



## **Beginning Primary School Teachers' Perspectives on the Role of Subject Specialization in Botswana Colleges of Education: Implications for the Professional Development of those who did not Specialize in Languages (English and Setswana)**

Rosinah Thando Mokotedi<sup>1</sup>  
Department of Primary Education  
Faculty of Education  
University of Botswana, Botswana

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, there have been a number of innovations and reforms aimed at making education relevant to the needs of the society. Despite the premium placed on education, there continue to be challenging and persistent issues negatively affecting teacher education. One of these challenges is the generalist approach of primary schools whereby teachers teach all subjects in the curriculum. This is often a departure from their pre-service training where they were trained as specialists. The purpose of this study is to establish new teachers' perspectives on the role of subject specialization in Botswana Colleges of Education and the implications of this training for the professional development of those who did not specialize in languages. This study adopted a survey research design in which questionnaires were the main data collection instrument. This study targeted two primary schools in the Southern Region with a sample of twenty (20) beginning teachers (with Diploma Certificates in primary schools). Of this sample of twenty, ten (10) completed the questionnaires. The results of this study reveal that beginning teachers advocate for specialization in primary schools because it allows them an area they can teach with confidence. These teachers raised the issue of in-service development and support as a source of information on matters pertaining to language teaching because for those who did not specialize in languages, teaching this complex subject is a challenge and can be highly demotivating.

**Keywords:** Teacher training, Primary Schools, Botswana Colleges of Education Generalist approach, Specialist approach.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Primary education in Botswana, both before and immediately after independence, was not treated as an important educational and societal foundation. This neglect manifested itself in terms of the resourcing. At independence, for instance, most of the country's primary teaching staff were employed without any training.

For most of those who qualified, entry into teacher training colleges required a Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLE). As reflected in the report of the National Commission of Education (1977) a decade after independence, as many as 81% of untrained teachers had completed standard seven, while 56% of trained teachers had completed standard seven to qualify for admission to a college of education (Republic of Botswana, 1977).

The Government of Botswana has since made efforts to improve the quality of primary education. During National Development Plan 5 and in line with the recommendations of the National Commission on Education (1975), primary education was accorded the highest priority within the education sector (Republic of Botswana, 1985). National Development Plan 6 also emphasized, inter-alia, raising the quality of primary education through the training of teachers. The government subsequently took initiative to invest in the training of teachers and the minimum entry qualification for training as a primary school teacher was raised initially to the Junior Certificate (JC) and later to the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) and the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE). Training for the Diploma Certificate in Primary Education is three years in duration the colleges conferring this accreditation are affiliated with the University of Botswana and so all teachers are trained in programmes validated by the University. Successfully completing teaching practice is a Diploma requirement, as is completing the core courses of the program. The University of Botswana also offers Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degrees in Primary Education. Entrants to the B.Ed. Primary must be teachers with several years of professional experience in primary schools (National Report, 1996).

All primary school teachers are now required to have a Diploma in Primary Education. Those possessing lesser qualifications are required to undergo an upgrading course to acquire the Diploma Certificate. For in-service teachers, upgrading to a Diploma Certificate is offered through the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Botswana. This is generally an in-service upgrading course for primary school teachers holding the Primary Teachers Certificate (PTC), which has been phased out.

In the thirty years since independence, very little training has been provided to prepare teachers to teach as generalists in primary schools given that their training focuses on subject specialization. The general public, and teachers in particular, are thus concerned about the quality of teaching and learning in Botswana primary schools. This concern emanates, in part, from the unsatisfactory pass rate in the PSLE, which is used to assess the performance of primary schools in Botswana. As Section 4.8.35 of the Report of the National Commission on Education (1993) notes, “one factor that both teachers and the general public consider to affect the quality of teaching and learning at primary level is the generalist teacher”. This study is thus interested in teachers’ perceptions of the specialist preparation they received in their respective Colleges of Education. This is an area of research that has been thus far neglected and one that could make an important contribution to the development and improvement of programmes and courses at Colleges of Education across Botswana. While what follows is only an initial small scale study, it is hoped that it will set the stage for more wide ranging and in-depth research with all newly qualified teachers in Botswana primary schools.

