Who becomes a teacher? The characteristics of student teachers in four countries

Julie C. Coultas *, Keith M. Lewin

Centre for International Education, University of Sussex Institute of Education, Brighton, BN1 9RG, UK

Abstract

This paper reviews the characteristics of students entering initial training in four countries—Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, and Trinidad and Tobago. First a brief overview of the teacher education systems is provided. Second, biographical data is reviewed on age, religious affiliation, ethnic group and mother tongue, parental occupations and academic achievement, and students’ educational qualifications. Third, some insights into trainees’ perceptions about teaching and the teaching profession are presented. Finally, comparisons are made for two countries on cross-sectional data comparing the perceptions of entering and exiting trainees and newly qualified teachers. The results draw attention to the qualities and perceptions that those on initial training programmes bring to the teacher education curriculum. They provide a reminder that teacher education curricula should recognise these characteristics and be designed to respond to needs that they create. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

Keywords: Primary teachers; Developing countries; Student–teacher characteristics; Attitudes to teaching

1. Introduction

Teacher education is critical for the achievement of universal access to effective primary education in developing countries. World Conferences at Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000) generated and reaffirmed commitments to this goal. It is clear that teacher supply is now one of the main constraints on both the achievement and sustainability of the Education for All agenda. This paper explores characteristics of those currently entering teacher training programmes in four countries1 chosen to represent a range of circumstances—Ghana, Malawi, Lesotho, and Trinidad and Tobago2. It details similarities and differences in age, sex, religion, ethnicity, language group, and academic achievement. Subsequent analysis illuminates aspects of family background, career expectations, and attitudes to the teaching profession. The results carry implications for future recruitment, teacher

---

1 These countries participated, along with South Africa, in the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research (MUSTER) project funded by DFID 1998–2001, which studied aspects of new teachers’ characteristics and identity, the training curriculum, colleges and their staff, and the costs of training.

2 In Trinidad and Tobago both teacher training colleges are in Trinidad. Our sample did not differentiate trainees from either island.
education curricula, and teacher professional development in first appointments.

2. Context

The teacher education systems in the four countries differ for complex historical, political, cultural and demographic reasons. All share influences that arise from the origins of the systems in missionary institutions which have been assimilated in one way or another into national systems after independence. They exist within different policy regimes and national contexts that determine the level of demand for new teachers and the nature of new entrants. The characteristics of the different training systems are explored in a series of baseline studies (Kunje and Chimombo, 1999; Quamina-Aiyejina et al., 1999; Akyeampong and Furlong, 2000; Lefoka, 2000) and other MUSTER discussion papers. Here a brief summary is provided of some key dimensions to locate the discussion which follows. (See Lewin, 2002.)

2.1. Ghana

Ghana has only one mode of initial teacher education. Thirty-eight colleges\(^3\) (seven male, one female, and the rest mixed) provide three-year full-time post-secondary training. All the colleges except one are residential and all prepare teachers for primary and junior secondary level with options to specialise. Since 1993 the number of trainees has increased by over 50% and in 1998 20,400 were enrolled, of whom 38% were female. Average enrolment in colleges was about 500 students, covering a range from 240 to 910. Formal entrance requirements for training are: a minimum qualification (Ghana GCE ‘O’ Level—5 Grade Es or better; Senior Secondary Certificate—4 Credits and one other pass), an interview, and a common college entrance examination. Some trainees with the minimum requirements may enter college via ‘protocol’ arrangements which may circumvent normal entrance requirements.

Ghana is committed to universalising primary education and enrolments have been increasing. The proportion of untrained teachers has been falling to below 20%, with large regional variations. There is widespread concern with standards of achievement, the low levels of which are partly attributed to the quality of teacher education.

2.2. Lesotho

The National Teacher Training College (NTTC) is the only teacher education college in Lesotho. It trains primary and junior secondary level teachers on different courses. Initial training has evolved through a variety of programmes but is being consolidated into a three-year residential programme, the Diploma in Education, Primary (DEP). Total college enrolment has been maintained at about 800\(^4\) on various programmes including those for in-service and post-service upgrading. The numbers enrolled in initial training for primary have fluctuated between 200 and 400 in the recent past. Typically, over 70% of trainees are female. Selection onto the DEP requires a minimum of four credits (one of which must be in English) and a pass in the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate. NTTC also interviews some candidates.

Gross enrolment rates at primary level are over 100%, and greater for girls than boys. The proportion of untrained teachers in primary schools has remained around 25% over the last five years, and current college output of about 150 new teachers a year has been insufficient to reduce this proportion. The introduction of free primary schooling from 2000 is likely to increase enrolments in grade 1 and reduce dropout thereby increasing demand for teachers.

