Eritrean primary school teachers’ perceptions of the relationship between pre-service education and the demands of the workplace

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Teacher education
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Curriculum
Lesson planning
Teaching practice
Assessment
Abstract

This study investigates six Eritrean primary school teachers’ perceptions of their pre-service education. In order to reach the desired goal the present study made use of the interview method of data collection. Six primary school teachers from three different schools in two different regions of Eritrea were interviewed. The study sought to find out answers to six questions. It tried to investigate whether primary school teachers found the knowledge and/or skill acquired from their pre-service courses in the Asmara Teachers’ Training Institute helpful to make and use effective lesson plans, prepare and use relevant teaching aids, assess their students’ performance, prepare lesson content, manage the classroom effectively, and select and use relevant teaching methods.

The findings show that the pre-service education that the teachers received at ATTI was helpful to: a) manage the classroom activity, though they seem to use corporal punishment as a means of controlling the classroom, b) assess their students’ knowledge which they acquire from the teaching and learning process, though they find it difficult to do the same with regards to the skills and attitudes of their learners, c) select and use relevant teaching methods, despite the fact that the sitting arrangements, large classroom size, and physical situation of the classroom make it difficult to apply the acquired skills and knowledge properly, d) prepare and make use of lesson plans, e) prepare lesson content, and f) prepare and use teaching aids using materials that can be found easily at the school environment, even though they usually seem just to follow the textbook. Based on the findings, recommendations are given for changes to the ATTI teacher education curriculum.
DECLARATION

I declare that Eritrean primary school teachers' perceptions of the relationship between pre-service education and the demands of the workplace is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

KEFLOM TSEGAYE

Signed: ..........................

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

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Chapter One

Teacher Education in Eritrea

This chapter deals with the general background information about teacher education in Eritrea (a country in Northeast Africa), the historical background of Asmara teachers' training institute, the purpose and limitation of the study, and the overview of the study.

1.1 Background information: education in Eritrea

Education plays a primary role in the development and modernisation of any country. Therefore, there is a need to educate each and every citizen of the country as far as its economy allows, for the chief reason that education is instrumental in producing creative citizens.

As a developing country, Eritrea aims to minimise social and economic problems by providing quality education for all. In relation to this, the World Bank (1994: 109) states the following:

Education will play a critical role in Eritrea's economic and social advancement. It will promote productivity, help transform the effectiveness of organisations and facilitate the rapid absorption of the new technologies and methods needed to transform Eritrea's productive sectors and ensure its competitiveness in the international market.

Making basic education, which comprises grades one up to seven, available to all citizens is one of the educational policies of the government of Eritrea.
In Eritrea, there are 537 primary (grades 1-5), 95 junior (grades 6-7) and 36 high schools (grades 8-11) including three technical schools. The number of teachers in primary, junior and high school level is 5576, 1208, and 982 respectively. The teacher student ratio (which is 1:46 at the primary, 1:55 at junior and 1:48 at high school levels), however, is not satisfactory (Ministry of Education - MOE, 1999: 40-67).

As a new country, Eritrea has a shortage of qualified teachers at all levels - primary, junior, and high school levels. Currently, to minimise this problem the ministry of education is forced to recruit and employ qualified teachers from abroad (mostly from India and the Philippines). In addition to this, some teachers from primary schools are assigned to teach at junior level and, in rare cases, in high schools, without giving them further in-service education. But, does their pre-service education enable them carry out their tasks successfully?

The matriculation results of most Eritrean students, in most high schools, is not satisfactory. The grade point of most of the students is below the passing mark (less than two points). Similarly, the performance of Eritrean students in junior and high school levels (particularly in English and mathematics) is not satisfactory. Though not supported by research, most of the teachers in junior and high schools blame primary school teachers for this weakness. Is there any truth in these accusations? And how do primary school teachers react to such an accusation? On the other hand, if these accusations are true, and primary school teachers are to be blamed, what can be done to improve primary teachers’ performance?
The above two problems, i.e. blaming of primary school teachers for the low performance of students in the junior and high school levels, and assigning them to teach in the level where they are not trained, provided the background to the study.

Taking these issues into consideration, I was interested to explore Eritrean primary school teachers’ perceptions of their pre-service education.

Since the study is concerned with Eritrean primary school teachers’ perception of their pre-service education, and Asmara Teachers’ Training Institute (ATTI) is the only institute that is currently responsible for training primary school teachers in Eritrea, I would like to relate the historical development of ATTl, the criteria used for recruiting student teachers, the duration of the training and the type of courses offered at ATTl in the next section.

1.2 The Asmara Teachers’ Training Institute

Teacher education in Eritrea started in 1943 by the British Administration when it trained a few selected trainees for two weeks to be primary school teachers. This was later extended to two years’ training for those who had completed grade eight, to teach in primary schools. At this time, there was no permanent place or institute for teacher training.

Currently, the requirement to be a primary school teacher is the completion of high school and a one-year teacher’s training programme. Junior school teachers are required to complete high school and two years’ college or
university education. High school teachers are required to complete high
school and a four-year university education in Science or Arts.

The responsible agency to train and provide teachers for the high school level,
currently, is the University of Asmara. The University of Asmara, from the
time of its establishment in 1958, has made quite a considerable contribution
to the training of teachers for high schools (Bergem and Ertzgaard, 1995: 44).
Among different departments in the University of Asmara, i.e. departments of
Social science, Engineering, Natural science, Agriculture and Aquatic science,
Health science, and Education. The department of education of the university
is chiefly responsible for running the teacher training program. Even if there
are so many teachers assigned from primary level to teach in junior level, 150
primary school teachers were trained in collaboration with the education
department of the University of Asmara and became junior school teachers
(MOE, 1997: 10).

Training student teachers academically and professionally from all the ethnic
groups for the primary school level is one of the basic aims of Asmara
Teachers’ Training Institute (ATTI). Teachers who are considered to be more
effective are promoted to teach at the junior level, alongside those teachers
who were trained, previously, in a diploma to teach at this level.

The current Asmara Teachers’ Training Institute was established in 1981
(World Bank, 1994: 117). However, teachers who were trained in this institute
were not to serve the Eritrean people until Eritrea achieved its independence in
1991. At that time, teachers were expected to teach in primary schools using
‘Amharic’ (Ethiopian official language) which is not spoken in any part of
Eritrea as a language of communication. Besides, the curriculum of the institute was used for political purposes to the advantage of the previous Ethiopian government. This, however, changed after 1991.

Immediately after liberation, activities were focused on short duration courses of various types: orientation for teachers who were employed by the Ethiopian administration, upgrading courses for new recruits and crash programs for selected groups, for example, teachers for some local languages. The emphasis has now shifted to regular programs with the initiation of one-year course for primary school teachers (World Bank, 1994: 117).

Since 1991, ATTI has started to train primary school student teachers who are able to transmit the national values and heritage of the Eritrean society to the young generation. In addition, developing the general attitude, motivation and confidence and self-reliance of teachers, producing professionally and ethically responsible teachers from all the ethnic groups of the society, and strengthening the existing training capacity of the institute, are the aims of ATTI.

