidi, Sitima and Luo, 2018; Ballard & Dymond, 2017;

Gholami and Qurbanzada, 2016). This curriculum has been based on the idea that after ‘acquiring’ theoretical knowledge through courses done at the college/university, student teachers are able to ‘apply’ this knowledge to their teaching at the schools (Srinivasan, 2016). Indeed, teacher education curriculum content is organized along the following components—foundation courses, subject content and pedagogy courses and school teaching experience. This enhances quality of teacher preparation programs by identifying inter-related competencies needed for the role of educating teachers. Competencies such as in content, pedagogy, group dynamics and communication, development and personal growth, plus organizational competencies (Goodwin et al, 2014). Similarly, Shulman (1987) continues to illustrate that the competencies teacher must embrace for their effectiveness that included: (1) knowledge of subject matter, (2) general pedagogical knowledge, (3) pedagogical content knowledge, (4) knowledge of curriculum, (5) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, (6) knowledge of educational contexts, and (7) knowledge of educational ends. In this context, Herold and Waring (2009) advances that content knowledge is defined as the subject-specific knowledge needed by the teacher to deliver specific curriculum requirements related to the subject in concern.

Although, student teachers gain knowledge about their specific subjects like history, math chemistry among others (called general training) together with knowledge that is relevant for teaching, like teaching methods or classroom management (called professional training) in teacher training. The first priority in this preparation process is students’ attendance to subject courses (Lohse-Bossenz, Kunina-Habenicht, & Kunter, 2013). As Herold and Waring (2009) notes, “how much, and what type of subject matter content is needed, and what are the consequences for pre-service teachers is important during teacher preparation”. The impact of subject matter content exposed to pre-service teachers should be worthy of more detailed consideration (Herold and Waring, 2009). Considering and managing the impact of various content implies that subject content is the first source of knowledge base (Shulman (1986, 7). Despite these structural differences, it is obvious that besides subject content and subject teaching methods, non-subject-specific courses are considered an integral part of teacher education (Lohse-Bossenz, Kunina-Habenicht, & Kunter, 2013). Similarly, the time period necessary to fully prepare persons for the teaching profession, that is, from the decision to become a teacher to becoming a fully responsible is well-thought-out (Lohse-Bossenz et al, 2013). Because the teacher educators’ interest lies in preparing pre-service teachers effectively for the classroom (Bourke and Lidstone, 2015). Since teacher educating is not merely engaging in the act of instructing or developing preservice. Rather, it is a purposeful commitment to a professional life that is centered on the teaching of teachers and a deep understanding of what it means to teach about teaching (Goodwin, Smith, Souto-Manning, Cheruvu, Tan, Reed, & Taveras, 2014). Thus, strengthening Nenty and Sello’s (2017) perception that teaching is the first among all nation-building professions. Members of all other professions are built or trained by teachers (Kagoda and Itaaga, 2013 & Nenty and Sello, 2017) and therefore subject content that prepares preservice teachers to learn and implement classroom activities first requires a solid base (Mkandawire et al 2018). The aim of this study, therefore, is to empirically highlight internal stakeholders’ perception within general teacher education content areas. By specifying broad teacher education content areas with concrete issues, we can contribute essentially to the development of curricula that can be considered relevant for student teacher.

1.1 Problem

Training teacher trainees at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities seem to be complicated in that the building blocks that produce a teacher are disjointed (Kagoda, 2018; Otaala, 2013a; Otaala, 2013b; Kagoda & Najjuma, 2013; Kagoda & Itaaga, 2013; and Kagoda (2019). For example, within the teacher preparation content, School of Education (Makerere University) and Faculty of Education (Kyambogo University), offers the professional teacher education course units while content for the disciplines is offered by other colleges (for Makerere University) Kagoda and Najjuma (2013) and faculties (for Kyambogo). This has raised many criticisms on how universities are training teachers (Otaala et al, 2013a). As a result, at Makerere and Kyambogo universities, teacher education curriculum has faced serious criticisms from society especially teacher employers. For instance, Otaala et al (2013b) reports that the public has always expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher graduates from Kyambogo University, something that directly and indirectly expresses dissatisfaction with the university teacher education curriculum. Similarly, at Makerere University, teacher trainees do not seem to have

enough time to be effectively trained in the teacher course content (Kagoda and Katabaro, 2013; Kagoda, 2019), inculcating a believe that School of Education, College of Education and External Studies, Makerere University is not adequately preparing teacher trainees to meet the demands and needs of secondary school curriculum (Kagoda and Itaaga 2013). Underlying to this discussion is a sincerity that if external stakeholders have been complaining about teacher education curriculum content, what do student teachers think? And we also do not know much about what teacher educators who implement teacher education curriculum content think. This study, therefore, falls within this knowledge gap and dilemma to explore the perceptions internal stakeholders (teacher educators and student teachers) have about teacher education curriculum content in Makerere and Kyambogo Universities.