## **Research Questions**

- What are the views of primary school teachers on subject specialization in Colleges of Education?
- What are the views of teachers on teaching as subject generalists early in their career?
- What are the challenges facing teachers who did not specialize in languages (English and Setswana) but are teaching these subjects?
- To what extent is the content proficiency of teachers as generalists developed in schools?
- What further training do new teachers believe is needed for their professional development?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Curriculum Implications on Teacher Training**

Teacher education is an important component of any educational system charged with the training of teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills need to lead in the classroom (Lamb, 1995; Roberts, 1998). The education system in Botswana has, however, been performing this task within the limits of training teachers as specialists. In other words, a trainee upon completing the Diploma programme, which is the minimum requirement for teachers in primary schools, should be able to display his/her intellectual abilities in the teaching of two subject. For those who specialize in

languages, these two subjects are English and Setswana. Subject specialization is thought to make an individual more relevant, efficient and effective in his/her teaching endeavor. The thoroughness with which such a person will be displaying his/her expertise or teaching skills will be so profound that will reveal a high level of knowledge, understanding and mastery of the subject matter (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001).

An examination of Botswana primary schools reveals the proliferation of a generalist approach, contrary to the objectives and structure of teacher education programmes. This is an obvious barrier to achieving basic education excellence. One simply cannot a teacher to efficiently teach all school subjects across the curriculum (Sharpe, 2001). Its adverse effect on the thoroughness, mastery, skills and efficiency with which subjects are taught cannot be over emphasized. This assessment is reiterated by Sibanda and Madome (2000) in their observation that the generalist approach has begun to have an adverse effect on the minor subjects taught by generalist teachers in primary education.

A recent study by Nthobatsang (2000) investigated the impact of the introduction of a Diploma programme to primary teachers training with various stakeholders including a small number of Diploma graduates. The graduates reported that the Diploma programme had prepared them well in the subjects that they selected as their majors and that it had improved their overall classroom instruction. They felt, not surprisingly, that specialization should be the preferred instructional method in primary schools. Sharpe, (2001) agrees with this position and highlights three particular advantages of specialization in terms of language instruction: the production of language experts, the introduction of linguistic role models in schools, and the correct teaching of intonation and pronunciation. Specialist teachers are thus able to use target language spontaneously as they have knowledge of the linguistic and cultural context and plan lessons from a point of full knowledge of the target language.

### **Teachers' Beliefs in Pre-service Training**

Research has shown that the education of pre-service primary teachers is a pertinent focus in efforts to achieve education reform. Despite the debate as to whether current teachers can change the context of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), it is worth noting that College of Education lecturers are important in terms of assisting pre-service teachers to become agents of ESL education reform (Brown, 1995; Sharpe, 2001). These lecturers in turn acknowledge that primary teachers, whether or not they have a specialized background in teaching ESL, hold the key to properly teaching the existing ESL curriculum if they are adequately educated themselves (Brown, 1995).

Delivering and implementing effective programmes for change for second language teachers must include collaboration, as collaboration supports the change process, lessens the fear of risk taking, and provides a forum for analysis of what works and what does not for new teachers (Brandon, Moorad, Bogopa & Dambe, 1998; Sharpe, 2001).

However, if teachers still teach as generalist across the curriculum after training as specialists in their subject areas then, the government of Botswana has to change the education policy in order to support teachers and ensure enhanced professional development (Brandon et al. 1998).

Teachers possess an extensive array of complex beliefs and pedagogical preferences and perspectives (Borg, 2003; Johnson, 1994). Their complex beliefs form a structured set of principles, and have been formed as a result of a teacher's prior experiences, both before and after training, school practices, and a teacher's individual personality (Borg, 2003). Teachers' behaviours in the classroom are said to be governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve to act as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions made. In English as a Second Language instruction, there has been a growing realization of the need to understand and account for the underlying belief systems of language teachers and the impact these have on their classroom. Research has thus established that the aim of training pre-service teachers must be to develop their professional reasoning ability, rather than helping them to acquire pre-defined behaviors (Akyeampong, 2003).