Asmara Teachers’ Training Institute provides one academic year of training for full-time students who have completed high school education with at least 1.8 points score in the matriculation examination. The courses, which are offered in ATTI, are expected to transmit general knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.

The ATTI curriculum, as the ATTI lecturers mentioned in their meeting at the end of 2000, has the following general aims (MOE, 2000: 1). The goals are broken down into different areas, which shows what should be achieved in these different areas.
• **Subject Matter**
This is emphasised because trainees need to have adequate knowledge of the areas they are expected to teach. For this reason, the curriculum stresses the need to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the subject and interconnection of subjects.

• **Methodology**
The curriculum gives methodology its right place since knowledge of subject matter without effective techniques is of little avail. The curriculum emphasises the necessity to apply a variety of approaches and techniques appropriately.

• **Planning**
The curriculum discourages haphazard work. Instead, it encourages planning and systematic organisation. To instill these values, the curriculum recommends that student teachers be appropriately trained in this area. For this reason, student teachers are trained to systematically plan an effective scheme of work including individual lesson plans.

• **Classroom Management**
Student teachers learn to manage classes practically from their trainers, and theoretically from the courses offered. Both theoretically and practically, from their observations, student teachers are expected to learn to manage the class effectively taking into account factors such as motivation, individual differences and resources.
• **Resources**
The student teachers also learn how to prepare, select, utilise and evaluate teaching resources including textbooks.

• **Assessment/Diagnosis**
The curriculum recognises the need to assess students' performances. Student teachers are made aware that without assessment teaching by itself is incomplete. Thus, they are taught to use appropriate means of assessment of pupils' learning, including monitoring, diagnosis and feedback.

• **Recording/Administering/Reporting**
Since records play a significant role at the schools, student teachers are prepared for the roles they play in keeping records and writing reports. Thus, while still at the institute, student teachers are trained to keep appropriate records and be able to report to concerned parties.

• **The community**
The curriculum also tries to instill in student teachers to be aware of the need to play an active role in integrating school and community.

• **Research**
Because student teachers are expected to read and do some research as teachers, these skills are encouraged. Thus, student teachers are trained to demonstrate basic research skills and be able to carry out community/school-based research.
• **Attitudes**

Values and right attitude to the profession is also stressed. Thus, student teachers are trained to develop a positive attitude to the profession and act as a model of national and cultural values.

• **Reflection/Teacher in Society**

Self-awareness and reflection are not only encouraged but also required of students. Therefore, to boost their confidence to bring change to their profession trainees, are taught to show self-awareness and the ability to reflect on their learning, teaching and working with others.

The one-year training programme at ATTI is divided into two semesters. The first semester runs from September up to the end of December while the second semester commences from the middle of January up to the end of June. Some courses offered in the training programme are given only for one semester while others are offered the whole year.

Environmental Science, Geography, Health and Physical Education, Psychology, and Visual Art are subjects offered in the pre-service ATTI programme only for one semester having three contact hours a week. English language, Mathematics improvement and methodology, General Science, Pedagogy, Psychology, and English methodology are, on the other hand, given for the whole year with three contact hours a week except Pedagogy and Mathematics with one additional contact hour. History and Music, though recently added to the list of courses offered, are omitted because of the shortage of trainers in these fields.
The pre-service course of General Methodology is designed to include topics such as key concepts in education, the process of teaching, the curriculum process, overview of Eritrean primary school curriculum, Education in Eritrea, Planning for Instruction, Teaching Methods/Techniques, Teaching and Learning Aids, and Effective School Management.

Introduction to Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Psychology of Personality and Educational Psychology are areas included under Psychology.

The English syllabus in ATTI programme has two parts. These are English Language Improvement and English Language Methodology. In English Language Improvement the different content areas: Listening, Oral (Communicative English), Grammar, Phonology, Reading, and Writing are included. This course is offered to trainees to equip them with the language that would give them access to different fields of knowledge so that through reading in that language they may gain more knowledge and improve their knowledge of the subject matter they teach. The methodology section, on the other hand, stresses in the skills to teach listening, oral, reading, and writing including Testing and Evaluation. In this course, trainees receive the skills that enable them to teach, test or evaluate English effectively. They are taught how to teach different language skills and how to enable learners use English as a foreign language.

The course Mathematics is also designed to help student teachers to acquire knowledge and skills on the content of mathematics and method of teaching in mathematics.
Geography, another course in ATTI, includes information on the location and relief of Eritrea, river/drainage and, climate of Eritrea. It is given to trainees to instruct them in geography of the nation. In addition to this, the population, culture and different occupations of the Eritrean people and map reading are discussed in the course. This course is designed and offered at the institute to equip student teachers with the knowledge of Eritrean geography and prepare them for their teaching profession, which could be teaching geography to primary students.

The pedagogy course in ATTI includes past and present Eritrean education, curriculum, common methods of teaching (General methodology), principles of teaching, how to prepare and use teaching and learning aids, lesson presentation skills, instructional objectives, instructional planning, effective class management, and microteaching.

All of the courses mentioned above are offered in the ATTI training programme. Therefore, the student teachers do not train to teach particular fields or subject areas. Rather, they are responsible to teach any subject area at any grade at the primary school level. However, different subjects require different methods of teaching, which may be obtained from the courses in subject methodology. In ATTI, subject methodology for each subject is not given – except for English and mathematics.

In Eritrea, there are nine ethnic groups each with its own language and culture. Hence, the Eritrean ministry of education decided that mother tongue language should be the medium of instruction at primary level, taking the advantages of mother tongue instruction into consideration at this level. The
medium of instruction at both junior and high school levels, however, is English. This is because the English language is an international language that enables students to communicate with different people in the world in their future career and offers materials, such as books, prepared by scholars and experts in specific fields written in that language. The main reason for selecting English as a medium of instruction is for international relations and the development of science and technology. The focus of the country is on science and technology and English is an important medium for teachers to transfer and students to acquire (Gerahtu, 1999: 10-11). Furthermore, there is no supra-ethnic language in Eritrea, although Tigrigna and Arabic are used as languages of communication due to historical and sociological reasons (Gerahtu, 1999: 10). So a language like English, which is neutral, solves the problem of possible domination of one language until all Eritrean languages are developed to a point where they can all fulfill this role (Tesfamariam, 2000: 4).

The medium of instruction at ATTI like in all post primary schools in Eritrea, is English. However, student teachers recruited from different ethnic groups of the country, train for one academic year and are assigned to teach in schools where their mother tongue serves as the medium of instruction. Since ‘Amharic’ (the official language of Ethiopia) was the medium of instruction before independence (1991), Eritrean languages were not used in the schools. This affects the employment of the languages for instruction negatively because they are used for the first time and may not have the necessary vocabulary. Further, people’s perception of their own language, which they rate as low, may affect their use at school. In addition, most of the languages have not had their own scripts for a long time. Both ‘Tigrigna’ and ‘Tigre’ use
‘geeza’ script while Arabic uses its own different script. Recently, other languages i.e. ‘Afar’, ‘Bilen’, ‘Kunama’, ‘Nara’, and ‘Saho’ have started to be written in Latin script. Therefore, the student teachers that are recruited in the areas where these languages are spoken need to be trained at ATTI in how to write each language using Latin script. This is what the trainers call ‘Transliteration’.