2.3. Malawi

Malawi implemented free primary education in 1994, resulting in an increase in enrolments from\(^4\) This includes part time students and is therefore not a full time equivalent figure.
about 1.8 million to 3 million primary pupils. Since 1997 all training for primary level in Malawi has been undertaken through the Malawi Integrated Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP). This system provides for one term in College, four terms in supervised teaching practice, and most of a term in College preparing for and taking final examinations. There are six colleges which support the programme (two are single sex). These have enrolled cohorts of about 2500 students at a time, three times a year, and six cohorts were enrolled between 1997 and 1999. Enrolments per college per cohort vary between about 400 and 600. About 42% of MIITEP trainees are female. They are drawn from the ranks of untrained teachers who constitute perhaps half of all teachers, and selection has varied. Most (65%) have been Junior Certificate holders (two years secondary), though the policy is to recruit MSCE (Malawi Secondary Certificate of Education) holders (four years secondary) wherever possible. Candidates are selected from the MIITEP database and are not interviewed or tested.

2.4. Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago has two colleges where most primary initial teacher education takes place. The Teacher’s Diploma is awarded after two years full-time study (39 weeks) including periods of teaching practice. Total enrolments average between 700 and 800, split evenly between the colleges. About 30% of trainees are male. Selection into the colleges is made from untrained teachers who have been working for two or three years, many of whom entered teaching via the On-the-Job Training programme. Students are employees of the Ministry of Education and receive full scholarships. Entrants to the teaching service must have 5 CXC (Caribbean Examinations Certificate) passes or the equivalent ‘O’ Levels obtained at one sitting.

Trinidad and Tobago has achieved close to universal enrolment at primary level. The number of primary students is projected to fall from 188,000 in 1995 to 163,000 by 2005. Overall demand for teachers is therefore falling; however over 20% were untrained in 1997, and opportunities exist to lower further the teacher pupil ratio in primary schools from its existing level of about 24:1.

3. The data

The data on which this article is based are derived from instruments collaboratively designed by the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research project (MUSTER). Systematic data on teacher education trainees was obtained from questionnaires administered selectively in the four countries to new entrants to training. Other parts of MUSTER extended the analysis using educational autobiographies, focus groups and individual interviews. These data are reported in the various MUSTER discussion papers. The questionnaire was administered to gain an overview of a range of characteristics of new entrants. These included age, sex, religion, ethnicity, language group, prior experience, and academic achievement. Self-reporting was used to ascertain family background, and Likert-style items were used to profile career expectations and attitudes to the teaching profession.

Samples were selected somewhat differently in each of the four countries, reflecting the different configuration of the training systems. In Lesotho (one college) and Trinidad and Tobago (two colleges) it was possible to survey trainees from each training institution. In Malawi, two colleges were sampled out of six, and in Ghana four out of 38. Overall the samples included 400 student teachers in Ghana, 90 in Lesotho, 176 in Malawi, 90 in Lesotho, 176 in Malawi, 100 in Ghana, and 50 in Trinidad and Tobago. The data is derived from instruments jointly developed and administered by the principal researchers (K Akyeampong — Ghana, P Lefoka — Malawi, D Kunje Malawi, J George — Trinidad and Tobago) and their teams in each country with assistance from the Sussex team. This paper offers a synthesis across the data sets developed by the authors on the basis of the data. The interpretations are those of the authors. Exit as well as entry questionnaires were also used in three of the four countries, and some Newly Qualified Teachers were also surveyed. Reference is made to this data in the latter part of this paper and more extensive analyses are available in MUSTER discussion papers.

Items used consisted of both those common across countries (modified to suit local idioms), and those which were country specific. This paper analyses common items only.
and 299 in Trinidad. These samples have their limitations. The proportion of male and female student teachers in the samples in each country is shown in Table 1. Over two-thirds of the student teachers in the samples in Lesotho, Malawi, and Trinidad and Tobago were female. In Ghana only about a third were female. In Ghana and Lesotho these proportions were broadly consistent with previous years’ intakes. However, in Trinidad and Tobago and in Malawi the samples had an over-representation of females when compared to the overall proportions enrolled in training. In Malawi this was due to the fact that one of the colleges used in the sample was all-female. In Trinidad and Tobago the reason appears to be mostly because of differential response rates between males and females. Further information on the samples and more detailed interpretation of the data can be found in MUSTER country reports and discussion papers (e.g. Akyeampong and Stephens, 2000; George et al., 2001).

4. Characteristics of the student teachers entering college

4.1. Age

The average age of entrants to teacher education in the samples varies. Ghana (21 years) and Lesotho (22.2 years) have the youngest entrants; Malawi (25.9) and Trinidad and Tobago (26.1) have the oldest. The most obvious explanation for this is that in the former cases most entrants are admitted directly from the school secondary system, while in the latter most entrants acquire teaching experience as untrained teachers before being accepted for college training. Table 1 and Fig. 1 show the age profiles.

Overall between 70% and 75% of teachers are between 19 and 22 years old in Ghana and Lesotho, and the same proportions are between 23 and 27 years in Malawi and Trinidad and Tobago. Within the samples the proportions of males and females of different ages showed some differences. Females were younger on average in Ghana and Malawi, males were younger in Lesotho, and there was no difference in age by sex in Trinidad and Tobago. The differences were small and the possible explanations differed between countries.

