Evaluating Primary School Teacher Professional Development Programmes in Zimbabwe: Pre-Service Student Teacher's Views

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Abstract

Teacher education conversation is a critical focus area given its distinctive contribution to nation building. The study explores pre-service student teachers' perceptions of the college and university teacher preparation practices. One aspect that has remained contested, and with competing ideas in the teacher education discourse in Zimbabwe is the quality and effectiveness of the programmes by two teacher education institutions. In this phenomenological study, we conveniently sampled twenty pre-service primary teacher students, ten from each institution. The design allowed us to focus on what and how the pre-service students experienced the teacher development programmes at institutions and the sense they made of those experiences. Focus group discussions with two sets of student participants and complemented by non-participant observation were data collection instruments. The key finding of the study is that the pre-service student teachers believe that the current professional development programmes do not adequately address their needs and challenges due to gaps in curricula, theory and practice and institutional and government support systems. The study recommends the need to come up with one primary teacher professional development system that considers the strengths from each of the two models in existence. The study contributes to the broad discourses on teacher development in Zimbabwe highlighting the need to identify the programmes' strengths, areas of improvement, and informed decisions on appropriate pre-service student teacher support, learning and professional growth.

Keywords: *Teacher Education Teacher Preparation, Colleges Of Education, Pre-Service Student Teachers, University.*

Introduction

The Zimbabwean primary teacher education training operates within a two–tier system, comprising teacher training colleges and universities, each producing graduates with different qualifications; diplomas from teachers' colleges and degrees from universities (Mutanga, 2023; Berejena, 2022; Tarusikirwa, 2016). While universities function with some degree of autonomy under the oversight of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), colleges are largely governed by the University of Zimbabwe's Centre for Teacher Education and Materials Development (CTEMD). Graduates from the two institutions find employment with the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW) and work within the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). This dichotomy in primary teacher training model has raised questions regarding the comparability of the quality of teachers produced, necessitating a focus on not just content and methodologies, but also the lived experiences and perspectives of pre-service student teachers.

Teacher education in Zimbabwe has evolved to address various educational challenges since independence in 1980. Acknowledging the necessity for competent teachers, it is essential for teacher education programmes to equip student teachers with requisite skills and knowledge necessary for developing responsible citizenship in learners (Newman, 2013; Kaya & Leon, 2024). The pre-service teachers' professional journey is crucial in determining their future teaching effectiveness, especially within the current empirical landscape. Past studies have predominantly examined areas such as work-integrated learning (Ndebele & Legg-Jack, 2023; Muyengwa & Jita, 2021), classroom effectiveness (Asare & Amo, 2023), and pedagogical and technological skills needed by pre-service teachers (Nyaruwata, 2022). However, there still remains a notable gap in research and a dearth of studies in comparing the efficacy of the pre-service teacher development programmes offered by universities and colleges.This research gap poses significant challenges, as neglecting to capture the voices of pre-service teachers may hinder the continual

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improvement of primary teacher training practices, ultimately undermining the quality of primary education in Zimbabwe.

Since the inception of the Zimbabwe National Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) and its evaluation in 1990, which highlighted deficiencies in critical pedagogical skills, the country's primary school teacher training system has undergone numerous transformations (Berejena, 2022). Despite implementing various models, including the conventional 3-3-3 model and the 2-5-2 school-based model, challenges remain in ensuring the adequacy of training. The establishment of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) in 1999 marked a significant shift, introducing degree programmes aimed at enhancing primary teacher training quality. Nevertheless, the persistence of diploma-offering colleges indicates that both models still coexist, each boasting unique strengths and areas for growth.

The quality of primary education in Zimbabwe is intrinsically linked to the effectiveness of these primary teacher development programmes. While significant resources have been allocated to strengthen these institutions, there exists a growing concern about the relevance of pre-service teacher training programmes in addressing the evolving demands of the primary teacher education sector. Engaging pre-service student teachers to share their training experiences could reveal insights into their preparedness to tackle classroom challenges.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the perceptions and experiences of pre-service student teachers across the two teacher training models, promoting an understanding of their preparation, instructional support, and overall experiences. By investigating the strengths and limitations of both programmes, this research endevours to provide actionable insights that would inform practices and policies in Zimbabwe primary teacher education. Ultimately, by centering the voices of student teachers in the assessment of their programmes, this study seeks to contribute to the continuous improvement of teacher training and, consequently, the quality of primary education in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

As access to teacher education programmes has surged globally, concerns have emerged regarding the adequacy of pre-service student teachers' preparation (Trowler, 2019; Mikeska, 2022). The need for resilient and responsive teacher education programmes is imperative to equip student teachers for the evolving educational landscape (Gouedard et al., 2020). According to Ko et al (2016), ensuring that future teachers effectively engage with societal, economic, and political contexts is crucial, as the goals of education are intrinsically linked to quality teacher training.