1.2 Study Objectives

The study was guided by a sole objective, namely:

To analyze the perception of internal stakeholders about teacher education curriculum content offered in Makerere and Kyambogo Universities.

2. Related Literature

Preparing teachers to enact core practices requires a sea change in the practice of teacher education. This raises concerns that to be relevant to the contemporary landscape of teacher education, any framework for learning to engage in the core practices must also attend to the contemporary organization of teacher education programs (McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanagh, 2013). This therefore calls for the initial teacher training to comprise the time period necessary to fully prepare persons for the teaching profession, that is, from the decision to become a teacher to becoming a fully responsible member of the teaching profession (Hendrik, Olga, and Mareike, 2013). Likewise, (Hollins, 2011) asserts that teacher education curriculum must be given time to be diagnosed well for one not to affect it negatively. The curriculum designers as the greatest aid to learning are the most important instrument and they need to know the basic principles that include demand, integration of theory and practice, school/classroom focus, competency and process assessment (Asare & Nti, 2014). This is in consonance with Kim, Ham & Paine (2011), who observe that when analyzing the curricula of teacher preparation programs, you find that content is influenced not only by social expectations in particular socio-historical contexts but also by evolving transnational discourses on education.

Besides subject content specialties, a significant body of literature (Kagoda & Itaaga, 2013; Kagoda & Sentongo, 2015; Otaala, 2013a; Otaala, 2013b) concludes that above and beyond training of teachers, non-subject-specific courses are considered an integral part of teacher education. These courses are mostly called educational foundations, which tend to include history of education, sociology of education or educational psychology (Hendrik, Olga, and Mareike, 2013). This observation is congruent with the view further advanced by Van Driel and Berry (2012) who opines that programs of teacher education usually include method courses. Indeed, Hendrik, Olga, and Mareike (2013) found that useful knowledge for teachers is mostly located at the level of content area. However, despite the reputation of the courses making up teacher education geared towards quality teacher, Hsieh, Law, Shy, Sang, Hsieh and Tang (2011) warns that future teachers are less approving the courses/content arrangement of teacher education programs than program educators, thus perhaps lowering educator's motivation to improve the arrangement.

However, this kind of gap in the said efforts further widens the prospective of the most fluent explanations of teacher educators, policy makers, curriculum designer, managers among other stakeholders in the aforementioned scenario to start asking themselves which course to offer first and which one to give last. A leaf from the foregoing presupposes that there appears to be a great deal of agreement that introductory courses provide an overview of the profession especially in the areas of history and philosophy (Mishra, Day, Little and Vandwalker, 2011). As Kim et al (2011) for instance argued that curricular courses provide likely teachers with various opportunities to acquire useful, practical knowledge. Therefore, one assumes that introductory classes set

the stage for content and skills developed during pre-service teacher training, and have the potential for being the keystone of the degree program and the foundation of a teaching career (Mishra et al, 2011).

The other critical components underlying teacher education preparation revolves around coherence and integration, extensive and intense supervision of clinical work integrated with course work using pedagogies that link theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, since of late, most of the teacher education courses geared towards theory base failing to link to practical. Moreover, many curricular contents in teacher education preparation are theory-based, a factor that sometimes drive the curricula content of teacher education to a different direction (Kim et al, 2011). Yet, on contrary, some authors like Zeinchner, Payne & Brayko (2014) noted that the practice should be that candidates learn what and how to teach in their courses and then go out and apply what is learned in schools during their field experience.

Furthermore, review of literature suggests that many researchers invested in writings showing the perceptions of stakeholders about the teacher education curriculum content in the context of higher education (See e.g. Olson, Laidlaw & Steel, 2016; Hassan, Maharoff & Abiddin, 2015; Petersen, 2015; Meegan, Dunning & Belton, 2013). For instance, Olson et al, (2016) carried out a qualitative empirical study to establish pre-service health and physical education teachers' reflection on the skill acquisition and a new curriculum in Austria and found out that pre- service teachers described the quality of the university teaching and the structure of the curriculum to matter a lot more than the number of units to be taught, hence perceived importance. Hassan et al, (2015) in their study aimed at investigating teacher trainers' and trainee teachers' understanding towards the curriculum philosophy regarding soft skills embedment in the Malaysian institute of teacher education discovered that it was the responsibility of the lecturers in Malaysian institute of teacher education to ensure that all student-teachers acquire the knowledge and skills required by a prospective teacher. Meanwhile, Meegan et al (2013) on their part, concluded that cooperating physical education teacher education programme provides a helpful and structured framework for the role of university supervisor.