The training of ‘Transliteration’ is given for a semester for two contact hours a week. However, this study focused only on those teachers who were trained to teach through ‘Tigrigna’, and does not take ‘Transliteration’ as a field of focus. This is because, as a non-speaker of their languages, I as the researcher cannot effectively communicate with other language speakers. In addition, the non-‘Tigrigna’ speakers are found too far from my residence.

ATTI is striving, as far as the available manpower and economy allows, to provide fruitful training to create effective teachers so as to make the young generation active participants in the process of building a new Eritrea. However, thus far attempts have not been made to conduct research to understand primary school teachers’ perception of their pre-service training, something which this research attempts to do.

According to the World Bank (1994: 117) ATTI faces the following difficulties:

1. None of the teaching staff has been professionally trained in curriculum development and materials preparation.
2. While the instructors have the appropriate level of qualification and high levels of motivation, their pedagogic methods require updating.

3. Supportive facilities, such as the library, need improvements.

Furthermore, the study of the World Bank (1994: 119) indicated that:

There are a number of factors which will need to be addressed in efforts to improve the quality of education in Eritrea. A significant number of primary school teachers, at least 1,400 persons or 28 percent of the teaching staff are made up of college drop-outs or high school graduates, who have received only minimal training (of 5-8 weeks duration) before being posted to schools. Efforts at upgrading their skills over three summers started in 1993, there is also backlog of teachers inherited from the pre-liberation system that needs refresher courses.

With all this in mind, I was interested to find out primary school teachers’ perceptions of their pre-service teacher education. Specifically, I wanted to know from them whether they felt knowledge and skills gained in their pre-service course helped them to create meaningful classroom instruction.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this mini-thesis is to explore the link between the pre-service courses for Eritrean primary school teachers and their actual work place experience. That is, it tries to investigate how useful the knowledge and skills acquired at the pre-service level were for primary school teachers who graduated with one-year qualification from the Asmara Teachers Training Institute (ATTI). In particular I focused on what they had learnt in the pedagogy course of their training programme.
The insights gained through this research will suggest feedback to ATII about their courses. In pursuance of this aim, answers were sought to the following questions.

- Have primary teachers found the knowledge and/or skills acquired from the course helpful to:
  - make and use effective lesson plans?
  - prepare and use relevant teaching aids?
  - assess their students' performance?
  - prepare lesson content?
  - manage the classroom effectively?
  - select and use relevant teaching methods?
- What recommendations would they make for improving the link between pre-service education and the demands of the work place?

1.4 Limitation of the study

The study is an attempt to explore the link between the pre-service education for Eritrean primary school teachers and their actual work place experience. I
have selected recently trained teachers because the perceptions of these teachers may not be as affected by their experience over time in the field as other teachers.

This study was restricted only to “Debarwa”, “Embeito”, and “Areza” primary schools taking two teachers, having one or two years experience, from each of these three schools. It was difficult to involve more teachers due to various factors affecting the study. Among these were a shortage of time to collect data, since recently trained teachers were assigned to rural areas where there is shortage of transportation and which consumes time to travel from my area of residence.

1.5 Outline of the investigation

This mini-thesis is organised in five major divisions. The first chapter deals with the general introduction. The second chapter reviews related literature. Methodology of the study is discussed in the third chapter. Chapter Four presents the data and analyses it. Finally, in the last chapter, the summary of the findings, including the conclusion and recommendations parts are presented.
Chapter Two

Literature review

This chapter deals with the general objectives of teacher education, and the experiences of teacher education in different countries. It reviews different studies which discuss the influence of teacher education in promoting effective teaching-learning activity. Furthermore, it deals with the importance of pre-service education for student teachers to acquire knowledge and skills to evaluate the performance of pupils. It also, through relevant literature, discusses how methods of teaching are selected, and preparing the content so as to create meaningful teaching and learning activity in the classroom.

2.1 Teacher education

Teacher education, according to Okafor (1998: 26), is the form of education which is properly planned and systematically tailored and applied for the cultivation of those who teach or will teach, particularly, but not exclusively, in primary and post-primary levels of schooling.

Teacher education should help in maintaining the school system by preparing teachers who can effectively discharge their duties within existing realities. On the other hand, it should bring about desirable changes in the prevalent practices of pedagogy and school organisation (Govinda and Buch, 1990: 141).

The content of initial teacher education courses is usually based on four major elements: one, dealing with the process of teaching; second, educational
theory; third, practical experience of teaching in school, that is teaching practice; and fourth, it is concerned with subject studies (Naish, 1990: 27).

Thus, in teacher education, pre-service teachers will develop subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as a result of training and experiences: “these types of knowledge involve knowing the content of a subject or discipline and being aware of the means by which the content is taught” (Farrant, 1996: 13).

Naish (1990: 33), taking the University of London as a reference, lists the following specific aims of teacher education.

- **Skills and abilities:** the course sets out to involve students in developing a range of skills concerned with organising an environment and climate conducive to learning, such as:
  - Stimulating and fostering children’s interest;
  - Organising children’s learning experiences;
  - Evaluating their own work and that of the children;
  - Contributing towards course planning;
  - Communicating effectively with children, colleagues, parents and the public at large;
  - Handling and managing educational hardware, including recent technology.

- **Knowledge and understanding:** the course encourages student teachers to develop knowledge and understanding of:
- Theory relevant to the needs of the beginning teachers;
- The education system, its recent development and future trends;
- General characteristics of the curriculum, its constraints and opportunities;
- The aim and educational potential of their subject or specialism and its relationship with the broader curriculum;
- Methods of planning and teaching and learning sequences which involve children in the process of learning;
- Methods of evaluating and assessing children’s work;
- Broad educational problems and issues.

- **Personal qualities**: the course sets out to foster and encourage certain characteristics of a good teacher such as:

- Concern for children and society;
- Professional commitment;
- Openness and sensitivity to change;
- A disposition towards co-operation with colleagues in common drive for the enhancement of children’s education;
- The ability to respond sensitively and constructively to children and colleagues.

Practically, however, problems have been identified in the bridging of training institutions and the schools themselves. As Putz (1992: 1) states, “research has indicated that beginning teachers experience difficulties in their initial year in the classroom.”
Tyler, for instance, indicates that the task of preparing teachers cannot be accomplished solely through pre-service programs. As he puts it:

Time is not sufficient in the pre-service programs of teacher education to acquire all the intellectual and emotional resources that could be helpful. Pre-service education must be conceived as a substantial beginning of a life long program of professional education (cited in Putz, 1992: 11).

