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Students' Perception of the Teaching Profession as an Antecedent to Sustainability in Teacher Education

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Abstract

This paper explores students' perception of the teaching profession as an antecedent of sustainability in teacher education in Kenya. Sustainability and sustainable development have increasingly become critical issues in teacher education and development. Since sustainable development in education is impossible without the professional competence of teachers, there has been growing pressure for the reorientation of teacher education all over the world and Kenya in particular. However, referent literature indicates that scholars have not examined the extent to which the transformations in higher learning in Kenya have integrated sustainability. The present research focused on the socio-psychological model of sustainable behaviour. The study utilised e*x post facto* cross-sectional design and purposive sampling methods were used to select four institutions of higher learning in Kenya. A structured self-response questionnaire and interview schedule. The researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse quantitative data using statistical tools using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. A sample of 376 respondents filled the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 94%. The observed mean age was 22 years, with a standard deviation of 2.23. Among respondents, 216(57.4%) were male while 160(42.6%) we female. Research findings indicate that high 220(59%) percentages of respondents perceived sustainability in teacher education, followed by moderate 148(39%) with a combined perception level of 98%. The findings present an implication that the idea of sustainability in teacher education has great potential for future developments in the programme. These study findings present significant implications for teacher preparation strategies for sustainable development in education. The findings also shed light on the state of preparedness as well as advances made in Kenyan higher education in compliance with global trends in best practices for teacher education in the face of sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable education; teacher preparation; higher learning; 21st-century skills; transformative pedagogy

Introduction

According to Barth, Michelsen, Rieckmann, and Thomas (2016), teacher education features prominently in recent academic research and publications on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) concerning the themes covered in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4.7. Besides, teacher education has increasingly recognised the need to respond to the economic, social, cultural and political challenges taking place globally. For example, the changing cultural composition of many societies has led to many countries, including inter-cultural competencies, within their training of teachers (Cushner, 2011, 2012; Grant & Portera, 2011). Several factors, such as the increasingly multicultural nature of societies and the work of international development organisations, have resulted in increased interest in global citizenship and development education (Baily, O'Flaherty, & Hogan 2017). Research places greater importance on pointing out the inequalities that exist in the world and the role we all play in causing or

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preventing such inequalities (Liddy & Parker-Jenkins 2013). The Sustainable Development Goals decided by the United Nations include a goal centred on learners gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

Studies from European and US scholars present extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motives for choosing a teaching career (Balyer & Özcan 2014; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Thomson, Turner, & Nietfeld 2012; Yüce *et al*. 2013). Psychologists view aspects not inherent in the immediate work, such as salary, status, and working conditions as extrinsic motives involve. On the other hand, inherent aspects, relating to the meaning of teaching and the passion for teaching, subject knowledge and expertise are intrinsic motives. Altruistic motives entail perceptions of teaching as a valuable and important profession and the desires to support children's development and to make a difference in society. Intrinsic and altruistic reasons seem to be more frequent in what are termed 'developed countries' than in developing countries, where extrinsic reasons are more prominent (Watt et al. 2012). Likewise, Klassen et al. (2011) claim that motives for entering teacher education differ based on cultural background and accordingly, there is no universal pattern of motives.

Sustainability and sustainable development have increasingly become critical issues in teacher education and development. Since sustainable development in education is impossible without the professional competence of teachers, there has been growing pressure for the reorientation of teacher education all over the world and Kenya in particular. However, referent literature indicates that scholars have not examined the extent to which the transformations in higher learning in Kenya have integrated sustainability. This paper explores students' perception of the teaching profession as an antecedent of sustainability in teacher education in Kenya. In this paper, we focus on assessment of the perception of the teaching profession across universities in Kenyan universities. Moreover, we also explore the influence of demographic characteristics on the perception of the teaching profession across universities in Kenyan