The effectiveness of teacher development programmes necessitates a data-driven approach that considers various perspectives, particularly using the Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) model of evaluation (Adhikari & Khadka, 2023).A strong nexus exists between teacher quality, preparation, professional mentorship and the institutions involved highlighting that teachers' experiences during their education profoundly shape their professional identities and competencies (Perines, 2020; Man & Manaf, 2022; Asare & Amo, 2023). Fullan (1991) emphasises that effective teachers must possess a foundation knowledge in subject matter, management, instructional pedagogy, and the capacity to evaluate learning outcomes, all areas that can be systematically assessed using the CIPP framework.

Pre-Service Teacher Development in The Global Context

Globally, research underscores the importance of refining pre-service teacher development programmes. For instance, Irani et al. (2020) revealed that in Iran, there is an urgent need to revise teacher training to better support the progression of pre-service teachers through their learning journey. Similarly, Perines (2020) highlighted critical views from student teachers in Chile on the disconnection between theoretical coursework and research practices, advocating for enhanced participation in educational research to foster a more comprehensive educational environment.

Research from the Philippines by Remirez (2021) also identified significant gaps between educational theory and practice, which hindered the professional growth of pre-service student teachers. This theme of discrepancies between training received and real-world applicability resonate in South Africa, where van de Merwe (2022) found that while pre-service teachers were aware of their pedagogical deficiencies, they valued the robust foundation provided by their training.

In another study, Damoah and Omodan (2023) emphasised the necessity of clarifying Environmental Education within pre-service curriculum, proposing that such education can be made compulsory to align it with contemporary needs. Furthermore, Ndebele and Legg-Jack (2023) demonstrated that exposure to work related learning positively influences pre-service teachers' professional development. In the same vein, Man and Manaf's (2022) study in Malaysia noted that training is more significant when related to factors of the mentoring procedure.

Chisholm's (2010) critical examination of South Africa's transition from teacher education colleges to university-based programmes highlights additional concerns. She argued that universities often overlook practical training, leaving pre-service teachers underprepared. Although colleges provided hands-on, experiential learning, they struggled with quality assurance, indicating the need for complex balance between theory and practice.

In summary, the few global studies collectively accentuate the need for a comprehensive and relevant pre-service teacher training framework. They advocate for explicit curriculum requirements and collaborative partnerships to ensure that student teachers are well-prepared to confront contemporary challenges in primary education.

Studies On Pre-Service Teacher Development in Zimbabwe

The examination of pre-service teacher development in Zimbabwe's colleges of education and universities has not been thoroughly addressed from the students' perspective. However, there are notable studies that have contributed to the pre-service teacher development discourses. For instance, Chikuvadze et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative content review which highlighted the positive effects of digital technology-enhanced pedagogy on sustainable pre-service teacher development. In another study, Gwirayi and Sigauke (2023) employed an exploratory sequential research design to assess pre-service teachers' knowledge and perspectives on global education at a state university, revealing that participants prioritised career preparation over challenging the status quo, with knowledge levels found to be lower than similar studies internationally.

Nyaruwata (2022) focused on how lecturers can equip both pre-service and in-service teachers to face the challenges of teaching during and beyond Covid-19 pandemic. The findings indicated a pressing need for enhanced pedagogical and technological skills advocating for significant improvements in Zimbabwe's technological infrastructure to facilitate better internet access and ICT training for lecturers and pre-service students.

Muyengwa and Jita (2021) explored how universities and colleges of education can support schools and practitioners in work-related learning (WIL). Their qualitative multiple case study revealed that although WIL contexts could create more favourable educational environments, challenges arose from multiple roles of mentors and inadequate mentoring infrastructure, necessitating strategic improvements. Complementing this, Makamure (2020) examined the disconnect between pre-service teacher expectations of mathematics teaching and their actual experiences during pedagogical internship. The study recommended preparation programmes for pre-service teachers to bridge the gap and better equip them for the challenges they face.