Cole and Watson, as cited in Putz (1992: 11) also support the idea: "...the pre-service program provides merely the foundation for continuing professional growth."

The result of Putz's study (1992: 11) indicates that despite the best efforts of teacher education institutions, the programs designed to prepare teachers do not completely prepare graduates to carry out the role of teachers. However, Putz (1992: 12) strongly reminds that "it would be unfair to accuse teacher education institutions of ineffectiveness or incompetence."

2.2 Teacher education in different countries

The programme of training teachers varies from country to country. In some countries, the training programme is extended for some time while in others it is limited to a short period. The reason behind this may be the shortage of skilled persons and/or financial problem.

Primary schoolteachers' training in Eritrea is given to student teachers who take the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination. Candidates are expected to have the minimal score of 1.8 out of 4 grade points though the
maximum score is left open. This means that only those who failed to score passing marks to join Asmara University for a diploma or degree in different professions offered by the programmes of the University including teacher education for high schools join Asmara Teachers’ Training Institute. At ATTI, the student teachers stay for one year as full-time students. Their food and residence fees are covered for them and they are expected to give their full-time to study. In short, at the end of the training, the student teachers leave the institute with only one year’s training, in addition to their secondary school education.

In the one year pre-service education programme at the University of the Western Cape, in South Africa, “students are expected to complete two Subject Method courses in the school subjects they plan to teach, as well as a general course entitled ‘Preparing to teach in the South today’, which is offered to the whole group of students” (Robinson, 1999: 191).

In Nigeria, according to Akpe (1987: 277), teachers who serve in primary schools train in the college, which provides a three year programme leading to the qualification of the National Certificate in Education (NCE). According to him, programme graduates possess sufficient knowledge to teach in primary schools and show favourable attitudes to teaching. The practical teaching period is twelve weeks, which is adequate for students’ future professional engagement. The allocation of 25% to the professional component and 75% to the academic component is adequate distribution for the programme.

In India, according to Govinda and Buch in Tisher and Wideen (1990: 142), pre-service teacher education to primary schoolteachers is given for those who
complete twelve years of education and possess a higher/senior secondary certificate. The duration of the training is two years full-time leading to a Diploma in education of primary teachers’ certificate. At this level, the teacher education programme embraces both course work and teaching practice for all student teachers without having any specialised areas of training. Courses attempt to give knowledge of facts, concepts and principles for teaching, while teaching practice attempts to provide student teachers with the opportunity to apply the newly acquired professional knowledge and allow them to develop their teaching skills further (Simbo, 1989: 195).

2.3 Different studies in pre-service teacher education

Teacher education is intended to affect the quality and professional ability of teachers in schooling. As a result, when a child’s or adult’s first teacher is poorly trained and poorly motivated, the very foundation on which all subsequent learning will be built will be unsound (Delors, 1996: 146).

At the primary level in most countries, according to Okafor (1998: 46), a vast preponderance of primary schoolteachers are not adequately trained for their work. Short courses, which use modern and experimental methods and techniques of teaching, should be introduced to take effect during the long vacation. The initial teacher training for qualified teachers should be closely linked with practical experience in school, and involve the active participation of experienced practising schoolteachers (Marsh, 1990: 186).

Teachers in most developing countries depend on the conventional teacher-centred methods of instruction essentially involving “chalk and talk” as the
main instructional strategy (Bacchus, 1996: 79). This may be the result of poor teacher training. According to Zeichner, as cited by Bacchus (1996: 80) in these countries “most education programs are too narrowly focused because they give little attention to the social, political, and cultural content of schooling.” As the result, the teachers’ performance in the school may be unsatisfactory.

The teachers’ experience that they imitate from their teachers, at primary, junior and high school levels also influences their performance in teaching. Regarding this, Bacchus (1996: 83) explains:

Teachers must be more conscious that by the time students enter the teachers’ college they have already developed deep-seated attitudes to and particular perceptions of teaching that are usually a product of their own 10-12 years of experience as students. These earlier exposures to teaching will have a strong influence on their own teaching strategies unless the preparation they receive as teachers is effective in helping them overcome some of the more negative aspects of their own school experiences.

In 1997, in England, Davies and Ferguson carried out a research on teachers’ views of the role of initial teacher education in developing their professionalism. According to the results obtained, many gaps in training were identified by the 61 teachers in the interview sample. Some of the gaps were lack of help in how to teach children to read, not enough observation of ‘good’ teaching, little guidance in the administrative side of teaching, lack of guidance on the practical side of classroom management, lack of training in
how to assess children's ability and progress. Similarly, as stated by Davies and Ferguson (1997: 43), the 1992 report of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) indicates that 46% of the newly qualified primary teachers felt poorly prepared or not prepared at all by their initial teacher education, 65% of primary teachers felt poorly prepared or not prepared at all for administrative duties, and 38% of primary teachers felt poorly or unprepared for assessing pupils' work. A majority of primary teachers (57%) felt well prepared for classroom management.

In September 1987 Erwin Miklos and Nyrmal Greene, in Alberta University, conducted a study on the effectiveness of pre-service teacher education of the university. The purpose of the study was to examine to what extent preparation programs (pre-service education) provided teachers with the knowledge and skills important for effective teaching.

To confirm this, the authors distributed questionnaires to 515 teachers who were graduates of Alberta teacher preparation programs and who were in their first, third or fifth year of teaching.

According to the authors, organising for teaching, motivating, communicating with students, and learning from experience were rated highest in importance by teachers. On the contrary, understanding the organisational structure of the educational system, participating in the process of improving schools, and understanding social issues or legal aspects of teaching were rated less important by respondents.
On the other hand, their finding indicates that more than one-half of the respondents believed that preparation (pre-service teacher education) was a greater source of learning in understanding one or more subject areas in depth, knowing the ethical standards of the teaching profession, to acquiring a broad general education, realising how children develop and learn, understanding the legal aspect of one’s work as a teacher, and having an effective command of the language of instruction, and understanding the organisational structure of the educational system than that of experience.

However, only a few respondents (less than 10%) regarded pre-service teacher education to be the major source of learning to help students acquire a love of learning, manage the routine classroom activities, relate to students in a supportive way, communicate effectively to other teachers, and learn from one’s professional experience.

On the other hand Veenman’s study (1984, 160) indicates that beginning teachers manifest a lot of problems. This may have some relationship with pre-service education. Veenman, using data based on questionnaires and interviews, identified that classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students’ work, relationship with parents, organisation of classroom work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students were some of the problems beginning teachers have.

In Nigeria, in 1991 a study was conducted by Onocha and Okpala to determine practising primary schoolteachers’ perception of the relevance of topics taught in educational measurement courses. Questionnaires were
distributed to 1500 teachers with 5 to 16 years experience. In the questionnaire, a list of 31 measurement topics and concepts were developed from the course content and measurement textbooks used in teacher training institutions.