Literature Review

Alkhawaldeh (2017) argued that teacher education for sustainable development is an educational paradigm that considers life-long professional development and learning of teachers as the central hub of teaching practice. Sustainability and sustainable development have recently become widely discussed in the educational arena, in general, and in teacher education and development, in particular. For example, Salīte (2015) called for the reorientation of teacher education towards sustainable development. The core aspect of the debate on the sustainable professional development of teachers is a shift from the traditional one to more school-based teacher professional development. Recently, sustainable education and teacher education integration into the broader system of higher education and teacher education milieu have attracted the attention of policymakers, educationists and researchers. Teachers are urged to equip themselves with new skills and high standard professional knowledge to assume new roles and responsibilities in sustainable education in their societies (Kabadayi, 2016). Sustainable development in teacher education calls for a paradigm shift to focus on transformative models of education. The 21st-century demands for humanity have changed since the world we live in is

more globalised than before (Bell, 2016). With this new trend in teacher education, teachers are mainly required to exhibit teacher renewal and professionalism.

According to McDiarmid (2008), the continuum of teacher learning, as well as teacher education, turns out to be indispensable in a lifelong learning process which implies the demand for extended teacher professionalism. Teacher education and learning, which forms the premise for the present study, should continue through the whole teacher development and should feature all teacher experiences during career-long learning.

Eslamian, Jafari, and Neyestani (2017) claim that nowadays, educational systems have an essential mission for responding to the needs of different communities. The complex organisational nature of educational centres, accompanied by evolving pedagogies, requires multiple professional development strategies (Mohammadi & Moradi, 2017). The professional competence of teachers is the nexus for sustainable development of teacher education. Special attention should also centre on the training of teachers, youth leaders and other educators (UNESCO, 2005). In this way, the problem of improving the teacher's professional competence is relevant in terms of sustainable development of education (Korsun, 2017), and for educational improvement, teacher professionalism is essential (Reid & Horváthová, 2016). Yoo (2016) has argued that to ensure sustainable development, educators should focus on studies related to teacher programmes.

Continuous professional development is necessary to help teachers understand sustainable development concepts as well as issues and help become effective mentors for sustainable education. It requires teachers to be learners, researchers, and collaborators, to reflect on their teaching practices and improve professional proficiency (Mohammadi & Moradi, 2017). Kabadayi (2016) argued that understanding teachers' professional proficiency and their training needs could lead to more responsive teacher education programmes.

The Concept of Sustainability

According to Gaudiano, Meira-Cartea and Martínez-Fernández (2015), the incorporation of sustainability into Higher Education institutions is a relatively new process. Its history traces back to the foundation of the Environmental Sciences Formation International Center in 1975. Then in 1985, the University and Environment in Latin America and Caribbean Seminary was founded in Bogotá, Colombia. However, despite progress, sustainable development is not yet a finished concept. Sustainable development is the development that addresses the current generation's needs, without compromising the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs (UNESCO, 2017). It is a paradigm to think in a future where the environmental, social and economic considerations balance with the search for better life quality.

The sustainable development concept initially had a political connotation. Later, "sustainability" was used in a more critical sense lost over time. Some IES conventionally used either concept, without considering the implications (Gaudiano, Meira-Cartea and Martínez-Fernández, 2015; Martínez-Fernández & Gaudiano, 2015). According to Gutiérrez and Martínez (2010), the emphasis was first on the environment, but sustainable development now emphasises social,

economic, political and religious dimensions. As these polysemic concepts of sustainable development and sustainability developed, environmental education emerged as a strategy to understand and address the growing environmental problems.

Methodology

Research Design of the Study

This study was a mixed-method study that included qualitative and quantitative data. The study was quantitative and utilised an *ex post facto* cross-sectional survey design. The purpose of the inferential approach was to provide data from which to compute and examine correlations and the relationship between variables. Kothari (2014) suggests the use of *ex post facto* design in studies which the researcher does not manipulate the variables under study, which was the case in the present study. The cross-sectional survey design was appropriate for this study because the researcher collected data from a cross-section of sampled universities.