4.2. Religious affiliation

All the teacher education systems have been influenced by institutions originally established by religious denominations. Religious affiliation plays an important role in defining identity in each country. In Ghana some colleges retain strong religious affiliations, though the system of 38 colleges is formally under the control of the Ministry of Education. Religious-based training colleges were amalgamated into one secular institution in Lesotho in 1975. Two of the six colleges in Malawi remain affiliated to the Catholic church, though formal control over the colleges was taken by the government in 1973. In Trinidad and Tobago, from the 1960s onward the government closed denominational colleges and established the secular institutions, Corinth and Valsayn, examined in this study.

The religious affiliation of Ghanaian student teachers in the sample was predominately Christian, with 36% Catholic, 16% Methodist, 15% other identified denominations, and 24% who just classi-
figed themselves as ‘Christian’. Muslims accounted for 4% of the student teachers, significantly less than their percentage of the population, reflecting the fact that colleges in the sample were selected from the South, which is predominantly Christian. In Lesotho, the majority of Basotho student teachers were either Catholic (37%) or Lesotho Evangelical Church (33%). About 16% were ACL (Anglican) and a further 14% ‘other’. In Malawi 41% were members of the Church of Central Africa and 29% were Catholic. About 15% were Seventh Day Adventists, and 3% Muslim. In Trinidad and Tobago 22% were Catholic, 19% Hindu, 16% Presbyterian, and 30% were distributed across various other Christian denominations; 6% were Muslim.

The religious affiliation of student teachers, and the denominational history of many of the training institutions, carries implications for the training process. These are not simple to unravel, but are likely to have some influence on student teachers’ attitudes towards learning, and on their role as teachers.

4.3. Ethnic group or tribe and language spoken at home

In three of the countries ethnic group is a signifier of difference. The exception is Lesotho which is ethnically (Basotho) and linguistically (Sesotho) homogenous. Ghana is the most ethnically diverse of the countries, with 26 groups represented in the sample. The largest groups were Ashanti (51%), Fante (11%) and other Akan speaking groups (12%). The remaining 26% were distributed relatively evenly across the 20 other ethnic groups. The language spoken at home in the Ghanaian sample was predominately one of the
Akan languages. Twi accounted for 47%, other Akan languages 22%, and Fante 15%. The remaining 16% were distributed across 21 other languages. Akyeampong et al. (1999) draw attention to the significance of language in teacher education. They note that the first language spoken is not a criterion for admission and no consideration is given to the mother tongue of students during posting. Trained primary teachers are expected to use the local language of pupils in grade 1 to 3. However, there are four regions in Ghana (and other areas within regions) where the vast majority of grade 1–3 pupils speak little Akan (Volta, Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions). If Akan speakers are posted to these areas they will have to use English as a medium of instruction, in contradiction to the language policy of the Ghana Education Service.

The student teachers in Malawi belonged to one of nine tribes. The greatest numbers were Chewa (28%), Ngoni (27%), Lomwe (22%), and the Tumbuka (18%). The language spoken at home was predominantly Chichewa (83%) even though only 28% of student teachers are Chewa. The majority of Lomwe and Ngoni student teachers appear to speak Chichewa at home. Chichewa and English are the two languages used in the school curriculum. As in Ghana, there is an issue about the posting of teachers to areas which speak a language different to the mother tongue of student teachers, since the policy is that the first three years of primary should be taught in the mother tongue of pupils.

Trinidad and Tobago classifies its population into one of five groupings, each of which has much diversity. The majority of students in the sample were East Indian (56%), African (24%), or mixed (17%). The school system is in English and all students are required to speak it, though they may or may not use it at home.

4.4. Home background

The cultural capital that new entrants to teaching bring with them to the teaching profession is broadly influenced by home background and the educational attainment of parents. There is a wide range in the occupations given for the fathers of Ghanaian student teachers. The majority indicated that their father was a teacher (21%), a farmer (18%), or a trader (14%). The other most frequently mentioned occupations were civil servant, accountant, driver, and minister in the Church. The range of occupations given for mothers was smaller. The largest numbers of those responding (52%) indicated that their mother was a trader. About 14% of mothers were teachers, and 13% farmers. The remaining 21% of student teachers responding indicated that their mothers were nurses, seamstresses, housewives, and secretaries.

About 40% of the fathers of the Ghanaian student teachers had a post-secondary qualification, and over 15% were graduates; 21% had a secondary school certificate (‘O’ or ‘A’ Level). This compares to only about 10% of the population who have similar achievements. Most of the remainder had some secondary schooling, and a small minority had only completed primary schooling or less. In contrast, only 24% of the mothers of the student teachers had a post-secondary qualification, and fewer than 2% were graduates. About 13% had a secondary school certificate; about 35% had some secondary schooling. The remainder had primary schooling or less. It is reasonable to conclude that beginning student teachers come from families with relatively well-educated parents, though a significant minority do not.