### **Support Services Needed for the Professional Development of Beginning Teachers**

Researchers have acknowledged that teaching is a dynamic process requiring teachers to constantly review their practice. In-service programmes and support programmes are two of the means through which teachers can examine their classroom practices and enhance their professional growth (Richards & Nunan, 1990; Richards, 1998; Richards & Farrell, 2005). In-service programmes offer teachers the opportunity to find solutions to the classroom challenges they encounter. In-services are also seen to involve attempts to change the way teachers undertake the task of teaching. The government of Botswana appreciates the ever-changing challenges of teaching and is of view that "teaching is a dynamic field with new methods, techniques and curriculum evolving all the time. Thus teachers need constant in-

service training if they are to keep up with developments in education” (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 57). A study by Irvin and Tombale (1997), demonstrates that in-service training through school-based workshops offers several advantages particularly that they are contextual as they are based on the needs identified by the teachers themselves. They are cost effective, as there are no accommodation and travel expenses, and tend to be managed by teachers thus enhancing ownership and commitment. A study by Lamb (1995) designed to follow-up on an in-service course undertaken a year earlier revealed, however, that the ideas presented to teachers during the in-service training were not ultimately used by teachers, but instead remained theoretical issues with no direct bearing on classroom teaching.

In addition to in-service formats for the development of new teachers, researchers have identified a number of other approaches including mentoring, peer teaching, modeled lessons, observations and journaling (Richards & Farrell, 2005). These formats have the advantage of being able to reach and impact a relatively large numbers of teachers efficiently and economically (Richards & Nunan, 1990). Mentoring is the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. In education, the value of mentoring has been recognized by teachers and other professionals in the one-on-one instructional educational instruction of students. It is equally important that new teachers are surrounded by people who are passionate about the profession because it helps them to feel included rather than isolated. It is also important that new teachers have opportunities to connect with colleagues who possess effective strategies and are well informed professionally (Bailey et al. 2001). In terms of the networking needs of new teachers, Bell and Gilbert (1996) have noted that new teachers “seek new teaching ideas, new resources and equipment to improve the learning of their students. They seek to improve their teaching skills, their knowledge about the subjects they are teaching (p. 1).

Peer observation improves the teaching skills of new teachers and according to Bailey et al. (2001), “is an excellent way to break down barriers and begin conversations that lead to professional development” (p.157). When a new teacher is present in another teacher’s classroom, it is an opportunity to observe and learn firsthand how to best address common classroom, learning and student behaviour challenges. In Hong Kong schools, the main advantage of peer observation relates to class size. It is common in Hong Kong schools to have more than 40 learners in a classroom and so peer observation helps new teachers learn how to manage such large groups of learners (Bailey et al. 2001). Peer teaching, on the other hand, offers both teachers involved a model to observe in the classroom and an opportunity to develop critical decision-making skills (Freeman & Richards, 1996).

Modeled lessons are very important for new teachers and the literature shows that teachers need effective teaching practices to model (Bailey et al. 2001). Such modeling demonstrates teaching knowledge, syllabus implementation, and the teaching of language subjects. Through modeled teaching, new teachers can come to understand another’s reasoning, motivations, approaches and outcomes. They are also able to witness enthusiasm for teaching and ways of coping with the demands of teaching (Bell & Gilbert, 1996).

### **Resources Needed for the Professional Development of Generalist Teachers**

Teaching resources in the form of textbooks often represent the hidden curriculum and thus play a significant part in the process of teaching and learning. Textbooks, in other words, have an impact on teachers and teaching (Sharpe, 2001; Richards, 1998). While some ESL teacher guides are only concerned with course content, some serve as thorough training manuals for new teachers with detailed information that goes well beyond course material. For the new teachers, textbooks and teaching guides are thus central resources and if not available or not available in sufficient quantities, hinder teaching and learning.

Classroom resources must be adequate enough to provide learners with the skills needed to be competent in language learning. According to Driscoll and Frost (1999), language competence grows incrementally through the interaction of reading, writing and talking. Sharpe (2001) concurs, noting that with “a range of resources and employing extravagant gestures, vivid actions and animated facial expression, the teacher communicates to the children the imaginary L2 context and introduces the appropriate language items” (p. 154). Classroom resources are thus crucial and must be able to be accessed by all learners in a class rather than shared. Small class size is likewise important because it improves and maintains good teacher-pupil relationships. It increases a teacher’s knowledge of each child’s needs and monitoring their learning becomes easy. Computer use and radio lessons also enhance language teaching and learning. In this context, the Internet is described as “a dynamic, ever changing source of ideas and materials for teachers and resources for use with pupils” (Cajkler & Addelman, 2000, p. 176).