In an earlier research, Gonye et al. (2008) explored perceptions of mentors and school heads regarding the pre-service teachers from universities and colleges of education during teaching practice (TP). While recognising the potential of university pre-service teachers, the study found their overall performance was lower than that of their college counterparts. Notably, university studies excelled in pedagogical content knowledge and presentation confidence, while college students demonstrated strengths in scheming, lesson

planning and professional conduct. The study called for a more balanced curriculum for university students to better prepare them for teaching practice.

Collectively, these studies underscore the complexities and challenges faced by pre-service teachers in Zimbabwe, highlighting the need for improvement in pre-service teacher education programmes.

The study explored college-university teacher education dichotomy using the the CIPP model and phenomenological framework from the lens of pre-service student teachers and addresses two research questions:

- How have the colleges and universities prepared pre-service student teachers for Zimbabwean primary schools?

- How can the programmes be strengthened?

Conceptual Framework: Context, Inputs, Process, and Product

Stufflebeam's (1969) Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) model served as the conceptual framework for the study. The evaluation inspired decision-oriented approach facilitated data-driven decision making (Adhikari & Khadka, 2023; Finney et al., 2021) regarding teacher programmes in Zimbabwe from the perspectives of pre-service student teachers. Within this context, the model aimed to inform decisions related to the structure, organisation, goals and the curriculum, support for teacher education programmes across two institutions (Lei, 2024). We align with Toosi et al.'s (2021) who argue that pre-service teacher education programmes are effective when their activities adhere to appropriate standards and undergo continuous evaluation. The curricula, materials, infrastructure, processes are vital endogenous inputs and systematic processes of decision-making, influencing the effectiveness of student teachers (Bessong, 2024). Additionally, Toosi et al.'s (2021) highlighted that the CIPP covers all the stages of monitoring and revising an education programme.

Key evaluative decisions such as the choice of training institutions directly shape the teachers' identities. In addition, the interplay between lecturers and students as system actors occur within the large systemic context where knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours, and values emerge as a body of knowledge, a process; praxis and a context (Khan & Law, 2015) prompting reflective inquiries about the nature and delivery of knowledge at the institutions.

Methodology

Research Design

This phenomenological study explores pre-service primary student teachers' perspectives on the teacher professional development provided by colleges and universities. Utilising the qualitative approach, we gathered insights into the lived experiences of students within the college-university professional development contexts, allowing them to articulate their understanding of the programmes (Daniel, 2016; Ferreira & Lind, 2023; Stolz, 2023). The phenomenological design facilitated an exploration of the students' experiences, addressing knowledge gaps of the dual systems of teacher education programmes in Zimbabwe.

Acknowledging our own biases and methodological considerations (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022), we maintained a blank slate mindset (Neubauer et al., 2019) throughout data collection and analysis, setting aside our pre-exisiting notions of teacher development. Member checking further enabled pre-service teachers to validate our interpretations, fostering co-construction of findings (Gonzalez-Salgado et al., 2024). Our approach ensured an open minded engagement with the data throughout the research process.

The Sample

The study involved twenty pre-service student teachers, with ten from each of the two-teacher education institutions, ensuring gender balance to reflect diverse experiences. All participants were in their final semester/term, possessing comprehensive knowledge of teacher development processes. The selection prioritised obtaining rich descriptive qualitative insights over statistical representativeness and generalisability (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020, McDermott, 2023). A convenience sampling strategy was employed, aligned with non-probability sampling approach which facilitated participant accessibility, geographical proximity, and their willingness to engage in this research (Etikan et al., 2016). This method captured the depth of knowledge and experiences from the student participants.

Data Sources and Collection

The study employed two data collection strategies; a group-think focus group discussion as the main data collection instrument supplemented by non-participant observation. We collected qualitative data that addressed our sub-research questions while centering on narratives and experiences of pre-service students as key actors within the teacher education system (Mohajan, 2018). Participants were encouraged to speak freely in the focus group discussion (Kakilla, 2021; Ruslin et al., 2022) facilitating the emergence of novel insights.