According to the results obtained, more than 60% of the teachers think those topics such as the role of measurement and evaluation in teaching, determining validity and reliability should receive more importance. In addition, the same respondents think that relating test scores to instructional objectives, constructing and using essay test items, and factors that distort students' test scores should be given equal weight as the previous topics above. Further, topics related to testing and test use carry considerable weight. Hence, topics such as using tests to diagnose students' needs, locating tests for classroom use, test administration and scoring, and psychological problems of testing were related as more important. Furthermore, these respondents stressed student intelligence and the need to define it. Thus, the respondents suggest the need to emphasise topics such as basic concepts of intelligence and aptitude, the concept of formative and summative evaluation. In addition, they suggest that concepts of testing, measurement, assessment and evaluation, and making and reporting procedures, measuring students' intelligence, aptitude and achievement be given due importance in pre-service training programmes.

On the contrary, topics such as statistics used to describe test scores; interpreting different kinds of scores; constructing specialised tests; constructing questionnaires and rating scales; methods of processing data obtained from questionnaires and rating scales; concepts of observational
techniques; constructing and using observational instruments; and interpretation of test norms were considered not important in practical work situations by more than 50% of the teachers.

Again in Nigeria, in 1989, Simbo conducted a study to investigate the effect of microteaching on the quality of teaching behaviours of social studies student teachers in their actual teaching practice classrooms. The respondents were 20 students from a population of 160 year II social studies education undergraduates selected using stratified random sampling method of selection.

These 20 sample students were divided into two equal groups such that the first group was exposed to a mini-microteaching programme while the second group was not exposed to this programme so that it became a control group.

The result of Simbo’s study indicates that the student teachers who were exposed to microteaching experience demonstrated a higher quality of teaching behaviours during the teaching practice exercise. Based on this study, the author (Simbo) recommended that teacher-training institutes need to add microteaching in their education programme in order to produce quality teachers.

Over and above the problems already mentioned, the following are some of the possible major criticisms of pre-service teacher education identified in the literature (Gore, 1995: 16-17):

- Most graduates are mildly dissatisfied about their teaching practice (Miklos et al., 1987).
• There is too much emphasis on theory (Miklos et al., 1987) or the link between theory and practice need to be improved (Duquette, 1993).

• Practicums are often inadequate (Duquette, 1993, Miklos et al., 1987).

• The quantity and quality of feedback for novice teachers is insufficient and inadequate (Harris and Harris, 1992).

2.4 Teaching practice

Teaching practice is an important and indeed essential component of any teacher education programme. Giving adequate time to teaching practice helps trainees gain confidence in their future careers. Stating clearly the relevance or purpose of the lesson, presenting information in a systematic sequence, giving opportunities for pupils to ask and answer questions, and to give their opinions and asking good-quality, varied, well-distributed questions were behaviours observed from student teachers having more teaching practice (Simbo, 1989: 16-17).

The teaching practice period may vary from place to place. According to Robinson, at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), student teachers are exposed to about 10 weeks in local schools and are expected to plan and teach at least two lessons a day, to observe the classroom practice of other teachers and their peers, and to participate in the life of the school (1999: 195).
During this period, the interns may be supervised by university staff, school staff, school district consultants, or representatives of all of these, depending on the sponsorship of the program (Jacknicke, 1991: 100). During these 10 weeks of teaching practice the student teachers from UWC are under the guidance and supervision of the teachers at the school in addition to supervisors of the university who visit the school three or four times (Robinson, 1999: 195). This is because, according to Sohoni, as cited by Govinda and Buch (1990: 142), the effectiveness of the teacher is influenced significantly in cases where subject experts observe the lesson and give appropriate feedback to their students.

Cope as cited by Nel (1992: 50), argues that the formation of good pupil-teacher relations, application of theory in practice, evaluation of teaching potential, experiencing of teaching success, deepening of self knowledge, experiencing of discipline application, and adaptability and sensitivity are some of the objectives of teaching practice. The work of Gallmeier and Poppleton, again as cited by Nel (1992: 50), illustrates that personal contact with pupils, obtaining support in the transition from student to teacher, obtaining confidence in a variety of teaching techniques, and being exposed to examples of good teaching are some of the benefits which may be acquired from teaching practice.

In South Africa, in 1992, Nel conducted research to determine the relevance of the content of subject didactics courses, as a source of information for student teachers during practice teaching.
According to his findings, the components of a subject didactics course are of considerable importance or benefit to the students as a source of information during practice teaching. During teaching practice, the practice-oriented components such as subject content, microteaching, schemes of work were considered by the students to be the most important elements. In addition, Nel also mentioned that the influence and role of teachers in the schools where the students did their teaching practice was very important, especially in classroom management, contact with headmaster and personnel, class discipline and relations with pupils.

2.5 Evaluating the performance of students

Student teachers in teacher education programmes are not complete strangers to the idea of educational measurement and evaluation. They have seen what their teachers were doing when they were students in primary, junior, and secondary level to evaluate or assess their performance using classwork, homework, tests, exams. However, this does not mean that they have ample knowledge or skills in this field. Therefore, the knowledge and skills of evaluating the performance of students and their own performance in the actual teaching learning process is one of the benefits that the student teachers are expected to acquire from their pre-service education.

According to Stiggins (1990: 97) the day-to-day assessment of students’ achievement in many classrooms is complex and demanding and it is not producing the high quality data for decision making, because those teachers and administrators who serve in the front lines of education have not been provided with basic training in classroom assessment methodology. Stiggins
also mentions that research is needed to understand how to motivate teacher training institutions to provide relevant assessment training, and teachers and administrators to take advantage of training opportunities.

2.6 Methods of teaching

The method of teaching, that is the variety of classroom activities planned by the teacher, must always be appropriate to the basic aspects of teaching. The methods of teaching must, furthermore, fit the subject matter as well as the objectives in view for the lesson (Duminy and Sohng, 1990: 67). According to Griffin, as cited by Simbo (1989: 195), effective methods of teaching, which maximise students' learning, can only be used in the schools if the teachers during their training have been trained to use them. Sharpe (1997: 82) also states the following about teaching methods:

Therefore what students need to be told about teaching methods is certainly not that they should use 'traditional' or 'progressive' methods but rather that they face inexorable choices for which they are accountable both to themselves as professionals and to agencies of the wider society. They must choose when to use a particular strategy and be able to justify this with reference to circumstantial constraints and general criteria against which assessments of teaching quality are made. It is crucial that during the period of initial training students are given ample opportunities to gain experience of a broad range of teaching styles so as to be in a position to discharge this awesome responsibility.

In general, even if there is no single correct way to teach a class, a variety of factors constantly influence the use of the various methods employed in the classroom (Duminy and Sohng, 1990: 68).
2.7 Selecting the content

Since every education department has its list of subjects that must be taught, teachers do not have a free choice in the selection of the content of his/her lessons (Duminy and Sohnge, 1990: 104).

According to Duminy and Sohnge (1990: 104), however, “still, the teacher has the task and privilege to make the finer selection of what should be covered with the pupils. Many of the themes included in the syllabus are so wide that the teacher must make a selection of what he/she regards as the more important aspects.” As they say, the selection of content should take into consideration the pupils’ level of intellectual development, views and interests, as well as the immediate and more remote aims of the syllabus.