## **METHOD**

This study adopted a quantitative approach within the umbrella of the positivist paradigm. This study employed a questionnaire (see to Appendix 1) where all participants were asked the same questions (Creswell, 2005). This approach is inclined to produce results that can be generalized to all new teachers in the population. An open-ended questionnaire was used because according to Wiersma and Jurs, (2005), it encourages full and meaningful answers based on participants' own knowledge and feelings as they are free from most restrictions. Furthermore, the questions tend to be more objective and less leading (Richards, 2003). By then analyzing the data descriptively, the researcher sought to gain additional information to better identify problems with current generalist practices of teaching, determine what others in similar situations are doing and assess what teachers feel should be done to improve the situation. As observed by Gorard (2004), "figures can be very persuasive to policymakers whereas stories are more easily remembered and repeated by them for illustrative purposes" (p. 7).

### **Population**

The population of this study consists of new primary school teachers who graduated from Colleges of Education with Diploma certificates. New teachers were chosen because we know that during their training specialized in two subjects, a major and a minor, whereas upon starting to teach they found themselves responsible for all curriculum subjects regardless of their area of their expertise.

### **Sample**

The proposed sample for this study was a stratified one so as to cover new male and female teachers in a variety of typical Botswana schools in urban, semi-rural and rural village areas. Due to various resource constraints, however, this proved impossible. The actual sample consisted of twenty teachers from two schools in Gaborone, which is urban in Botswana. From the two schools chosen for convenience, a systematic simple random sampling procedure was used to reach a desired sample size (Creswell, 2002). One new teacher with a Diploma Certificate was chosen from each stream (Standards 1-7).

### **Methods**

A questionnaire was used in this study. It elicited information on new teachers' qualifications, training experiences at Colleges of Education and concerns about how their training has affected their professional development in the content area of the minor subjects that they must teach, especially teachers whose minor subjects are English and Setswana. The questionnaire is comprised of open ended questions, limited response questions and a few Likert-type statements where the participants had to circle the most appropriate answer (Bell, 1999). The return rate of the questionnaire was fifty per cent. Out of twenty questionnaires, ten were returned with responses that helped the researcher acquire the required data for the study.

### **Piloting of the Instrument**

The questionnaire was piloted/pre-tested with two new teachers not included in the sample. The pre-test helped to ensure that questions and instructions were clear and allowed the researcher to remove items that did not yield usable data" (Bell, 1999, p. 128). Minor changes were made as a result of feedback from this pre-test.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The head teachers of each school were approached by the researcher and shown a copy of the questionnaire. They were also given a brief verbal and written rationale for the research and asked to select a time when all new teachers who hold a Diploma Certificate would be available to meet with the researcher to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire allowed the participants to express their opinions anonymously.

## RESULTS

The results of the study are presented below by interpreting each question descriptively and using examples of participants' responses to illustrate their views. Some of the data is presented in tables for quicker understanding.

### Section A: Background Information

Table 1: Personal Information

1. Age	Number of Teachers
23-27	9
28-33	1
2. First Year of Teaching	
2006	4
2007	6

Participants' age and first year of teaching were included in the study to establish if the participants completed teacher training after completing COSC or whether they remained for some time without formal training. The results revealed that the majority of the participants were young and with only one year of experience in the teaching field thus giving an accurate representation of new teachers.

### Section B: Previous Training

Table 2: Previous Training

Questions	Very Well	Quite Well	Not Very Well	Badly	No Response
(6) How well do you feel that the content portion of your major subjects prepared you for teaching at school?	3	6	1	0	0
(7) How well do you feel that the content portion of your minor (English and Setswana) subjects prepared you for teaching at school?	1	3	5	1	0

In terms of how they were trained, the majority considered the content of the major subject training to be good (Q. 6). The majority did, however, feel that their minor training was inadequate (Q. 7) It is possible that responses here may have been explained further if there was a follow-up question.

### Section C: Current Professional Training needed in the Workplace

With regards to the problems faced when teaching languages (Q. 8), two main issues were identified relating to methods/techniques and interpreting course objectives. Four participants commented on the lack of awareness of appropriate teaching methods/techniques. One respondent noted that:

“Identifying appropriate teaching methods, focusing on the specific objectives, and developing the language skills is difficult.”