The focus group discussion allowed internal triangulation and cross-validation of data, as participants questioned and compared responses thus increasing credibility and reliability of qualitative findings (Barbour, 2014; Ahmed, 2024). Through these discussions, we gained insights into the knowledge, skills, experiences acquired, anxieties and expectations of pre-service student teachers. Each session, organised for participant convenience, lasted approximately forty minutes and was audio recorded, adhering to research ethic of consent. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used; CST and FGD 1 for College participants and UST and FGD 2 for University participants.

To ensure data triangulation of data, a hallmark of qualitative research that bolster credibility (Morgan, 2022), we employed non-participant observation to corroborate focus group findings (Ahmed, 2024; Cardino, 2018). During observation, we explored questions about student's activities and discussions, seeking to understand their experiences within the teacher development programmes. This approach allowed us to delve into the intricate dynamics of their world (Ciesielska et al., 2018) as we took notes and asked probing questions to uncover their perceptions of the teacher development programmes.

Coding and Data Analysis

We employed the inductive descriptive coding for our analysis, identifying concepts and relationships from the focus groups and non-participant observation through an iterative process (Riazi et al., 2024). Utilising the reflective approach, we recognised themes as shared, meaning-based patterns (Morgan, 2022), thus allowing us to synthesise divergent data and capture the lived experiences of the pre-service students. Our analysis produced rich thematic description, highlighting both convergent and divergent perspectives (Campbell et al., 2021; Sundler et al., 2019) in programme experiences.

The Findings

Multifaceted views of pre-service student-teachers on the differences between professional development models

Training Preferences and Implications

Vignettes from pre-service student teachers revealed critical socio-political dimensions influencing their institutional choices for primary teacher training. Participants from colleges highlighted financial support during teaching practice and shorter programme duration, reflecting a pragmatic approach to overcoming economic constraints.

"Our programme is just three years and we join the profession early enough and the biggest motivation   is the allowances we get from government while on TP, it gives financial relief to our parents and guardians given the poor economic environment in our country". (FGD 1).

Their reliance on allowances and lower entry qualifications (post 'O' Level) underscored immediate motivations.

Conversely, university pre-service students prioritised the benefits of a degree, viewing it as a gateway to professional development and a more comprehensive educational experience.

"It everyone's dream to join the teaching profession with a high qualification, and at university you   are sure of your professional development and growth. The environment and the curricula are flexible enough for professional growth. The only challenge is lack of support from government when we are   on TP but we see benefits ahead". (FGD 2).

University students valued active learning environments and diversified curricula, which fostered reflective practice. Although university participants expressed discontent with the absence of government support during teaching practice, they maintained that this sacrifice was temporary and justified by clear career trajectories.

These divergent motivations underscore the implications of institutional choice on teacher competency and professional identity formation.

Curriculum and instructional practices

Pre-service student teachers' expectation for effective teaching and professional growth are deeply intertwined with the curricula and pedagogical approaches of their training institutions.

"The curricula are responsive and speaks to current issues in Zimbabwe and the primary schools…it's a rich curriculum with modules that speak to the current thinking in education. But the integration of   technology is weak, and the university should improve on this given its centrality in education today". (FGD 2).

University pre-service participants emphasised that their curricula are broad, innovative, featuring modules that enhance critical thinking and address contemporary contexts through modules such as Curriculum Innovation and Industrialisation, Culture and Heritage, Entrepreneurship and Financial Management Curriculum Innovation and Industrialisation, Culture and Heritage, Entrepreneurship and Financial Management. However, they noted a critical gap in technology integration within the learning experiences.

On the other hand, college student participants stressed that their curricula were more of experiential learning situated in real primary classroom contexts, highlighting a curriculum structured around professional studies, pedagogics, research and subject specialization.\

"In our context the whole process is lecturer-controlled and the curriculum a straight-jacket. There is a strong emphasis on how to apply theories in real classroom contexts". (FGD 1)

While college students' curricula were grounded in both theory and practice, participants expressed frustration with lecturer-centred instructional strategies that limit opportunities for critical thinking and exploration, leading to a less dynamic learning environment.

The contrasting approaches indicate discrepancies in the preparation of pre-service students, with university curricula broad, flexible and cultivating a deeper understanding of pedagogical content knowledge, while colleges curricula followed traditional frameworks which inhibit the development of problem-solving skills essential for professional growth. Consequently, professional teacher development designers must align their programmes to establish a shared vision of effective teacher competencies. Emphasising reflective

practice, integrating modern pedagogical strategies, and incorporating contemporary content is essential for enhancing teacher quality and efficacy ensuring that pre-service teachers are equipped with knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of modern primary education.