In Lesotho, half of the student teachers did not respond to the question about their father’s occupation, and one third did not respond when it referred to their mother’s occupation. The fathers of the other student teachers were farmers (21%), miners (9%), and civil servants (3%). Smaller proportions were teachers, drivers, skilled or unskilled workers, and a few were listed as not working. The

---

8 Occupational classification was problematic in all countries — labour markets and terminology differ and respondents may not be consistent in the use of particular categories. The data reported reflect judgements made in consultation with principal researchers based on answers to open ended questions.

9 An unknown combination of unwillingness to respond, and lack of knowledge of their father’s or his occupation, possibly related to historically high rates of male migration to work in South Africa.
most frequently mentioned occupation for mothers was either housewife (21%) or teacher (18%). The remaining third were fairly evenly distributed across a range of other occupations: hawkers, shopkeepers, civil servants, business people, secretaries and farmers.

About 3% of the fathers of the Basotho student teachers had a degree level qualification. About 17% had fathers with a Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) or a junior certificate, a quarter had a primary leaving certificate, and under a quarter had no qualifications. More mothers than fathers of the student teachers were qualified above secondary school level, although none of the mothers had a university degree. Over a third of the mothers had a primary leaving certificate, and 17% had no qualifications.

In Malawi, about 19% did not respond to the questions about father’s and mother’s occupation. A further third of the student teachers indicated that their father was a farmer (38%), a teacher (12%), or a businessperson (10%). Others were clerical workers, drivers, field health assistants, church ministers, clinical officers, nurse, engineers, a tailor, and a carpenter. There were fewer occupations listed for the mothers than the fathers. The majority of the mothers of the student teachers were either farmers (33%) or housewives (30%). About 6% had mothers who were teachers and 6% businesspersons.

About 11% of the fathers of the Malawian student teachers had a higher education qualification. Nearly a third had a secondary school certificate, and a quarter had a primary leaving certificate. A further 21% did not have any qualifications. Very few of the mothers had a higher education qualification, and far fewer mothers than fathers had a secondary school certificate. Over a third of the mothers had a primary leaving certificate, and 39% had no educational qualifications.

In Trinidad, the occupations of the fathers and mothers of the student teachers were broadly categorised and ranged from higher professional to unskilled persons. Approximately 16% did not respond to the question about their parents’ occupations. The majority of the fathers were lower professional and managerial (15%), skilled workers (24%), and semi-skilled workers (12%). The remainder were fairly evenly distributed between those who were unskilled workers, unemployed, retired or deceased. Half of the mothers were housepersons. A further 14% were lower professional or managerial (this category included teachers), and a few were skilled, unskilled, retired, unemployed, or deceased.

A sixth of the fathers and the mothers had a higher education qualification. Just over a third of the fathers and slightly more of the mothers had CXC/GCE, a further sixth of both parents of the student teachers had a school-leaving certificate, but more fathers than mothers had no qualifications. A sixth of the student teachers in Trinidad did not respond to the question about their parents’ educational qualifications.

It is clearly difficult to draw simple conclusions from these patterns. However, we can note that in Ghana, Malawi and Lesotho large proportions of student trainees originate from families where fathers and mothers are working in livelihoods outside the modern sector of regular wage employment. The largest proportions of those who are in the modern sector are usually in teaching (Table 2). In Lesotho many mothers are teachers, reflecting patterns of male employment and migration associated with the mining industry. In Trinidad and Tobago much higher proportions are in skilled wage employment than in the other countries, reflecting the different structure of the economy.

The educational qualifications of parents suggest that about half have no more than primary education in Lesotho and Malawi. Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago have higher proportions with secondary and above. Table 3 summarises the educational qualifications of student teachers’ parents in the four countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% Father</th>
<th>% Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Educational qualifications of fathers and mothers of the student teachers in the samples in the four countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father %</th>
<th>Mother %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Secondary</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5. Educational qualifications of student teachers

It is difficult to present the diversity of the educational experience and qualifications of the student teachers in the four different countries. The examinations in the different countries are often not equivalent, and the levels of attainment differ across the sites. However it is possible to make some general statements about the level of educational qualifications of the student teachers on entry.

In Ghana, the majority of student teachers only achieved an E grade in SSCE10 English, representing a bare pass. About 40% achieved a grade above E in GCE or SSCE. The results for mathematics were slightly more varied than the results for English, but again the majority had low grades for either SSCE or GCE. The range of grades for science examination results was greater than for English or mathematics. Some (9%) student teachers did not have a science qualification, and others had low grades, i.e. F or 9. In Lesotho, none of the student teachers achieved an A grade at COSC11 in any of three core subject areas, and few received B or C grades. Most achieved E grades or less (62% in English, 66% in maths, and 39% in science). Most of the student teachers in Malawi had passed their English and mathematics at JCE12 but very few (less than a third) had taken MSCE13 in English and out of these only a quarter had gained a grade 6 or higher. Approximately a fifth of the Malawian student teachers had taken mathematics and science MSCE, with a sixth in mathematics and a third in science gaining a grade 6 or higher. No student teacher in the Trinidad cohort achieved less than a grade 3 in English CXC O-level14, with the majority achieving either a grade 1 or 2. The pattern of results was similar for grades achieved in mathematics and science. A third of the student teachers also had A-level qualifications. Overall, the student teachers in Trinidad have substantially higher educational qualifications than the student teachers in the other three countries.