Location of the Study

The researcher conducted the study in selected institutions of higher learning in Nakuru, Laikipia and Kericho Counties in, Kenya. Each county consists of urban and rural regions where there is a cross-section of both private and public university campuses. With the establishment of a centralised university placement, the population in these institutions are not only cosmopolitan but also represent a cross-section of all communities in Kenya. The choice of the study location significantly enhanced the external validity of the study findings.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to generate a sample of 400 respondents. First, a stratified sampling procedure was used to group the target population into two strata based on university ownership. One stratum was public universities (4) and the other private universities (3). University ownership may present unique characteristics that might have implications on the research findings. The researcher stratified the target population to ensure heterogeneity in the final sample.

Instrumentation

In this study, the demographic items, sustainable teacher education scale and the sustainable distance learning scale. The Cronbach's alpha measured the reliability of the instrument by which was found to be 0.86. This value is above .7, so the questions used in this test can be considered reliable with the sample.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers obtained the required research authorisations before data collection commences. Data collection in each university took place in the same location to help improve the rate of return. After the sampling exercise, the data collection exercise began with a brief explanation of the aim of the study, followed by the distribution of the questionnaire. Questionnaires then were distributed to those willing to participate. The exercise ended when all the respondents returned the questionnaires to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Collected data was quantitative, and therefore data will be analysed in both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data analysis was done utilising statistical tools with the aid of computer software, SPSS version 25.0.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical principles are concerned with protecting the rights, dignity, and welfare of research participants (Baker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002). The critical areas for consideration within this study centred on anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent, voluntary participation of respondents and data handling and storage. The respondents were required to read the consent forms and acknowledge that they had understood what was involved in the study and that they were willing to participate. The respondents were assured of confidentiality through writing, indicating that the responses or data collected would not be presented in a way that would be identified with any respondent or university.

Results

A sample of 376 respondents filled the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 94%, which was considered suitable for survey research not only according to Babbie (1995, but also according to the findings of Asch and Colleagues (1997). The observed mean age was 22 years, with a standard deviation of 2.23. Among respondents, 216(57.4%) were male, while 160(42.6%) were female. It was also observed that 16(4.3%) of respondents were married, 356(94.7%) 'single', 4(1.1%) neither 'married' nor 'single', a category designated 'other'. Data revealed that 118(31.4%) of respondents were public, while 258(68.6%) were from private universities. It was observed that 297(79%) were in the full-time mode of the study compared to 79(21%) who were enrolled on online and distance learning. Data revealed that 250(66.5%) of the respondents were in the second year compared to 67(17.8%) who were in fourth, 35(9.3%) third, 19(5.1%) first while 5(1.3%) belonged to other years of study.

Perception of Teacher Education

Sustainability in teacher education was made operational through 11 items measuring the perceptions of respondents. Each was required to respond to a 5-point Likert scale measuring the level of agreement. The findings are presented in Table 1

Table 1 Respondents Perception of Teacher Education

	Level of agreement									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Item 1	72	19.1	32	8.5	32	8.5	20	5.3	220	58.5
Item 2	100	26.6	16	4.3	36	9.6	32	8.5	192	51.1
Item 3	192	51.1	16	4.3	32	8.5	24	6.4	112	29.8
Item 4	68	18.1	16	4.3	24	6.4	24	6.4	244	64.9
Item 5	60	16	28	7.4	52	13.8	28	7.4	208	55.3
Item 6	128	34	52	13.8	36	9.6	32	8.5	128	34
Item 7	68	18.1	32	8.5	32	8.5	32	8.5	212	56.4
Item 8	40	10.6	56	14.9	40	10.6	28	7.4	212	56.4
Item 9	52	13.8	20	5.3	40	10.6	32	8.5	232	61.7
Item 10	56	14.9	8	2.1	44	11.7	40	10.6	228	60.6
Item 11	16	4.3	24	6.4	24	6.4	68	18.1	244	64.9

The study findings presented a favourable implication for the perception of teacher education as currently constituted in Kenyan teacher preparation institutions. It was observed that high perception index was observed for many items measuring the perception of teacher education. Among sampled respondents, a 220(58.5%) presented an observed agreement level of 5 and 20(5.3%) at level 4 for item 1 which stated that *a career in education was my first choice for a university degree*. This is reflective of the findings by Ulrika, Stefan, Lena, and Annbritt (2018) who observed that among students, intrinsic and altruistic motives for choosing a career in education are frequent.