Pre-Service Student Teachers' Views on Similarities of The Teacher Development Programmes

Teaching Practice Experiences

The findings regarding teaching practice (TP) among pre-service student teachers reveal substantial similarities across institutions, despite subtle variations in implementation. Both college and university adhere to a theory-practice-theory continuum that facilitates the socialisation of student teachers into the profession.

Participants from college reported a structured TP experience characterised by a comprehensive year-long engagement in primary schools, supported by mentorship and guided by a manual prepared by the institution. They noted the importance of learning from qualified mentors in understanding the complexities of pedagogical documentation, and receiving assessment feedback from lecturers at regular intervals.

> "Our TP experiences are the most rewarding in terms of professional development, financial support from government, professional assistance from the college and mentors. The handbook is very handy   and you won't get lost". (FGD 1)

In contrast, university students raised challenges related to their TP experiences, highlighting the absence of financial support from the government and sporadic university supervision, while they had the flexibility to choose their placements nationwide, lack of consistent professional support and commitment from the university cast doubt on the efficacy of their preparation. University students noted the expectations including maintaining meticulous pedagogical documents and initiating innovative community projects to sustain their learning.

> "TP is very important and the guiding handbook helps a lot. But the experiences could be made more   meaningful with support from our institution and the government. There is a lot of work out there in   documentation and community projects which require both financial and professional support". (FGD   2)

Despite the challenges, both institutions utilise TP handbooks, which were crucial in guiding classroom-based professional development. The overarching objective of TP is to equip students with firsthand experience of classroom dynamics, thus enabling them to apply theoretical knowledge practically and construct their teaching identities. This underscores the critical importance of robust institutional and government support during TP, as inadequate support can interfere with students' professional development and readiness to embark on teaching career.

Assessment Strategies

Both teacher development systems employ traditional formative and summative assessments to evaluate student teachers' knowledge and skills crucial for life-long learning. University assessments consist of 40% coursework, including written assignments and presentations and 60% summative examinations, demanding an average passing grade of 50%.

Colleges use a similar model, with 50% from coursework and 50% from the examinations. Students expressed frustration noting the stress of high-stakes examinations and a desire for alternative assessment methods.

> "Our academic and professional lives are about examinations. Other ways like portfolios can be explored". (FGD 1 & 2).

The reliance on summative assessments in both institutions lacks multidimensional approach necessary to comprehensively capture the intricacies of professional learning and teacher development.

Research Literacy

At university students must successfully complete a Research Methods and Statistics module before embarking on classroom-based solutions. Conversely, students at colleges engage in mandatory empirical research through Curriculum Depth Study (CDS), wherein they select subject areas and seek evidence-based solutions to classroom challenges.

> "Yaa research is one of the challenging modules especially coming up with a topic based on classroom   problems". (FGD 1)

> "Research requires you to have a clear understanding of the classroom problems, a lot of reading and   takes a lot of time needed. In addition, you need to pass the research methods module which is really   demanding" (FGD 2).

Classroom research is recognised as a cornerstone of teacher professional training at both institutions by developing a rich culture of research early in the students' teaching career. This helps students contribute valuable theoretical and practical insights to the profession and also cultivates innovative strategies to address classroom challenges, ultimately elevating the quality of teacher training.

Discussion

This research on primary school pre-service teacher development in Zimbabwe reveals an urgent need for on-going evaluation and adaptation of teacher training programmes to meet the evolving demands of the education sector as advocated by the CIPP model. Aligning with existing literature, this study highlights critical areas in need of reform decisions, notably the necessity for a systematic approach to gathering feedback from educational stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of teacher development programmes.