2.8 Conclusion

Teacher education is a programme where student teachers begin professional education and is a foundation for continuous professional growth.

Pre-service education is important for student teachers in order to develop skills and abilities to teach well and to evaluate the performance of pupils as well as their own work in their future career. Creating effective classroom interaction, using teaching aids and proper teaching methods as well as promoting effective classroom management, developing knowledge and understanding of theory which enables them to teach effectively are some of the benefits which student teachers are expected to acquire in their pre-service teacher education programme.
However, as it is indicated above, in many places it is found that many teachers in general, and beginning teachers in particular, face difficulties in the practical working situation. This is directly related with the pre-service teacher education programme. It has already been discussed that it is difficult to change teachers’ prior beliefs and attitudes which influence the teaching-learning activity directly or indirectly (as in the Eritrean case where teachers felt the need to use corporal punishment to control the classroom without taking into consideration the disadvantages). Providing too much theory without proportional practising of teaching is also problematic in producing effective teachers.

Teaching Practice during pre-service training has been discovered to be important to student teachers in developing their self-confidence as a teacher. Teaching practice has been found to be helpful to student teachers in classroom management and in forming positive relationship with pupils. At this time, the role of schoolteachers is crucial to student teachers, as they share experiences.

The duration of the training has also discussed as an important aspect of teacher education. Student teachers who practised teaching for a long time, in their pre-service education, gained more skills and knowledge towards presenting the lesson more effectively than those who were not exposed at all or for a short time.

This chapter has dealt with the literature on the teacher education programmes and their influence on training effective teachers. The next chapter presents
the research methodology, the procedures, and technique that were employed in the research process of this particular study.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

This chapter deals with the research approach used in this study, i.e. the data
collection techniques used, the selection of the study site, and the selection of
subjects. In addition, the design of the interview questions, and the process of
conducting interviews so as to explore the link between the pre-service
education for Eritrean primary school teachers and their actual working place
experiences, are also discussed in this chapter. Particularly, the interviews
with the selected Eritrean primary school teachers aimed to understand if the
knowledge or and skills acquired from their pre-service education were
helpful to make and use effective lesson plans, and prepare and use relevant
teaching aids. In addition, the interviews aimed to find out if these skills also
enabled them to assess students' performance, prepare lesson content, and
manage the classroom effectively so as to create effective teaching and
learning activities.

3.1 The research instrument used in the study

This study attempts to investigate Eritrean primary school teachers' perceptions of their pre-service education. It is a qualitative research, which mainly makes use of interviews as a research tool. To collect the data, I interviewed six primary teachers from three different schools in two regions of Eritrea. In the sections that follow, an attempt is made to discuss the methodology used in this study. Firstly, the chapter attempts to contextualise the study within the qualitative-quantitative research tradition. Then, it
attempts to explain why interviews were used in preference to other research tools, such as questionnaires, observation or surveys. In this section the merits and demerits of interviews are discussed. First we turn to the discussion of contextualising the study in qualitative-quantitative research debate.

Qualitative research, according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1989: 12), enables researchers to learn, at first hand, about the social world they are investigating by means of involvement and participation in that world through a focus on what individual actors say and do.

On the other hand, Banister et al (1994: 3) describe qualitative research as an exploration to uncover the directly unobservable:

(a) an attempt to capture the sense that lies within and that structures what we say about what we do; (b) an exploration, elaboration and systematisation of the significance of an identified phenomenon; (c) the illuminative representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem.

This means that qualitative research studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Louw, 2000: 33).

Qualitative data is collected in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The kind of data collected in qualitative research could include interview transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs and other representations that can convey the actual words or actions of people (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993: 381). Hence, to investigate the perception of teachers of their pre-service education I used an interview as a data collection technique.
An interview, according to Cohen and Manion (1989: 241), involves the collecting of data through direct verbal communication between individuals. It is a technique in which the interviewer asks interviewees relevant questions in order to find out what they think or how they feel about something (Fraenkel and Wallen 1993: 385).

For data collection, I interviewed six primary school teachers from three different schools. Interviews were used to gather information for certain important reasons.

The study attempts to investigate teachers' perception of their pre-service education. As a research technique, an interview enables the researcher to probe and gather information in some depth. In cases where the researcher decides to further explore a point, the researcher can ask questions that enable him/her to extract the information he/she needs.

In addition, interviews, especially unstructured ones, give the flexibility other techniques do not provide. For example, in addition to exploring a point further, interviews enable the researcher to ask for clarification when a reply from an interviewee fails to make sense. Because other techniques do not allow face-to-face interaction with the subjects, the researcher is compelled to be satisfied with incomplete and insufficient data. In other words, the researcher has little or inadequate information. Interviews overcome this constraint as the researcher has direct access to the individuals with information (Wiersma, 1980: 145).
Further, low return rate of questionnaires also led to a preference to use interviews to gather data for the study. For different reasons, people fail to return questionnaires, which limits the pool of information the researcher hopes to draw his data from. Also, it is often observed that subjects fail to fill questionnaires seriously. Often, they are filled in within a short period of time. This greatly affects the reliability of the data.

Classroom observations may enable the researcher to observe if the teacher is teaching effectively or not. However, they do not allow researchers to explore the perceptions of their subjects. For this purpose, the researcher needs to use a technique that enables him to extract data that is not directly observable. Interviews serve this purpose effectively (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993: 385). According to Fraenkel and Wallen, through an interview, we can find out those things which are impossible or difficult to observe directly. They further explain that one can ask people questions to find out about their feelings, thoughts, and intentions, which is difficult to get through observations or questionnaires. Martin (1990: 106) also mentions that:

The interview method is used to find out not only what happened to the client, but also his/her perception of those events, the meaning ascribed to them and the current evaluation put upon them.

Similarly, Merriam (1998: 74) claims interviewing to be necessary when “we cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (Merriam, 1998: 74).
Although lengthy questionnaires can perhaps elicit more information from the subjects, a bulk of questions puts unnecessary stress on them, as they need to answer the questions in detail and explain at some length. Thus, I decided against using questionnaires to explore the teachers' perceptions of their pre-service education. Instead, I used semi-structured interviews to obtain information from the subjects.

Besides being directly relevant to the purpose of the study, interviews also have many advantages. Nalagy (1984: 59) summarises these advantages:

- It is flexible and it is applicable to different types of problems. If the question is not clear to a respondent, it can be rephrased.

- An interviewer can observe both what the respondent says and how he says it. Because a face to face interview involves a process of communication in a natural setting, the researcher can observe the feelings and the emotional reaction of participants.

- It is very useful in collecting personal information, attitudes, or beliefs and it is particularly useful in probing for additional information if the need arises.

- Where a respondent has been motivated to accept the reasons for the interview, the interview can be very effective.

On the other hand, according to Nalagy (1984: 59) the interview method has the following disadvantages.
It is very difficult to generalise from an unstructured interview.