Respondents whose level of agreement with item 2 of the tool (*Given another chance I would still choose a career in education*) ranged above 4 accounted for a total of 151(59.6%) of the total sample. Ulrika, Stefan, Lena, and Annbritt (2018) observed that the students' own experiences at school form the basis for the expressed feelings concerning teaching and teacher education. The findings of this research concurred with the assertion of Pop and Turner (2009) expressed a similar view. This, in turn, play a significant role in the construction of pedagogic identities. A reasonable consequence of the difference between the teacher programmes is that the future upper secondary school teachers will try to recreate their positive experiences to a higher degree while compulsory school student teachers will seek to create a somewhat different school than the one they experienced. Thus, the pedagogic identities of the former group will function retrospectively and conservatively, and the pedagogic identities of the latter group will function progressively and autonomously, in a de-centred manner (Bernstein 2000). This explains the feeling that respondents would still choose the teaching programme had they been given another chance.

Respondents who felt that *teachers should be more appreciated in society* accounted for 24(6.4%) and 244(64.9%) at level 4 and 5 respectively, thus giving a total 71.3% of the high level of agreement. Environmental education is an essential element of sustainability and a core

component in teacher preparation. Respondents who perceived that importance accounted for 236(62.7%) comprising 28(7.4%) and 208(55.3%) at level 4 and 5 respectively, that *environmental education is an essential part of teacher training in our university*. An observed total of 64.9% of the sample scored high on the perception level of the fact that *all students can succeed in education*. Besides, an observed total of 63.8% of selected respondents highly agreed with the statement: *I am satisfied with the assessment strategies for the educational course at the university*. High perceptions were observed among respondents who felt that *it is easier to get a job with a degree in education,* 70.2% at level 4 and 5, respectively. Respondents who registered high levels of agreement with the statement that *Teacher education is relevant for national development* accounted for a total of 71.2%.

Finally, the highest scores were observed for respondents who felt that '*Teaching is a comfortable job'* 68(18.1%) presented agreement level 4 and 244(64.9%) were at level 5 giving a combined agreement of 83%. The perception of "comfortable" in the career of teaching was viewed in this study to imply a profession that was comparatively less stressful compared to other prospective careers. This could be attributed in part to school holidays, ample family time, perceived job security, and 'break' times that characterise daily routine. This is supported in research carried out among 157 teacher candidates in Turkey where it was observed that a significant proportion of respondents chose a teaching career because of the long holidays and comfortable working conditions (Cermik et al. 2010). The findings are also congruent with a study by Gao and Trent (2009) on the motivations of students from Mainland China enrolled in teacher education programs in Hong Kong, where it was established that students' choice of teaching career was based on the perception of the profession as pleasant and devoid of the complexities involved in other disciplines. However, the findings were at variance with the findings in a study by Foley and Murphy (2015) as well as Hassan, Jani, Som, Hamid, and Azzizam (2015) who reported that teaching is a stressful career.

Overall Perception of Teacher Education

A dummy variable that grouped the perception index to *low*, *moderate* and *high* was generated to explore the distribution of overall perception of sustainability in teacher education. Out of the 55 possible points comprising 11 items where each had five possible points, the transition points were <18 and >36 for *low* and *high* perception index respectively and *moderate* perception at >18<37. The frequencies for each category were run, and the results are presented in Figure 1