Another respondent seemed to be aware of certain specific areas where training in methods was required:

“Training is needed in specific techniques on teaching how to write and mark compositions as well as preparing for English radio lessons.”

Four participants commented on the lack of competence of interpretation and preparation of relevant content for specific objectives. One respondent noted that the selection and matching of objectives was complicated:

“Dealing with general and specific objectives is tricky and it is not easy to select and match them with appropriate language skills”.

Issues relating to the teaching of grammar, composition, and reading and listening comprehension were raised as a serious problems, as one has to follow a series of predetermined steps when teaching them. One respondent articulated concern with the procedure one has to follow when teaching languages:

“Techniques/methods used in teaching grammar, comprehension and compositions is a challenge which is frustrating” .

With regards to resources used to teach languages (Q. 9), two main issues were raised around the accessibility and availability of resources. Six participants pointed out that resources have not been made easy for them to access. One respondent noted in terms of ineffective management:

“The few resources used are not stored where teachers can access them easily because they are only issued by Head of Department for Languages”.

Another respondent pointed out that even the resources that are available are not always in good condition:

“Some of the radios are not working and one would find out when it is time for the radio lesson and sometimes they do not have batteries”.

Four participants were of the opinion that there is shortage of resources as the number of materials are insufficient for large classes thus making teaching difficult:

“Teachers share teachers’ guides while learners share a textbook in a group”.

Regarding the challenges they face as beginning teachers (Q. 12), three main issues were raised relating to teaching as generalists, a lack of resource materials and a lack of in-service development. Three participants mentioned that they do not enjoy teaching as generalists. One respondent commented that the content of her minor subjects did not prepare her to teach as a generalist teacher:

“I did not get enough content and methodological foundations to handle language subjects”.

Three participants commented on the lack of resource materials as a challenge that hinders teaching and learning. The comment below shows that computers would be an ideal resource:

“Have no access to computers to research for content and techniques that one could use in teaching and it is not possible to photocopy the material for each learner to have a copy” .

Three participants remarked that they do not receive sufficient in-service development and support from policymakers and school management. One respondent commented on the value she placed on such support services:

“Provided with very little support from the school and Policy makers, which is really frustrating and de-motivating. Mentoring could have been ideal for the first two months to boost my confidence”.

One participant identified teaching languages in large classes as a challenge as it is difficult to address unique learning needs and to teach large groups with confidence. One respondent was quite aware of the pitfalls associated with teaching a large class as it limits her ability to offer learners individual assistance:

“Teaching of large classes of 40-45 learners in a class makes it difficult to cater for every child’s learning needs”.

Table 3: Development Support needed by Language Teachers

Support Services needed by Language Teachers	Number of Teachers
(a). Mentoring	3
(b). Peer teaching	3
(c). Modeled lessons	3
(d). Observation	1

As Table 3 shows, teachers were equally in favour of three methods of support but were less keen on observation. They provided a number of reasons for their choices (Q. 13). With regard to mentoring, one respondent, referred to the need for moral support as well as professional guidance:

“Language teachers have to guide and advise us on how to teach language subjects as well as give us moral support, in fact they should be mentoring us and providing us with feedback on how we teach.”

For those who favored peer teaching and modeled lessons, the idea of emulating language teachers was clearly significant. One respondent was aware that assistance from language teachers is vital in their situation:

“Learning how to prepare a lesson plan would be helpful as well as how to handle learners with reading problems as there are reading strategies used in languages” .

One respondent highlighted the importance of collaborative teaching and having time to discuss feedback after the lesson:

“Watching a modeled lesson and having time to discuss my strengths and weaknesses after the lessons is very crucial in teaching.”

With regards to changing the education and training curriculum for pre-service teachers, all participants favored the current curriculum. One respondent did comment on the need for specialization in primary schools:

“Training is devoted in producing subject specialists. The main problem lies with the policy of the Ministry of Education of teaching as generalists. Therefore, the change should be subject specialization in schools.”

On Questions 15 and 16 on development support in the form of short courses and further training, the comments repeated much of what was said on the need for training in the work place in the form of in-service and school based workshops. One respondent was of the view that on-the-job training was vital in the areas that new teachers lacked expertise:

“In-service and school based workshops where I could be helped on how to deal with the specific objectives, language skills and learn how to teach remedial reading lessons and appropriate methods/ approaches for teaching Languages.”