In general, the literature cited herein indicates that for any teacher preparation to meet its core, it must have a capacity to have a sound teacher education curriculum content which would make such a program deliver teacher products that would be perceived as of good quality. Thus, such major indicators formed the criteria under which internal stakeholders perceive teacher education curriculum content at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities.

3. Theoretical Consideration

The researchers used a theory and model: Pedagogical Content Knowledge Model developed by Shulman (1986, 1987) and the Constructivism theory by Piaget and Vygotsky (1978) as guides to analyze internal stakeholders' perception of teacher education curriculum content at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities. Rationale for this model is based on the reality that it incorporates all the elements of teacher quality resulted from appropriate teacher education preparation (Okpala, Rotich-Tanui, & Ardley, 2009). The second assumption of the model is that whatever teachers know about teaching, such as the use of concrete examples and manipulative, design of curriculum comprises pedagogical content knowledge (Cochran et al, 1991). Thus, the model refers to the knowledge teachers use to translate particular subject matter to students, taking into account possible (mis)conceptions (Depaepe, Verschaffel & Kelchtermans, 2013). According to this model, it's believed that teacher education curriculum content with appropriate components of curricular content, as illustrated by Shulman (1986,7), have potential to transform stakeholders' beliefs that the teacher preparation program in Makerere and Kyambogo Universities may perhaps fully prepare quality teachers with necessary skills, knowledge, innovativeness, creativity among others.

More succinct to the foregoing rationale are Clark, Byrnes and Sudweek (2015), as they observe that preservice teachers enter the teacher preparation programs with a variety of classroom and educational experiences of their own that can further influence and/or inhibit what they learn within the teacher preparation programs, in addition to the situated learning environment provided by teacher preparation programs with specific content, along with

varying degrees and types of field-based experiences. To them, one way to measure the influence of teacher preparation programs, and the teacher training context, is to explore the perceptions teacher educators and student teachers have about teacher education curriculum content. This basing on the model may enable stakeholders see and interpret the teacher education curriculum content in deeper and broader perspective - a presumption that this study intends to confirm. For constructivism theory, it provides a framework for the interpretation of teacher educators and student teachers' perceptions of teacher education curriculum content since human perception is always seen as a 'construct', a product of the human mind, developed out of their experiences-meaning directed toward convinced stuff. As such, stakeholders' interaction with the teacher education curriculum content, their explanation and interpretation of the teacher education curriculum content will depend on an individual, which would constitute their unique perception derived from their own experience (Weber, 2004) of the curriculum content. Grounding on this, it reminds university teacher education curriculum designers to apply a model/ approaches that lead teacher educators and student teachers to understand teacher preparation program deeply and view its content and process as inseparable aspects of knowledge construction. Consequently, based on the stated model and a theory, the researchers demonstrate in this study that the construction of content would be perceived positively as achieving learning ends and the reverse will be true.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study adopted a descriptive multiple case study design (Makerere and Kyambogo Universities). It was a multiple case study as it zeroed on Makerere and Kyambogo Universities and concentrated on in- depth understanding of the perceptions of the teacher education curriculum content held by teacher educators and student teachers. This study provided findings drawn predominantly from the qualitative thematic data analysis of data collected. A purely qualitative approach was preferred because the study sought teacher trainers' and trainees' perception about the teacher education curriculum. Research took place within the premises of the School of Education, College of Education and External Studies, Makerere University and in the Faculty of Education, Science, Vocational studies, and Art and Social Science, Kyambogo University.

4.2 Instruments

The data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. This means open-ended questions were used in order to yield in-depth answers about perceptions of the teacher trainers and trainees. The trainers and trainees were purposively and conveniently selected and interviewed by the researchers themselves. Data were also collected through a critical read-through and reviewing of the relevant documents such as the university strategic plans, government white paper on education (GoU, 1992), teacher education policy, national council for higher education, teacher education curriculum, University and other tertiary act. This aimed at checking the core issues that were related to teacher education curriculum.