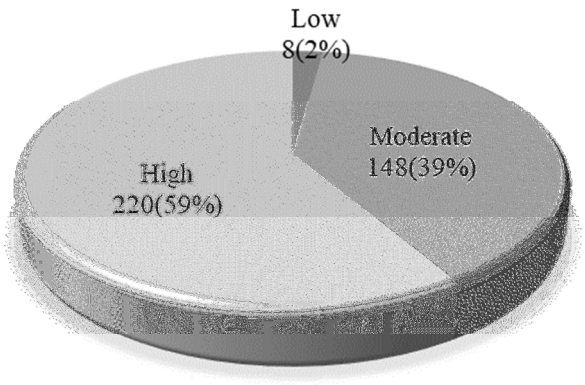

Figure 1: Overall Respondents Perception of Sustainability in Teacher Education (N = 376)

Data presented in Figure 1indciates that high percentages of respondents perceived sustainability in teacher education clustered around the *high* zone 220(59%) followed by *moderate* 148(39%) and then *low* 8(2%). Combining the *moderate* and *high* perception levels gives a total of 98% of respondents who felt that the model was viable. This presents an implication that the idea of sustainability in teacher education has great potential for future developments in the programme.

The Gender Factor in Perception of Teacher Education

In this study, gender was considered as an essential factor in the perception of teacher education. Analyses were, therefore grouped according to gender and the findings presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents Perception of Teacher Education by Gender

	Male (n = 216)			**Female (n = 160)**		
	Low	**Moderate**	**High**	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**
Item 1	56(26%)	16(7.4%)	144(76.7%)	48(30%)	16(10%)	96(60%)
Item 2	56(26%)	20(9.3%)	140(64.9%)	60(37.5%)	16(10%)	84(52.5%)
Item 3	104(48.1%)	20(9.3%)	92(42.6%)	104(65%)	12(7.5%)	44(27.5%)
Item 4	48(22.3%)	12(5.6%)	156(72.2%)	36(22.5%)	12(7.5%)	112(70%)
Item 5	44(20.4%)	36(16.7%)	136(63%)	44(27.5%)	16(10%)	100(62.5%)
Item 6	96(44.4%)	20(9.3%)	100(46.3%)	84(52.5%)	16(10%)	60(37.5%)
Item 7	48(22.2%)	28(13%)	140(64.9%)	52(32.5%)	4(2.5%)	104(65%)
Item 8	44(20.4%)	24(11.1%)	148(68.6%)	52(32.5%)	16(10%)	92(57.5%)
Item 9	32(14.8%)	20(9.3%)	164(76%)	40(25%)	20(12.5%)	100(62.5%)
Item 10	28(13%)	12(5.6%)	176(81.5%)	36(22.5%)	32(20%)	92(57.5%)
Item 11	16(7.5%)	16(7.4%)	184(85.2%)	36(22.5%)	12(7.5%)	112(70%)

Data presented in Table 2 indicates that male respondents presented higher percentages on items measuring the perception of teacher education.

Perception of Teacher Education and Type of University

The researcher set out to explore how respondents' placement influence their perception of teacher education. The placement was operationalised as either public or private universities. Analyses were, therefore grouped according to the category of the university and the findings presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Distribution of Respondents Perception of Teacher Education by Type of University

	Public (n = 118)			Private (n = 258)		
	Low	**Moderate**	**High**	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**
Item 1	36(30.5%)	15(13%)	67(56.7%)	68(26.3%)	17(6.6%)	173(67.1%)
Item 2	40(33.9%)	11(9.3%)	67(56.8%)	76(29.5%)	25(9.7%)	157(60.9%)
Item 3	62(52.6%)	13(11%)	43(36.4%)	146(56.6%)	19(7.4%)	93(36.1%)
Item 4	28(23.7%)	6(5.1%)	84(71.2%)	56(21.7%)	18(7%)	184(71.3%)
Item 5	28(23.8%)	17(14%)	73(61.8%)	60(23.2%)	35(14%)	163(63.1%)
Item 6	56(47.4%)	11(9.3%)	51(43.2%)	124(48.1%)	25(9.7%)	109(42.3%)
Item 7	34(28.8%)	12(10%)	72(61%)	66(25.5%)	20(7.8%)	172(66.7%)
Item 8	29(24.6%)	16(14%)	73(61.9%)	67(26%)	24(9.3%)	167(64.7%)
Item 9	16(13.6%)	14(12%)	88(74.6%)	56(21.7%)	26(10%)	176(68.2%)
Item 10	23(19.5%)	12(10%)	83(70.4%)	41(15.9%)	32(12%)	185(71.7%)
Item 11	28(23.7%)	6(5.1%)	84(71.2%)	56(21.7%)	18(7%)	184(71.3%)

Table 3 presents equal proportions of responses concerning the perception of teacher education and the type of university. A cursory inspection shows that both private and public universities respondents showed a similar perception of teacher education.