Another respondent noted that further training was important to developing teachers professionally:

“Training into Bachelor of Education degree should be a continuation from Diploma without a break in order to produce fully effective and competent language teachers.”

With regards to support services from schools for new teachers (Q. 17), two issues were raised relating to school based workshops and orientation by the senior management team. One respondent was quite dissatisfied with the support services provided by the school:



“School based workshop was done once on how to write a lesson plan and I felt that there was a need for a modeled English and Setswana lessons by language teachers”.

“We had a general orientation of the school management where we were promised team work and cooperation. I felt that team work meant working closely with languages department of which is not the case. It is difficult to teach language subjects” (Marea).

With regards to whether primary schools need teaching specialists rather than generalists (Q.20), the issue of subject specialization was raised by all the participants. One respondent felt strongly that:

“I trained as a specialist teacher and should be teaching the major subjects only”.

“Teach as specialists because the subjects that I teach very well are those I did as my major subjects during pre-service training”.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of new teachers are satisfied with the way they were prepared to teach their major subjects but dissatisfied with their minor subject training. They thus feel more comfortable when teaching their major subjects, an area in which they have expertise and can show their mastery of the subject matter. This complements the results of the study by Nthobatsabang, (2000), and what Sharpe, (2001) terms the advantages of specialization. It is, of course, not possible for them to have the same degree of expertise for all subjects in the curriculum. On the other hand, their teaching skills as generalists need to be improved through ongoing professional development. New teachers also need a sense of belonging and knowledge that overtime they will make a difference not only in the learners they are teaching but also in the profession. There was one participant who felt that the curriculum of his major subject did not prepare him well even though it was the same curriculum as the other participants. This could have been explained further if there was a follow-up question to account for the response. This contradicts the work of Sharpe, (2001) and Bailey et al. (2001) who argue that after pre-service training, teachers should be able to display competence and confidence when teaching the curriculum of the subjects selected as their major.

New teachers whose minor subjects were languages felt that they needed professional training from the schools because they encounter problems when they have to use language-teaching methods. These teachers were not thoroughly trained in this area as experts during their pre-service education. On other words, the content portion of their minor did not prepare them adequately to teach languages. They thus noted serious problems when it comes to selecting and preparing relevant content for specific objectives, teaching composition/essay writing and reading/listening comprehension. For many, even though they use the target language and plan in the cultural context as indicated by Sharpe (2001), the lack of methodological foundations for teaching languages is a challenge. Teachers' current situation thus often forces them to depend on their assumptions and beliefs when teaching English and Setswana. This can lead to a mismatch between activities selected by the teacher and the purpose for which they are intended (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). This, the under-training of language teachers, has been identified as one of the factors affecting “the quality of teaching and learning” (Report on National Commission on Education, 1993, section 4.8.35). Consequently, it will have an impact on their implementation of the entire language curriculum.

This study has also found obvious discontent with regards to teaching resources in that these are generally adequate and those that are available are not easily accessed by teachers. Insufficient textbooks, teachers' guides and radios for use in classrooms, and difficulties accessing computers for researching content for lessons were causes for concern. Teachers are often urged during their training to use such resource materials and so enthusiasm is quickly dampened when it becomes apparent that they are not available or not available in sufficient quantities. As Richards (1998) points out, textbooks can help inexperienced teachers to develop skills in teaching. These resources are thus contributing factors to teachers' professional development and subsequently student learning.

The issue of teaching large classes was also raised as a constraint given that it is difficult in such situations to establish language learning levels and offer individual assistance. Large classes thus hindered the achievement of learning across the curriculum as English is the primary language of instruction. If language learning objectives in English classes are not achieved because of class size, then learners will likely retain problems in comprehension and composition, crucial for all the subjects in the curriculum.

In terms of the training needed by new teachers for their professional development, most of the participants felt they needed professional support in the form of mentoring, modeled lessons and peer teaching. Their views are supported by the theories surrounding the importance of in-service development and support services as articulated by Richards and Farrell (2005), Bailey et al. (2001), Freeman and Richards (1996), and Richards and Nunan (1990). The teachers in this study felt that such services would help them to adjust to the demands of teaching language subjects, address difficulties that may arise in the classroom, and provide a model to emulate in teaching. Such models would, in turn, assist and enable them to gather varied ideas on how to engage their learners and develop content proficiency when teaching minor subjects. Most of the participants also revealed that they need guidance and moral support from teachers who specialize in languages in order to help them to combat negative attitudes towards language teaching. In some instances, having another teacher in the classroom can offer a helpful second point of view, something that is good for the professional development for both teachers. When teachers receive these types of support it helps them to remain passionate about their work.