There was very little difference between the achievement of the male and female student teachers in Trinidad. In Ghana, the women had achieved similar results in English, whilst the men achieved better results in mathematics and science. The male and female student teachers in Lesotho achieved similar results in English at COSC, but men did better than women in both mathematics and science at this level. A similar pattern was found in the grades achieved by the Malawian student teachers, with male student teachers having higher grades than female student teachers at MSCE.

---

10 Senior School Certificate of Education.
11 Cambridge Overseas School Certificate.
12 Junior School Certificate after two years secondary. Over 80% of all candidates pass this examination.
13 Malawi School Certificate of Education.
14 Caribbean Regional Examinations Council Ordinary Level.
4.6. School experience of the student teachers

The training programmes are for serving teachers in Trinidad and Tobago and Malawi so all the respondents had taught before. In contrast, in Lesotho and Ghana few had any teaching experience and were direct entrants from schools (Table 4).

These profiles highlight radical differences in the experiential base that student teachers bring to training. Though in all cases the trainees are on initial training courses leading to a first professional qualification, in Malawi and Trinidad and Tobago most are experienced but untrained teachers. Other MUSTER studies (e.g. Quamina-Aiyegina et al., 1999; Stuart and Kunje, 2000; Stuart, 1999) indicate that recognition of prior experience is not a prominent feature of course design, and is often not recognised in the structuring of college-based work. Nor is it used systematically as a criterion for selection, except in the sense of requiring a minimum period as an untrained teacher which is not assessed.

4.7. Overview of student teachers

The overall picture that emerges is therefore one where trainee teachers are academically poorly qualified, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago. Their scores on examinations at the end of secondary school suggest that they are drawn from the cohort that manages to meet but rarely exceed the minimum levels of qualification stipulated for enrolment in training. This has implications for the teacher education curriculum. Most obviously it suggests that subject upgrading is likely to be important if competence in school subjects is seen as a prerequisite for teaching at primary level. The medium of instruction varies between the countries, but in all cases upper primary is supposed to be taught using English. The academic level of entrants in English suggests that this is problematic in all but the case of Trinidad and Tobago. Student teachers come from a variety of family backgrounds. A minority have professional or semi-professional parents with post-secondary schooling, though the proportions that fall into these categories are likely to be above those in the general population. Substantial numbers have fathers and mothers with modest educational attainment and jobs outside the modern sector. Disproportionate numbers appear to have family members who are teachers. The systems differ widely in the amount of prior experience trainees have of teaching.

5. Student teachers’ perceptions

The student teachers’ responses to statements about teaching and the teaching profession add another dimension to the biographical information that the students have supplied. The responses give some insight into the attitudes that these trainee teachers bring with them when they start their training. This data is illustrative rather than conclusive, as a result of limitations in the sampling and construct validity. The preliminary insights presented are provocative rather than definitive. More research is needed to raise the level of confidence in the significance and interpretation of the results.

Eleven statements were identified which were common across the four country surveys. These are listed below along with their abbreviations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Never Taught</th>
<th>Less than one year</th>
<th>Between 1 and 2 years</th>
<th>Between 2 and 3 years</th>
<th>More than three years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1. Common statements\footnote{These statements were developed in MUSTER workshops and tested for construct validity etc. as far as possible through pilot studies.} across country samples—entry questionnaires

1. The most important thing a teacher can do is teach pupils facts that they need to know (Facts)
2. School pupils learn more from listening to the teacher than from asking questions (Listen)
3. Teachers cannot do much to improve the academic performance of low achieving students (Slow lrn)
4. Children need to be divided into ability groups to be taught well (Grouping)
5. Primary pupils cannot understand English so teachers have to use another language most of the time (Lang)
6. Corporal punishment should be available in schools (Punish)
7. Teachers are born not made (Tchrs born)
8. My friends think I am fortunate to be training to be a school teacher (Fortune)
9. Teaching is a very difficult job to do well (Difficult)
10. I would rather teach in a secondary school than a primary school (Pref Sec)
11. I would rather have gone to university than teacher training college (Pref Uni)

Fig. 2 shows the means for responses to these common statements.\footnote{Summary data in appendix 1} For all the statements there was an opportunity for the trainees to indicate on a Likert\footnote{As noted earlier other more qualitative data was collected and is reported elsewhere. The limitations of this approach to attitude measurement are well known. They include assumptions about construct validity across respondents, the possibility of biases arising from the form of the instrument, and implied association between responses to written Likert attitude items and attitudes manifest through behaviour. Nevertheless this approach is an accepted way of gaining some insight into attitudes of respondents.} scale whether they Strongly agreed (1), Agreed (2), Disagreed (3) or Strongly disagreed (4). In Fig. 2 mean scores can vary between 1 (everyone strongly agreeing) to 4 (everyone strongly disagreeing). The mid point mean score is therefore 2.5 (as many agreeing as disagreeing\footnote{Assuming a symmetrical distribution.}). A non-parametric (Kruskall Wallis) test was used to find out whether there was a significant difference in the trainees’ responses to the statements between the four countries. The results were significant for all eleven statements at the $p<0.001$ level, indicating that the overall patterns of response between countries were different. It does not imply that there were significant differences between each and every sample. The following discussion draws attention to the directions of some of the simple differences in the samples that can be used to generate hypotheses and reflect on possible implications for teacher education curricula.