4.3 Trustworthiness

The validity of the tool and reliability of the results were ensured by using a wide sample across the two study institutions. In addition to attaining trustworthiness as a conceptual soundness or value of qualitative research. To this effect, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, and peer review checks were ensured, as well as the focusing on the questions for the interview.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using descriptive and interpretive analysis. Interpretive analysis aimed at a view that knowledge is more dynamic an assumption that individuals use to seek and understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2003). Thus, developing subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain stuff, which are multiple in natures of which this study was interested in. For instance, the issue

of teacher education curriculum content was interpreted amongst teacher trainers and trainees using different lenses rendering teacher education curriculum content to be subjective in nature. Interpretive analysis was therefore aimed at presenting interpretation of the perceptions as comprehended by participants.

The data was then organized and categorized guided by the research questions, to enable the identification of themes and emerging patterns. Data coding was done and it helped in easy identification of data during reference and analysis, avoiding to lose the participants' data. Further analysis involved searching for thematic connections within and across the transcripts. Developed thematic data enabled the study to systematically identify, organize and develop insights into patterns of meaning across the data obtained to get deeper indulgent of teacher education curriculum content at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities.

5. Findings

In order to ascertain the teacher training at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities, study participants were asked to explain how they perceived teacher education curriculum content offered. The aim was to explore participants' perception of the teacher education curriculum content in terms of its relevance in respect to career aspiration for teacher trainees. Following the objective of this study, the perceptions of the teacher education curriculum content held by academic staff and student teachers, was that it offers professionalism (i.e., qualification for teaching and equipping teachers with specialized skills) and teaching methodology (i.e., equipping teachers with teaching skill as well as offering approaches to teaching) to teacher trainees. Each of these aspects are presented and discussed concurrently.

5.1 Offers professionalism

First, findings from both teacher trainees and their lecturers agree that ideally, they perceive teacher education curriculum content as offering professionalism to teacher trainees. For instance, across departments at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities, participants perceived teacher education curriculum content as a teacher education component intended to instill professionalism among student teachers. Indeed, the majority of the participants expressed that they view course content relevance as one that gives teachers ability to meet their daily activities of teaching qualifying them for teaching as well as equipping them with specialized skills. These are further discussed below.

5.1.1 Qualification for teaching.

Participants from study Universities were asked to reflect on the perceptions they hold on the course content taught to teacher trainees who end up teaching the secondary school curriculum. In support of the foregoing, a perceptible number of the participants in the study credited the teacher education course content student teachers cover to be highly okay because the courses were designed and developed in view of the academic content at secondary school level: the responses from teacher educators were as follows from Makerere University:

I perceive the course content to be very important to teacher trainee and that there is a lot of relevancy in it since it's geared towards helping student teachers in the field of teaching. We teach this content to our students so that they do not find problems in the field when they finish the program. (Science teacher educator2)

Besides courses being designed for training program, they are very important and very relevant to pre-service teachers because it rhymes with the secondary school curriculum and of course it gives them much more than what is embedded in the secondary school curriculum. Secondly, it also prepares them for higher degrees in case they are to come back. So, the teacher education curriculum content is relevant for the pre-service teacher (Arts teacher educator3).

These sentiments are in agreement with the teacher educators from Kyambogo University who added that course content like teaching methods, curriculum studies and foundation units offered to student teachers have a positive related relevancy. They cited that the course content makes students all-round, in addition to being a

prerequisite meant to prepare student teachers to go and do the teaching. Two educators from Faculty of Arts and Social Science and three from Faculty of Science responded that:

The courses expose our students here to methods of teaching. In this case we deal with a lot of things, first of all, we begin to see how we prepare them to teach taking them through stages of preparation such as mental preparation. Secondly, we guide them on how to make schemes of work and lesson plans among other requirements for teaching (Art teacher educator2)

Literature education is a course which is very important, it is a requirement before we send our graduates to go and teach. They need to have the skills to handle the content that they will be delivering to the students in the secondary schools. This is a course that provides them with the methodology, practical skills, techniques, theoretical groundings to be able to deliver the content that they have acquired in the university. So, I consider this course content to be very important for them as teacher trainees so that as they finish the university studies, they can deliver the content to students in the secondary schools. (Arts teacher educator1)

When a teacher has been trained in our courses of chemistry which I teach, he knows what to do in organic and inorganic at both "O" and "A" level because we train them everything which is involved. So, my perception towards this course is that it prepares student teachers for the teaching activities. (Science teacher educator4)

Course content is a core to me, it is the practical part of the profession for one to be a teacher. Even to student teachers who come to the program with adverse attitudes end up loving it when subjected to course units like methods of teaching physics (Physics education). Therefore, there is a way this positively pulls student teachers towards the profession (Science teacher educator1)

I think biology education is a necessary course, very vital if they have to go out there and become biology teachers. It is very relevant as long as they are going into education because it is not only knowing the content but even how to deliver the content to the learners so that the learners could understand. There is knowing the content but delivering it is also very important (Science teacher educator5).