In terms of more structured or formal training, new teachers in this study highlighted the need for school-based workshops where language curriculum issues, such as specific objectives, language skills, remedial reading, and appropriate methods for teaching languages, are addressed. Some felt that training in the Bachelor of Education degree should be in many ways a direct continuation of Diploma training so as to produce highly competent and robust language teachers trained with a communicative competence approach, the central goal of which is to enable learners to communicate efficiently using the target language for real purposes (Brandon et al. 1998). Unfortunately, it is not always easy for teachers to continue their training in a Bachelor of Education program because of the procedure used to select teachers for further education.

All of the participants in this study advocated for subject specialization in primary schools. They felt that teaching the subjects they are most proficient in would improve the quality of education and PSLE results as it has been observed that the teaching of minor subjects is creating adverse effects in primary education (Sibanda & Madome, 2000). The main obstacle here is lack of content proficiency in the minor subjects as schools have not put professional development mechanisms in place that would help new teachers to improve their minor subject knowledge. With subject specialization, teachers become competent in only the subjects they specialize in (major in) as there is a relationship between the depth of subject knowledge and the quality of the teaching process. This is supported by Driscoll and Frost (1999) who note that “one important factor which distinguishes the specialist from the generalist teacher is that the former has gained considerable proficiency and competency in the target language, through higher academic study” (pg. 28). There is thus no compelling reason why subject specialization should not be encouraged in primary schools considering the broad nature of primary education curriculum.

## **Implications**

The aim of this research study was to determine new teachers’ perspectives on the role of subject specialization during their training and the impact it has on their professional development. The results of this study have shown that new teachers lack the methodological foundations, support services and resources needed to effectively teach languages.

The pre-service curriculum needs to be structured in such a way that it incorporates the theoretical and practical components of language teaching as major subjects for all students if they are expected to teach as generalists. Following this, support services, adequate resources and professional development must be put in place by policymakers and school administrators to ensure the ongoing and relevant professional development of new teachers. Given that the teacher education programme is already tailored toward subject specialization in Botswana, the government must embrace subject specialization in schools and strive to employ more teachers who have been trained in Colleges of Education in order to have a sufficient number of specialized teachers in schools.

The findings of this study should be of interest to policymakers, College of Education lecturers and the Ministry of Education as an important starting point for considering the shift to subject specialization in primary schools. At the same time, the researcher recognizes that this is a preliminary research study situated in one urban area and carried out in schools sharing significant similarities and therefore care must be taken when generalizing the findings to all new teachers holding a Diploma Certificate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of this study suggest that a generalist approach wherein a teacher teaches all subjects is a key-contributing factor in the low quality of education in primary schools. This finding is in line with evidence presented in the

literature review, which suggests that subject specialization allows for efficiency, effectiveness and thoroughness in the teaching of subject matter. Languages are the foundation for all subjects taught in the curriculum and if not taught well, the learner's performance in all subject areas may suffer.

It is worth noting that the generalist approach has been widely used in Botswana. If it had been successful there would not be little concern from the general public about the unsatisfactory pass rate in PSLE. Subject specialization allows teachers to teach subjects which they are most proficient in and if provided with learning and teaching resources, to produce better results. Pass rates at any level of education are an important test of national progress towards achieving quality in education. Achievements in learning in turn inform us of the impact our schools are making in terms of nationally desired knowledge, skills and attitudes.

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<sup>i</sup> Rosinah Thando Mokotedi is a lecturer in the Department of Primary Education, University of Botswana. She teaches courses in language Education. Rosinah holds the following qualifications: B.Ed. Languages (University of Botswana), M.Ed. TESOL (Newcastle UPON Tyne, UK). Her research interests are in approaches to language teaching and learning, children's literature, language acquisition, academic literacy and teaching reading in a Second Language. She can be reached via Email: [mokotedir@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:mokotedir@mopipi.ub.bw).