Correlation Matrix for Teacher Education by Demographic Characteristics

A correlation analysis was done for the various demographic variables taken to be critical factors in the perception of teacher education. The findings are presented in Table 4

Table 3

Correlation Matrix for Teacher Education by Demographic Characteristics

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	Coefficient					
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
2. Marital Status	Coefficient	-.165**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001				
3. Type of University	Coefficient	-0.067	0.007			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.194	0.887			
4. Academic Status	Coefficient	0.058	-.157**	-0.017		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.263	0.002	0.743		
5. Year of Study	Coefficient	-0.1	0.054	-0.079	.110*	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.053	0.297	0.125	0.034	
6. Perception of Teacher Education	Coefficient	-.190**	-.116*	-0.012	-0.064	-0.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.025	0.823	0.219	0.939

Chi-square test of significance for age factor in the perception of teacher education yielded $\chi2=29.58(df=20)$ $p=0.77$, which was not statistically significant. It was therefore concluded that age does not influence the perception of teacher education and therefore is not an antecedent to sustainability teacher education. However, the gender factor yielded $\chi2=13.96(df=2)$ $p=0.001$, which was statistically significant. This implied that there was observed a significant difference in the perception of teacher education based on gender. Based on these findings, it was inferred that gender was a cogent antecedent to sustainability teacher education.

Similarly, respondents' year of the study yielded $\chi2=23.642(df=8)$ $p=0.003$, which was statistically significant, implying that academic level influenced perception making it a definite antecedent to sustainability teacher education. It was observed that respondents' mode of study (conceptualised as Part-time and Full-time) yielded $\chi2=2.156(df=2)$ $p=0.284$ which was not statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that academic mode of study was not an antecedent to sustainability teacher education. Finally, it was observed that the type of university yielded $\chi2=3.863(df=2)$ $p=0.15$, which was not statistically significant. It was therefore concluded that university placement does not significantly influence the perception of teacher education and therefore is not an antecedent to sustainability teacher education.

Conclusion

The sustainability of teacher education is mainly dependent on the social and professional perception of the discipline. These render impetus for choosing the teaching career and preconceptions of profession related to education. This, in turn, presents significant implications for the sustainability of the profession of teaching. The most important implication of this study is that institutions of higher learning draw their clientele from a cross-section of Kenyan society. With a large sample coming from different regions of Kenya, the research findings provide useful insights into the students' perception of teaching as a career which was viewed in this study as a motivation acts as an antecedent of sustainability of teacher education. Second, the

study draws attention to variations in the perception of aspects of the teaching profession through socio-cultural values, which is a crucial component in career choice and factor in the sustainability of education discipline. These values include the social perception of the teaching profession, its conditions as a profession, and the ease of securing a job for graduates of the education programme. Understanding these antecedents presents significant implications for teacher educators and curriculum planners to grasp more clearly how public perceptions affect teachers' and prospective teachers' attitudes, and thereby to make teacher training programs more attractive. This would ultimately ensure continuity and sustainability in teacher education, whose consequence would be the achievement of sustainable development in other foci of the SDGs.

Recommendations and Areas for Further Study

First, this was a cross-sectional descriptive survey where the data collection tool was administered at only one point in time. Taking cognisance of the effect of time in shaping of attitudes towards phenomena it is reasonable to suppose that perceptions of teacher education might change during a student's academic progression, and this possibility (along with reasons for any changes) would be worth investigating.

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