The responses above indicate that teacher education curriculum content is perceived as a criterion to which one has to go through so as to be empowered to teach. To confirm this in the process of teacher preparation, the researchers further interviewed teacher trainees from the respective institutions under study. Teacher trainees' responses from Makerere University are:

Most of the foundation courses concerning teaching are applicable especially curriculum. It is helpful to me as a teacher because the many things am studying, are going to help me during teaching, for instance, the assessment of the students and the content delivery, the methods we use when teaching especially choosing the right methods which can cater for every student including those with disability (arts trainee2)

I think the course content taught to us as student teachers is okay. For example, what I am taught in physics is applied in our daily life. So, when am trained in physics as a teacher, I can do other jobs outside the teaching profession but related to physics because physics covers a lot, including electrical engineering. So, I hold a positive perception towards my subject of specialization (Science trainee3)

Equally, teacher trainees from Kyambogo University too shared their perceptions of the teacher education content as well. In carrying out this, it was to confirm the assertion obtained from educators from Makerere and Kyambogo Universities on how they observe teacher education curriculum content as offered. This is what two teacher trainees (one arts trainee and one science trainee) asserted when asked how they thought about the curricula content taught to them

As an individual, I am going to base on the teaching methods. It is good for our course as teachers because when we are going to school practice, they teach us the teaching methods in our respective subjects of specialization. These help us to make our files, in addition to learning to organize things like lesson plans and schemes of work (arts trainee1).

I hold a positive attitude towards all the course content taught to us as teacher trainees. This is due to the fact that when I went for my first school practice, I did not find any challenge with the teaching

activities that were allocated to me because of the work exposure we get here at university (science trainee1).

In another perspective from teacher trainers and trainees, although participants across the institutions, fields, departments and ranks perceived teacher education course content as a requirement for teacher preparation, some had misgivings as well, especially teacher trainees complained about the heavy course load and broad, some relevant but not applicable in secondary schools, while others said that the course content were outdated and needed revision. One of the teacher trainees from Makerere University in the field of arts said: *some courses which according to my understanding are not relevant, like, for example Syntax and the methodology being used to teach it is not effective.* One other teacher trainee from Kyambogo University made this observation: *Some of the course content is very appropriate, it's fine but the other thing is that it's bulky. It is wide and by making it wide they make us not to read well. So, I would say that probably they reduce on content and they target appropriate skills that would be fine (science teacher trainee).* To the researchers, this is a very important gap identified in the teacher preparation program at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities

5.1.2 Equips Teachers with Specialized Skills.

As previously stated, in general, both students and lecturers agree with the view that teacher education curriculum content as a curriculum component equips teacher trainees with specialized skills a real teacher must have which is acquired when teachers get exposed to the real course content specifically designed for teachers. To this effect, it appeared that one of the most important aspects of teacher education curriculum content is the realization of specialized skills for teachers essentially directed towards teaching profession. In this regard, one of the teacher educators from Foundation and Curriculum Studies, Makerere University argued that: -

I feel that foundation courses are very relevant to them as teachers because it helps them in terms of communication, teaching and in all behavioral change expectation and to understand how teachers relate with the student. (Foundation lecturer 1)

A biology teacher educator (Science teacher educator 2) from the same institution had a similar perception:

The student teachers we train when they go to the field, they teach based on the way we taught them. So, if you have been using lecture method like in my area of biology or when teaching biology teaching methods, that will be their preference when they are at secondary school. Nonetheless, teacher training courses involves actual giving this person the skills required for effective teaching.