5.2. Attitudes to teaching and learning

Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are items that have a direct reference to the trainee teachers’ attitudes to learning and teaching. The Malawian\footnote{Here and subsequently the results reported refer to the sample of trainees surveyed with the limitations in representativeness arising from that sample.} and Basotho trainees agreed more with the statement (1) ‘The most important thing a teacher can do is teach pupils facts that they need to know’ than the trainee teachers from Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago. The pattern was different in relation to (2) ‘School pupils learn more from listening to the teacher than from asking questions’. In this case the trainee teachers from Lesotho, Malawi, and Trinidad and Tobago disagreed more with the statement than did the Ghanaian trainee teachers.

This sample of Ghanaian trainee teachers were more likely than others to agree that (3) ‘Teachers cannot do much to improve the academic performance of low achieving students’. For statement (4) ‘Children need to be divided into ability groups to be taught well’ there was general agreement across the samples except in Malawi, where less than 50% agreed. This would seem to reflect some consensus, if not a very strong one, that ability grouping was preferable to mixed ability classes. The final statement in this section (5) ‘Primary pupils cannot understand English so teachers have to use another
language most of the time’ elicited disagreement from a large number of the trainees, except in Ghana. Support for this view was strongest in Lesotho, and weakest in Ghana. Language issues are well established as a problem in all the African countries in the sample. Surprisingly, teacher education curricula seem to give little emphasis to it in the training process (Stuart, 1999).

5.3. Attitudes to discipline

Corporal punishment in schools in all the countries is controversial. It is formally discouraged or proscribed, but still practised with varying degrees of frequency. Trainee teachers’ autobiographies (e.g. Akyeampong and Stephens, 2000) indicate ambivalent attitudes and a division of opinions amongst trainees. The responses to the statement (6) ‘Corporal punishment should be available in schools’ amongst entering trainees indicate disagreement in three of the countries, which is strongest in Malawi, where only 13% agreed with the statement. Two-thirds of the trainees in Trinidad and Tobago appeared to be in favour of some corporal punishment.

5.4. Attitudes to teaching as a profession

Some attitudes to becoming a teacher were addressed in statements 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. The statement (7) ‘Teachers are born not made’ produced similar responses, indicating weak agreement, across three of the countries, suggesting the samples were evenly split. In Trinidad there was a small level of overall disagreement. It might be thought that those in training would disagree more strongly if they believed in the efficacy of the training process. Responses to (8) ‘My friends think I am fortunate to be training to be a school teacher’ gave some indication of the trainees’ perception of the status of the teaching profession. There was general agreement with this statement, with more Malawian trainees agreeing than in the other countries, perhaps reflecting the relative scarcity of alternative opportunities. Statement (9) ‘Teaching is a very difficult job to do well’ also gives some indication of how entering trainees perceive their intended profession. There was little agreement from the Malawian trainees, implying that most thought teaching was easy, whilst a majority of the Trinidadian trainees felt teaching was difficult.
Some more interpretive data\(^{20}\) suggests that it may be that Malawian trainees are anxious not to be seen as having difficulties since all have been teaching as untrained teachers for several years before entering MIITEP. In Trinidad trainees have also been teaching prior to enrolling on the training programme, and they are better qualified. It may be that they regard teaching as more difficult because expectations of them are high, but this possible explanation remains at the level of speculation.

An indication of trainees’ career preferences is revealed by the responses to statement (10) ‘I would rather teach in a secondary school than a primary school’. All the student teachers in the four countries are training to be primary school teachers. A majority of Ghanaian trainees agreed with this statement, possibly reflecting the fact that primary teachers become qualified for upgrading training and study leave after a few years teaching in primary schools (Hedges, 2000; Mereku, 2000). This is not such an established pattern in the other countries. Three quarters of Basotho trainees disagreed with this statement, with a strong difference between males and females, suggesting females were more enthusiastic about remaining as primary school teachers.

There was a mixed response to (11) ‘I would rather have gone to university than teacher training college’ across the four countries. Overall the great majority of Ghanaian trainees agreed with this statement, possibly reflecting the fact that primary teachers become qualified for upgrading training and study leave after a few years teaching in primary schools (Hedges, 2000; Mereku, 2000). This is not such an established pattern in the other countries. Three quarters of Basotho trainees disagreed with this statement, with a strong difference between males and females, suggesting females were more enthusiastic about remaining as primary school teachers.