The personal bias, values and beliefs of the interviewer may affect the result of the interview.

The technique is time-consuming.

The race, tribe, age, sex, religion, vocabulary, accent, ethnic background or social class of the interviewer could alter the response of the interviewees. These factors must be considered in selecting the interviewees.

For Kvale (1996: 296), interviewing is a means of knowledge production, which involves the researcher's processing of the data collected. In this process, Kvale explains, the researcher's interpretation of the data plays a major role. Further, the process includes reviewing relevant literature, through which the findings are compared to other results in similar situations:

The interview is a situation of knowledge production in which knowledge is created between the views of the two partners in the conversation. The construction of knowledge is not completed by the interaction of the researchers and their subjects, but continues with researchers' interpretations and reporting of their interviews, to conversations with other researchers about their findings (Kvale, 1996: 296).

Since interviews form the only means used to collect data in this study, they need to be discussed at some length, in order to highlight the reasons for selecting them. Interviews, even with the highly structured interview schedule, provide an opportunity to obtain qualified answers. This is done in two ways, namely probing and promoting. Probing is when the interviewer asks the
respondent to explain an answer in a little more depth. Prompting, on the other hand, is an attempt to ensure that the respondent has considered all possibilities when replying to the question. Probing, according to Zikumund (1997: 491), may be needed for two types of situations:

First, it is necessary when the respondent must be motivated to enlarge on, clarify, or explain his or her answers. It is the interviewer’s job to probe for complete, unambiguous answers. The interviewer must encourage the interviewees to clarify or expand on answers by providing a stimulus that will not suggest the interviewer’s own ideas or attitudes. The ability to probe with neutral stimuli is the mark of an experienced interviewer. Second, probing may be necessary in situations in which the respondent begins to ramble or lose track of the question. In such cases the respondent must be led to focus on the specific content of the interview and avoid irrelevant and unnecessary information.

Interviews may be structured, unstructured or the combination of the two, i.e. semi-structured. A structured interview, according to Fontana and Frey (1999: 52), is a method of interviewing different interviewees in the sample by formulating the same types of questions and limited set of response categories. As Fontana and Frey (1999: 56) state:

A structured interview aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behaviour within pre-established categories, whereas an unstructured one is used in an attempt to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any priori categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry.

The major use of a highly structured interview, according to Merriam (1998: 74), in qualitative research is to gather common sociodemographic data such as age, income, history of employment, level of formal education, and so on from interviewees. However, “the problem with using a structured interview is
that rigidly adhering to predetermined questions may not allow you to access participants’ perspectives and understandings of the world” (Merriam, 1998: 74).

However, according to Wiersma (1980: 147), “unstructured interviews centred around a topic may, and skilled hands do produce a wealth of valuable data, but such interviews require a good deal of expertise to control and a great deal of time to analyse.”

Semi-structured interviews provide much more scope for the discussion and recording of interviewees’ opinions and views. The interview schedule still needs to be carefully designed but it will consist of some fairly specific questions, each of which may be probed or prompted, and a number which are completely open-ended. These latter questions mainly serve as a checklist for the interviewer to ensure that the question is asked, that different facets are explored and that all the possible answers are covered. Semi-structured interviews are used to collect qualitative information as opposed to quantitative data.

In this study, I decided to use a semi-structured interview because it enabled me to structure the responses of the interviewees so as to give information on the required area. It also allowed me to raise necessary questions which might occur during the interview time. The value of a semi-structured interview is in enabling researchers to probe the responses made by the interviewee while at the same time controlling the tendency to deviate from the topic in question. According to Behr, as cited by Klein (1997: 32), one of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is that it allows for flexibility. I used this feature
during the interviews raising questions such as “how?” “why?” “when?”... As a beginner in research, I also felt that a semi-structured interview would give me more control over the situation.

3.2 Research site

In Eritrea there are six geographical regions namely, ‘Zoba Anseba’, ‘Zoba Debub’, ‘Zoba Maekel’, ‘Zoba Semenawi Keih Bahri’, ‘Zoba Debubawi Keih Bahri’, and ‘Zoba Gash Barka’. Of these six regions the study was conducted in one primary school in ‘Zoba Maekel’, and two primary schools in ‘Zoba Debub’. Of the total six interviewees, four were selected from ‘Zoba Debub’ and two from ‘Zoba Maekel’. The reason I chose two primary schools from ‘Zoba Debub’ is because I taught mathematics from 1993 until April 2000 at ‘Debarwa’ secondary school, which is found in ‘Zoba Debub’. I thought that I would have more access here in ‘Zoba Debub’ than in other regions.

Two of the six interviewees were selected from ‘Zoba Maekel’. I selected these interviewees because they were my students when I taught in ‘Debarwa’ secondary school and I felt that they would be willing to cooperate during the interviews if I involved them in the study.

3.3 Designing the interview questions

As mentioned earlier, the research instrument used in this study was an interview. The interview questions were designed to elicit answers to the main research question and the sub-research questions. I designed ten interview questions as a pilot study on the topic “Perceptions of Eritrean primary school
teachers of their pre-service education.” The interview was conducted with one of the Eritrean students at UWC who was doing human movement science at a diploma level. He graduated from ATTI in 1994 and served as a teacher in different Eritrean primary schools until he came to South Africa to study further. Based on the experience gained from that pilot study, I modified the interview questions and discussed them with some of the Eritrean Masters students at UWC in 1999. Again, having their comments as reference, I prepared eighteen interview questions and discussed the questions with my supervisor in detail. This enabled me to omit some irrelevant questions, and avoid redundancy. In addition, it helped to include relevant questions, and modify some questions which were prepared earlier so as to make the questions clearer to the interviewees.

3.4 The selection of the subjects

In Asmara, I received a letter of permission, which enabled me to conduct research at the schools chosen to be included in the sample. This permission was granted by the Department of Human Resources Development (HRD) office of the Ministry of Education of the state of Eritrea.

In the selected schools, I explained the purpose of the study and how the data was to be collected. Both directors of these schools were co-operative and helped in identifying teachers with one or two years of experience of teaching. The directors also helped to introduce me to the teachers and asked the teachers’ willingness to participate in the study. In all the three selected schools, every concerned teacher was co-operative and interested to give the interviews. In each school, from the teachers with one or two years of
experience, I selected two teachers randomly. Altogether, I interviewed six primary school teachers who recently graduated from ATTI. Recent graduates were selected because they can reflect what is happening today in ATTI since the programme of training has undergone some changes and one cannot ask earlier graduates. Some of the changes (for instance, how teaching practice is conducted in the institution) are important and could lead earlier graduates to provide inaccurate information about the institute.

With regard to the two teachers selected in ‘Zoba Maekel’, I contacted them directly and told them that I was interested in conducting research on Eritrean primary school teachers’ perception of their pre-service education. I asked their willingness to be interviewed about the link between their pre-service education and the actual working situation. They were willing to be interviewed.