In a similar sentiment, teacher trainers serving at Kyambogo University viewed teacher education course content as a factor important for trainees' career. Presupposed therefore is that teacher educators' perceptions reveal that teacher education curriculum content introduces learners to foundation of education as well as helping teacher trainees to get knowledge they would put into practice; thus, it provides the practical part of the profession. For instance, one teacher educator said that,

We feel that after this course, teacher trainees can also join us and be teacher trainers. But it is good content because we designed it in such a way that it helps them, introduces them to psychology as a course and it gives them the basis for the profession (Foundations Lecturer3)

Other teacher educators at Kyambogo University added that

What we expose to them is what they are going to apply when practicing teaching. So, once they get to know these methods, then we go to what we call history room, to prepare trainees on how to use teaching and learning aids. But in most cases, the teaching-learning aids are two dimensional (it means that it has got length and width). But then, we ask them to have a three-dimensional figure (would have the length, width and height). In other words, we encourage them to prepare models (Arts teacher educator2).

On the other hand, majority of the trainees in both institutions under study further disclosed that the teacher education course content exposed to them as teachers highly supports their teaching skills. Teacher trainees according to those interviewed in this study indicated that teaching and offering of teacher education courses is

done with a purpose of equipping them with teaching skills. To confirm this, participants' perceptions that suggested that teacher education courses equip student teachers with teaching skills were "*the course gives us the tips on how to teach*", "*it gives a torch on what we will find in the field*", "*it helps us as teachers to teach appropriately*", "*we are taught how to think and generate information*", "*we are given pedagogical content knowledge to help us teach at secondary school level*". Thus, equipping trainees with teaching skills emerged as a strong sub-theme among student teachers to explain why teacher education curriculum content is given to them the way it is at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities.

5.2 Offers teaching methodology

The second finding was that the views of both teacher educators and student teachers were in agreement that teacher education curriculum content offers teaching methodology to teacher trainees. Indeed, the majority of the participants expressed that the curricular content university education students cover is perceived well satisfactory given the fact that the course content is developed with emphasis on making their interests at the center so that education helps students become the best that they can become in life. This in one way helps in equipping teachers with teaching skill as well as offering approaches to teaching; hence, preparing teacher trainees with the techniques and skills of how to deliver content. These are further discussed below.

5.2.1 Equips Teachers with teaching Skills.

The findings revealed that course content offered to student teachers give them pedagogical content skills to help them teach appropriately when they go to the field. To this extent, participants' perception of the course content as taught to teacher trainees was that it supports knowledge transfer activities significantly. This perspective mainly came from lecturers (teacher educators) who argued that teachers who passed through the teacher education curriculum content when they go to the field, they teach based on the way they were taught. So, if educators have been using lecture method like in any area of their respective specialization, that will be their preference when they are at secondary school. In particular, according to the pattern of the responses, most of the participants perceive teacher education course content as a component of teacher education curriculum involving giving teachers with the actual skills required for effective teaching at secondary school level. For instance, at Makerere University, one teacher educator held that:

Once you're a teacher, you have to achieve certain skills right from the classroom. In this case, I perceive the course content we give teacher trainees to be equipping them with skills necessary for them to teach, for instance, skills on how to handle students, pursue classroom management which we give trainees when teaching subject teaching methods in their area of specialization. So, I look at this content to be appropriate for the teacher preparation program and teacher trainees at large (Foundations Lecturer2).

In the same vein, two teacher trainers from Kyambogo University observed teacher education curriculum content as a way through which trainees are equipped with basics and foundations there are to use in the field. To achieve this, trainers are exposed to subject teaching method content an excellent course because it is the foundation of any subject specialization, one must have that quality so as to teach. One of them stated:

Ideally what we expose to students is what they are going to apply when practicing teaching. So, once they get to know these methods, then we go to what we call history room, to prepare trainees on how to use teaching and learning aids (Arts teacher educator2).

In this course we look at preparations, importance, how you can ask learners questions and why should ask them and when they ask you, what do you do and why do you allow them to ask you. So how do you improve the interaction between your learners? Physics education methods is all about classroom situation between the teacher and the learner (Science teacher educator1)

Additionally, students' testimony cannot be underrated because their memories of what they cover is still fresh. Based on their first school practice (SP) experience students also evaluated the relevancy of the teacher education curriculum content covered at university. At both Makerere and Kyambogo Universities trainees too gave their perspective by disclosing that the teacher education course content exposed to them highly supports

their teaching skills. One of the teacher trainees from Faculty of Science, Kyambogo University said: *Though the courses offered us are too broad but we get teaching skills. The evidence is when I went for school practice, I did not find any challenge due to the fact that here I do a lot of work and when I reach the field, I found things were moving.* One other teacher trainee from the Department of Foundation and Curriculum Studies, Makerere University made this observation: *To me as a teacher trainee before I came here, I was not confident of myself but at the moment I am. I can now stand in front of student and communicate because of the many courses I have gone through for the period I have been here at Makerere University studying education. I have learned many things here at campus*

5.2.2 Offers Approaches to teaching.

As previously mentioned, the other finding of this study was that participants perceive teacher education curriculum content as a pathway to offering approaches to teaching. This perspective mainly came from lecturers (teacher educators) whose perspectives were that knowledge and skills of teaching are attained after teachers have been exposed to teacher education curriculum content. They cited that engagement with teacher education course content is seen as a prerequisite in enhancing teaching approaches amongst student teachers under training. Hence, embedding teaching approaches to student teachers to facilitate teaching and learning activities likely to take place amongst learners in secondary schools and society according to these participants.