In Malawi, this may partly reflect the chances of trainees actually getting into university, since opportunities there are very limited. In Lesotho, it may reflect satisfaction in being enrolled at NTTC which, though not a university, is perceived to have good standing leading to secure employment.

6. Have attitudes changed with time and experience?

In Lesotho, Malawi and Ghana samples of trainees completing their training (exit), and those who were in post as newly qualified teachers (NQTs), were also surveyed. This allowed cross-sectional comparisons, but not longitudinal ones. The data is therefore suggestive of changes that might be occurring, but not sufficient to draw firm conclusions without more detailed attention to sampling. Figs. 3 and 4 show changes in mean scores between entry, exit and NQTs in Lesotho and Malawi.\(^{21}\) The Ghana data is analysed in a subsequent paper. Item 5 on language was not included in all the data sets as a result of country team decisions, and is omitted from the charts.

The mean responses across entry, exit and NQT samples in the two countries did not vary greatly. Typically, the range in mean score was 0.5 or less between the greatest and least. In Lesotho, samples on three items (3, 9 and 11) showed a consistent direction of difference between entry, exit and NQT. In Malawi there were seven items (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11) which had a consistent trend. Depending on the item, it might be expected that attitudes would continue to change in the same direction over time as training and experience had a cumulative effect. But equally, since the experience of passing through a training programme and the experience of induction are different, and may not in reality be much of a continuum, a change in direction of the mean response might be consistent with the realities actually experienced.

For this preliminary discussion we can just note some possible interpretations that suggest further analysis is needed. In the Lesotho data set NQTs are significantly more likely\(^{22}\) to wish they had gone to university for training\(^*\) (11). Exiting trainees are significantly more likely to think they are fortunate to be teachers\(^*\) (8) and entering trainees seem most likely to disagree with the use of corporal punishment\(^*\) (6).

In Malawi NQTs and exiting trainees appear more likely to believe teachers should stress facts (1), more likely to disagree with the statement that pupils learn most from listening to teachers\(∗∗\) (2) and to disagree with the statement that slow learners cannot be helped much by teachers\(∗∗\) (3).

\(^{20}\) Perspective of D Kunje, Malawian principal researcher, based on data from MUSTER data collection.

\(^{21}\) Summary data in Appendix 1.

\(^{22}\) Chi square where \(∗ = p < 0.05, ∗∗ = p < 0.001\)
They also agree more with grouping by ability. NQTs disagree significantly less with the use of corporal punishment** (6) and are significantly less likely to think themselves fortunate to be teachers** (8). They are much more likely to want to teach at secondary level** (10), and to wish they had gone to university** (11).

In both country data sets student teachers who have completed training seem more likely to disagree with the statement that slow learners cannot benefit from teaching (3), agree with the use of corporal punishment (6), and agree with the desirability of attending university for training (11), though these changes are not significant at the 0.05 level.
This imperfect data set thus begins to suggest areas for deeper enquiry and possible reasons for the changes observed. At another level, taking the data at face value, it is not immediately clear that training programmes and the experience of being an NQT have dramatically transformed the responses trainees give to the common items. Whatever effects training is having they are apparently not sufficient to cause large shifts in perspective across the groups. This might be considered disappointing, or perhaps an indication that the task teacher educators have is a very difficult one. It may also suggest that the perceptions represented by the items are deeply entrenched, and/or that they are strongly influenced by factors exogenous to the training process.

7. Some concluding remarks

This paper set out to give an overview of some of the characteristics of those currently in training in four of the MUSTER countries. It draws attention both to what these are and to some of the similarities and differences found between the groups in different countries. These provide a reminder for subsequent discussions and analysis that context does differ, and that the age, religious affiliation, home background, prior educational qualification, and amount of teaching experience new trainees have, vary widely. These characteristics are often very different from those manifested by trainee teachers in the UK and USA, from where much of the theorising and advice on teacher education reform in anglophone countries originates.

The perceptions illustrated by responses to the attitude items also vary between countries, and between entry, exit and NQT samples. The significance of the patterns that emerge is difficult to interpret, invites cross-reference to other more qualitative MUSTER data, and indicates the need for further focused analysis on particular points of special interest. This should be pursued within each country. The dispositions of trainees have implications for selection, the design and enactment of teacher education curricula, and for the induction of NQTs into the teaching profession. They suggest several starting points for a reappraisal of how teacher education in the different countries can recognise the characteristics of those selected for training. Attempts to systematically assess changes in student teachers’ perspectives before, during and after training also challenge teacher educators to show convincingly that the training process does transform student teachers.

Some themes emerging from the data provide the basis for further reflection and invite more rigorous analysis. First, the academic level of many entrants is unimpressive. Many have the minimal qualifications necessary and are unlikely to have secure grounding in core subjects. This carries implications for the proportion of time that teacher education curricula allocate to subject upgrading. Though it might be thought that raising entry standards could be a solution, the scope to do this is constrained in several of the countries. Low academic achievement in the medium of instruction (in all cases English) is worrying. None of the teacher education curricula in the countries makes special provision for upgrading language fluency, or for that matter working with pupils in a multilingual environment where linguistic code switching is likely to be common.