Focus group discussions and observational data indicate a concerning stagnation in curriculum design, which has not evolved in relation to significant developments in primary education in Zimbabwe. This situation implies a disconnect between theoretical training and practical experiences, raising questions about the expertise of the curriculum designers at these institutions. Perines (2020) says that teacher education curricula should be developed by individuals possessing subject matter, pedagogical knowledge and evaluation skills, otherwise student teachers may not be well-prepared for the teaching profession. In line with Irani et al. (2020), who emphasised the need for revising teacher education curriculum in Iran for contemporary educational contexts, our findings advocate for an innovative, technological-driven, and needs-responsive teacher education curriculum consistent with evaluation-based teacher development programmes as encouraged by the CIPP model. Similarly, Chikuvadze et al. (2024) underline the importance of integrating digital technology-enhanced pedagogy for sustainable development of pre-service teachers. In stark contrast, Chipika (2021) criticised Zimbabwe teacher education curricula for inadequate needs assessment, perpetuating a gap between academic preparation and practical demands.

Furthermore, research indicates an imbalance in teacher education programmes concerning the head, heat and hand models (Robinson & Seleznyov, 2023) reflecting a broader issue confirmed by Remirez (2021) in the Philippines where practical and theoretical training were misaligned, adversely affecting pre-service teachers' professional growth. This disconnect resonates with findings from van der Merwe (2022) in South Africa which reported insufficient preparation of pre-service students in critical areas.

Assessment methods within current teacher education programmes predominantly rely on traditional tools such as formative and summative assessments, often prioritising examination passing over genuine professional growth (Du Plessis & van De Westhuizen, 2021). Makamure (2020) advocates for a more comprehensive approach to assessment that equips pre-service teachers with knowledge and skills necessary to face the challenges of modern research-based primary school teaching.

The teaching practice component remains crucial in shaping pre-service teachers but seemingly lacks adequate support to facilitate the transition from academic to practical settings. Both student feedback and observational data reveal a deficiency in the university's assistance to bridge this gap, echoing Irani et al.'s (2020) concerns regarding the overall quality of teacher preparation. Man and Manaf (2022) also raise the need for sufficient mentoring, supervision and organised training for professional growth and personal improvement. Earlier studies by Gonye et al. (2008) and later studies by Muyengwa and Jita (2021) underscore the inadequate guidance universities and colleges provide, further complicating the path to confidence for student teachers. This dichotomy between college and university training programmes, as noted by Chisholm (2010) has resulted in incongruent identities and beliefs in pre-service teachers.

The gaps identified by the pre-service student teachers emphasise the need to continually evaluate the programmes as recommended by the CIPP model, and timely interventions can be made that help to ensure the programmes remain relevant and effective.

The study findings can inform policy advocacy aimed at reforming pre-service teacher development in Zimbabwe by integrating existing programmes. Conducting a needs analysis utilising data on the current curricula, learning outcomes and student feedback is essential for identifying overlaps and gaps. Policymakers should develop a unified curriculum that aligns with primary school needs and meets national and international standards by incorporating best practices from both programmes. Additionally, new policies addressing funding, human resources, admissions and certification processes are crucial for successful integration. These steps can enhance educational quality and better prepare pre-service student teachers for the primary teaching profession in Zimbabwe.

Future researchers may conduct a comparative study on how other countries have prepared pre-service teachers. Furthermore, given that this study was limited to two institutions, future studies could involve more teacher preparation institutions gathering perspectives from various stakeholders; school administrators, current teachers and education policymakers to get holistic views on the effectiveness of the teacher development programmes in Zimbabwe

Conclusion

The study examines pre-service student teachers' perceptions of teacher programmes in colleges and universities, shedding light on their impact on the quality of primary education in Zimbabwe. It identifies critical areas for enhancing pre-service teacher training, particularly in structure, curricula, theory-practice integration, and institutional and government support. The findings reveal that the current dual systems of pre-service teacher development lack a unified focus, insufficiently addressing student needs, and promoting divergent teacher identities, despite students ultimately working under the same ministry of education.

We recommend a strategic merging of college and university teacher development programmes to enhance the overall quality of teacher education and optimise resource allocation. Such integration would leverage existing strengths and address weaknesses through comprehensive needs assessment involving stakeholder surveys. Moreover, exploring successful models from other contexts that have undertaken similar mergers may provide valuable insights for this transition. We contend that a unified teacher development framework, better resourced and managed is essential to secure the primary teacher quality who meets the demands of the 21st century primary education in Zimbabwe.

Informed consent statement: Authors of the study issued the informed consent form to the participants that clearly explained that their participation was voluntary with no any material things in return. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the research process at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Authors also assured the participants that no harm would be imposed on them.

Conflicts of Interest: All the authors declared that they have no conflict interest.

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