From the above sentiments, teacher educators were arguing that student teachers who go through teaching courses were able to get pedagogical skills a process that would culminate into teaching student teachers how to handle learners hence improving the teaching and learning process at the lower level where they are likely to serve. The other perspective of teacher educators was that teacher education curriculum content is seen beyond offering content but also training teachers how to deliver content among other requirements. One teacher educator at Makerere University pointed out

Education courses here at School of Education have been designed in such a way that they do not only teach the content but also, teach how to teach the content. (Arts teacher educator3)

Other teacher educator from Kyambogo University added that

what we do is basically to beef them up with pedagogy and all the skills that they can use to teach about the past and to teach it better. (Arts teacher educator2)

Similarly, the participants' responses indicated that the teacher education curriculum content meant to prepare trainees on ways of delivering to which real active teaching is experienced. Thus, demonstrating the extent to which education course content as an element of teacher preparation exposes student teachers to methods of teaching. In addition to educators' conceptions, majority of the teacher trainees interviewed in this study reported that they perceive course content taught as alleyway through which they are taught how to teach, deliver content, how to handle students and how to be successful in their journey as teachers. For instance, one teacher trainee from Department of Chemistry, Kyambogo University said,

The curriculum we are taught and exposed to gives us student teachers some of the techniques we use while teaching e.g., if they are saying that when the students are shouting, what can you do? or if a student asks you like a joking question which is off topic from what you are teaching, what can you do? So, in that sense they prepare me to go and face that environment by giving me ways of dealing with learners. (Science teacher educator4)

In conclusion, the dominant perceptions showed by participants signifies that teacher education curriculum content as offered at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities shows a modification in approach on how teacher training is done. Similarly, Participants' perceptions directly indicated that teaching and offering of teacher education courses is done with a purpose of equipping student teacher with teaching skills.

6. Discussion

The study set out to study the perceptions of the teacher education curriculum content held by academic staff and student teachers in public Universities in Uganda. According to the findings from both teacher trainees and their lecturers agree that they ideally perceive teacher education curriculum as an element of teacher training that offers professionalism and teaching methodology to teacher trainees, hence, qualifying trainees to teaching, offering approaches to teaching, equipping teacher with specialized and teaching skills. Teacher educators emphasized that teacher education curriculum helps pre-service teachers to execute their duty of teaching excellently as well as giving teachers ability to meet their daily activities of teaching. This finding is basically in tandem with extant literature by curriculum and development scholars in higher education that teacher education curricular courses provide likely teachers with various opportunities to acquire useful, practical knowledge (Kim et al, 2011). The implication herewith is that the teacher education curriculum content is very important and that there is a lot of relevancy in it since its geared towards instilling professionalism and teaching methodology among teacher trainees.

In view of these results, it is interesting to note that at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities the teacher education courses taught to undergraduate student teachers were perceived by both teacher trainers and lecturers to have initially been designed for domesticated program for teachers. This was revealed when majority of the educators in various departments in the two institutions ascertained that teacher education curricular enforce core practices of the teaching profession. The results corroborated such studies such as McDonald et al. (2013) who concluded that preparing teachers to enact core practices requires a sea change in the practice of teacher education. This further strengthened the subscription that the initial teacher training comprises the time period necessary to fully prepare persons for the teaching profession, that is, from the decision to become a teacher to becoming a fully responsible member of the teaching profession (Lohse-Bossenz et al, 2013). In this way, the findings of the study further rhyme with Hollins (2011) who, while probing the philosophical stance that influences the framing of the curriculum, surmised that teacher education curriculum must be given time to be diagnosed well.