Second, the majority of entrants to training appear to come from family backgrounds where parents’ occupational and educational levels suggest that the cultural capital they bring with them to the training experience is constrained. Teacher education curricula should be designed to reflect the realities of home background and levels of school achievement. Disproportionate numbers have relatives who are teachers and this may be significant in shaping how these students approach learning to teach. Speculatively this may be seen as an asset—some of the realities and possibilities of teaching should be known to such students; it might also be a disadvantage—whatever the college curriculum implies, the role models provided by family members who are teachers may present the most compelling influence.

Third, in two of the countries many entrants to training have prior experience which is institutionalised as an entrance requirement. This creates an experiential base that is unavailable to those entering training directly from school. This is unlike the situation in countries where direct entry is the norm. It carries implications for the curriculum and for theorising about the professional develop-
ment process. Other MUSTER studies suggest that rarely is prior experience explicitly recognised.

Fourth, the evidence on trainees’ attitudes provides some indication of dispositions that trainees have when they enter training. The interpretation of these dispositions is not simple, but it is important. Since all the teacher education curricula include aims to invoke attitudes and perspectives on learning and teaching that are associated with good practice, teacher educators need to be sensitive to the orientation of new trainees. This constitutes a starting point for any attempts to reshape these perspectives during the teacher education process. It might be thought surprising that, in the two cases considered here where entering and exiting trainees and newly qualified teachers are compared, the differences in response patterns that emerge between new entrants, exiting trainees and NQTs, are not more pronounced. If training really had powerful effects then comparison between the groups would be expected to show stronger and more consistent shifts. This may not be evident because of methodological limitations, including the fact that the samples are cross-sectional. However, the illustrative findings are a reminder that teacher educators need to develop more rigorous ways of demonstrating that what they do really has an effect both on cognition and on the affective attributes of trainees.

The final point is to re-emphasise that the data profile some of the actual characteristics of trainees, not those idealised or assumed in selection rubrics. Some of these are predictable and well known to those in training institutions, others may be less familiar. All are significant for attempts to improve the relevance and impact of the training process. Our qualitative data suggest that often tutors have surprisingly little detailed knowledge of the characteristics of the cohorts of students they train, and sometimes also of the school environments that newly trained teachers enter. This cannot be an asset in tailoring curricular experience to a realistic appraisal of antecedent conditions and learning needs. Nor can it be a basis for more responsive and reflective modes of training that recognise difference, address questions of motivation and commitment, and prepare trainees purposefully for their first appointment. The difference between what trainees ought to be when they enter training, and what they are, is central to the achievement of effective change in reshaping and revitalising the teacher education experience.

Appendix A

Table 5, Table 6, Table 7

Table 5
Number of respondents, the mean and standard deviation for the statements across all four sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stm</th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Lesotho</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th>Trinidad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Stm=statement, N=number of respondents, X=mean response, SD=standard deviation.
Table 6
Number of respondents, the mean and standard deviation for the statements in the Lesotho entry, exit and NQT questionnaires

| Stm | Entry | | | Exit | | | | NQT | | |
|-----|-------|---|---|------|---|---|------| |---|---|---|
|     | N     | X | SD | N     | X | SD | N     | X | SD | |
| 1   | 89    | 1.94 | 0.98 | 59    | 1.51 | 0.73 | 68    | 1.71 | 0.41 |
| 2   | 88    | 2.88 | 0.98 | 58    | 2.69 | 0.88 | 70    | 2.93 | 0.79 |
| 3   | 87    | 3.18 | 0.97 | 59    | 3.22 | 0.95 | 68    | 3.46 | 0.74 |
| 4   | 88    | 2.10 | 1.04 | 27    | 2.44 | 1.01 | 69    | 2.17 | 0.95 |
| 5   | 85    | 3.04 | 0.88 | 59    | 2.61 | 1.11 | 70    | 2.67 | 0.93 |
| 6   | 86    | 2.37 | 0.96 | 56    | 2.09 | 0.98 | 70    | 2.14 | 1.04 |
| 7   | 84    | 2.19 | 1.06 | 27    | 1.85 | 0.82 | 69    | 2.39 | 0.89 |
| 8   | 89    | 2.52 | 1.01 | 56    | 2.73 | 0.96 | 70    | 2.86 | 0.69 |
| 9   | 89    | 2.90 | 0.95 | 56    | 3.13 | 0.96 | 70    | 2.96 | 0.91 |
| 10  | 90    | 2.93 | 0.98 | 56    | 2.73 | 1.00 | 70    | 2.54 | 1.00 |

N = number of respondents, X = mean response, SD = standard deviation.
Table 7
Number of respondents, the mean and standard deviation for the statements in the Malawi entry, exit and NQT questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stm</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Exit</th>
<th>NQT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N =$number of respondents, $X =$mean response, $SD =$standard deviation.
References