An emergent body of evidence confirms that teacher education curriculum content is appreciated to be more pertinent, appropriate and yields greater benefits to teachers and the society at large since its intended to address sustainability (McKeown, 2014). These statements clearly show that in teacher education, teacher education curriculum content is viewed to be a core and foundation for teacher trainees because of its rhyming with the secondary school curriculum and of course it gives them much more than what is embedded in the secondary school curriculum. This supports Lohse-Bossenz et al's (2013) contention that non-subject-specific courses are considered an integral part of teacher education. Such courses are mostly called educational foundations that tend to include discipline like history of education, sociology of education or educational psychology. As pointed out earlier, a quicker look at the variety of teacher education course content as observed at Makerere and Kyambogo universities is the realization of specialized skills for teachers essentially directed towards teaching profession. Indeed, these courses help teacher trainees to accumulate massive knowledge (Van Driel and Berry, 2012).

The above notwithstanding, results correspondingly revealed that several study participants across departments training teachers at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities primarily perceive teacher education curricular content as a prerequisite trainee must go through before the University sends them to the field. This point is also strongly resonant in the work of Zeinchner et al.'s (2014) on teacher training where they demonstrated a positive impact acquired as a result of engaging in teacher education content that candidates learn what and how to teach in their courses and then go out and apply what is learnt in schools during their field experience. Further, according to Van Driel and Berry (2012), the course content therefore helps student teachers in increasing an understanding of how to develop insights in specific subject of the curriculum content. The finding thus strengthens and acts as a confirmatory to earlier studies such as Olson et al, (2016) who hold that pre-service teachers described the quality of the university teaching and the structure of the curriculum to matter a lot more than the number of units to be taught, hence perceived importance.

From the foregone discussion, the study spelt out and thus observed that teachers need to understand what they are going to do in the field in terms of how to handle students and other related aspects of teaching and learning activities which were understood to might have been attained through the teacher education course content. However, as Mishra et al (2011) asserts, teacher education courses set the stage for content and skills developed during pre-service teacher training, and have the potential for being the keystone of the degree program and the foundation of a teaching career. In this way, the findings of the study further rhyme with Abell et al, (2009) who, while reinforcing and supporting various models of teacher preparations, surmised that teacher training courses should enforce numerous knowledge and skills as this was perceived to transform teachers' familiarity with the teaching profession. The implication herewith is that teacher education courses provide an overview of the profession (Mishra et al. 2011); thus, helping teachers gain membership with teaching profession (Scheja, 2015). Similarly, participants also agreed that there is indeed need for educators to have adequate content knowledge. As evidence of several trainees noted that some of their lectures were either 'knowledgeable of the subject matter' or 'had good understanding of content and subject matter' while others were not adequately perceived that way. Yet a strong link between educators' knowledge of subject matter and training of student teachers ensure that student-teachers acquire the knowledge and skills required by a prospective teacher (Hassan et al, 2015).

The findings also show that despite the positive perceptions of teacher education curricular content held by teacher educators and student, its conceptualization still remains complicated. Indeed, across the two institutions, trainees held that the teacher education course content is okay but too bulky and broad, some said that its relevant but not applicable in secondary schools, while others revealed that the content were outdated, theoretical and need revision. The views of the student teachers appear to agree with the ideas of Darling-Hammond (2006) that most of the teacher education courses gear towards theory base, failing to link to practical. Equally, Kim et al (2011) explains that many curricular contents in teacher education programs are theory-based, a factor that sometimes drive the curricula content of teacher education to a different direction. This is possibly why authors like Zeinchner et al (2014) advise that the practice should be that candidates learn what and how to teach in their courses and then go out and apply what is learnt in schools during their field experience.

7. Conclusions

In this study, we sought to establish views of teacher educators and student teachers on teacher education curriculum content. The findings have clearly shown that both lecturers and student teachers view teacher education curriculum content positively viewing it as enabling learners to be equipped with specialized teaching skills, essentially directed towards teaching profession. The findings also showed that the teacher education curriculum content at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities enables student trainees to effectively deliver content in secondary schools to meet the demands and needs of secondary school curriculum despite complaints by external stakeholders. The curriculum emphasized the skills necessary for teacher trainees to attain competence in teaching and learning environment, pedagogy as well as understanding learners required to perform their duties.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends the following as far as teacher preparation is concerned. First, teacher training institutions need to continuously review teacher education curriculum in order to weed out outdated content. This should be done following NCHE guidelines that provide for periodic review of curriculum every three to five years and universities need to adhere to this. Secondly, there is need to design a 21st-century teacher education curriculum by teacher trainers in corroboration with other university units rendering a training service to teacher trainees. This would bridge the gap of the disjointed teacher education curriculum content at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities hence strengthening the building blocks that produce a teacher.

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