Before conducting the interviews with the selected teachers, I had a small meeting with the selected teachers. I used this meeting to explain the aim of the research, the aim of the interview, and to explain that their opinion would be of great help, and to arrange a suitable interview time and venue with each interviewee. This helped to set the tone of the interaction.

The teachers were reassured that their names would not be mentioned in the research report, and, as a result, they were relaxed and answered the questions freely. However, the interviewees did not forbid me to use the names of the schools where they taught. I requested that I could use a tape recorder because I could not memorise or write down all the information they would share, to which they agreed.
3.5 Conducting the interviews

The interview was conducted in the teachers' mother tongue ('Tigrigna'), which is common to the interviewees and the interviewer. This allowed us to communicate effectively and helped to elicit more information than that which would be obtained if English were used, which would create a communication barrier. Hence, before conducting the interview I translated the interview questions into 'Tigrigna' with the help of one of the Eritrean students studying Language Education at UWC.

I interviewed the interviewees at a time convenient for them, which they fixed according to their preference. I used a mini-cassette recorder to capture the data. This is because, as Merriam (1998: 87) states, recording interview data ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis and the interviewer can also listen for ways to improve his/her questioning technique. The interview was fully recorded and transcribed.

Each teacher from 'Debarwa' and 'Areza' (T_3, T_4, T_5 and T_6) was interviewed in their own homes. This is because it was found that their rooms were more silent and relatively free from the interference of individuals than the classes of the schools. The other two teachers, both from 'Embeito' primary school were interviewed in my home in 'Debarwa'. This is because the teachers, who were from 'Debarwa', decided to be interviewed during the semester vacation, when they would come to visit their families in the town. Interviews with the four interviewees took place from Wednesday the 27th of December 2000 up to Friday the 5th of January 2001. The other two teachers both from Embeito
were interviewed on Monday the 29th of January and Monday the 1st of February. The duration of each interview was 45 to 60 minutes.

Relevant information i.e. the coding, years of teaching experience, sex, and a place of teaching of the interviewed teachers is described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers' code</th>
<th>Name of the school</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T₁</td>
<td>Embeito Primary School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₂</td>
<td>Embeito Primary School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₃</td>
<td>Debarwa Primary School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₄</td>
<td>Debarwa Primary School</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₅</td>
<td>Areza Primary School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₆</td>
<td>Areza Primary School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1

N.B. T₁ belongs to respondent "1"  
   T₂ belongs to respondent "2" and so on

3.6 Conclusion

The study has been devised using qualitative research methodology to explore the link between the Eritrean primary school teachers' pre-service education and the actual demands of the work place. The subjects of the study were six primary school teachers who had recently graduated from ATTI and were assigned to teach at Eritrean primary schools. Data was collected through
semi-structured interviews so as to probe the responses made by interviewees and at the same time to control the tendency to deviate from the topic in question. A mini-cassette recorder has been used to collect data with the agreement of all the subjects.

The following chapter presents and discusses the data which was obtained through the interviews with the six Eritrean primary school teachers.
Chapter Four

Teachers' perception of their pre-service education

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to explore some Eritrean primary school teachers' perceptions of their pre-service teacher education which they received at ATTI. Hence, this chapter presents the responses (obtained through interviews) given by the selected teachers with respect to the importance of pre-service education towards preparing teaching aids, preparing lesson content, selecting a proper teaching method, assessing the performance of students, preparing and using lesson plans, and managing classes. In addition, an attempt has been made to discuss the selected teachers' comments about their pre-service education, particularly their pre-service teaching practice experiences, and the relevance of the courses offered at ATTI to the practical work situation.

4.1 Teachers' perception of the importance of pre-service education to prepare and use teaching aids

As asked how well the training at ATTI equipped them to prepare and use teaching aids for particular students and particular situations, the respondents admitted that the training significantly enriched them in this area of their training.

All the respondents pointed out that they had no idea about teaching aids, i.e. how to prepare and use them before the Pedagogy course they took, and that they acquired the skills in their pre-service education. In addition, they said
that the fact that the training was supported with practical activities encouraged them to get interested and learn how to prepare their own teaching aids. This, they said, enriched their experience of preparing teaching aids. Respondent T4 explains:

Especially in our science course, teaching aids were used very frequently. It was at that time that I saw a thermometer could easily be prepared. I have never seen laboratory experiments: how to combine chemicals and form other chemicals in my school life before. However, at ATTI, because materials were available, we did many experiments that helped us not to forget the concepts easily and we learned more about how to prepare teaching aids because we considered their importance was great, especially at primary level.

Other respondents, however, though they knew how to prepare teaching aids, failed to use their knowledge properly. They explained that they found some of the odds at schools they taught at insurmountable. These, they further explained, discouraged them from pursuing their ambition to improve their teaching by employing teaching aids. Respondents T1 and T3, for example, stated that the supply of materials at the school hindered the preparation of teaching aids. Other respondents, however, had no difficulty preparing teaching aids using different materials, which could be found easily around the school environment.

For some teachers materials were no problem. They also didn’t find that a lack of materials made it difficult to apply the theory from ATTI in the school environment. The training, as T2 explained, focused on how to prepare teaching aids using cheap materials. T2 exemplifies his response:

In order to teach about ‘air pressure’ I can use a piece of paper, a glass and water. I fill the glass with water and put the paper on the top
of the glass. Turning the glass upside down doesn’t make the water flow out. Here, students will understand this happened because of air pressure. One can find these materials everywhere.

T5 used similar approaches: “If there is no globe in the school one can prepare it using pieces of paper and attaching them with glue.”

The most important thing teachers should show their students, T1 pointed out, is taking students outside the classroom and showing them real objects based on their maturity level. “For example in teaching science, when we want to talk about plants, we don’t have any problem; we can show them easily.” Mathematics teachers, however, find it difficult to find real objects to show students when they teach. Therefore, they are compelled to prepare teaching and learning aids that can represent a real object.

Moreover, the respondents believed that when they used teaching aids the students’ attention was drawn to the teacher’s explanation and they participated actively through question and answer. On the other hand, if they presented the subject matter without supporting teaching aids, the students got bored.

In general, all the respondents indicated that they had no idea about teaching aids before they got into ATTI but the training provided them with helpful ideas about how to make and use teaching aids. Most of them responded that, even if there was shortage of materials in their schools, it was possible to prepare teaching aids using materials available in the school environment.
4.2 Teachers' perception of the importance of pre-service education to prepare lesson content

Selecting and preparing a lesson content is an important skill for teachers so as to make the teaching and learning process more meaningful. Asked if they thought the training at ATTI equipped them with this skill, the respondents admitted that it did. Some, however, complained that some factors frustrated their efforts to use this skill effectively.

According to T₃, most of the primary school textbooks do not have teachers' guides. In addition, no refresher courses, which help teachers to select, and prepare the content effectively are offered. This forces teachers to follow textbooks, whether the content is difficult, easy, or applied to the school context without adapting it. Respondent T₆ also said that, "mostly, since we had to follow the textbook, our duty was limiting the content of the lesson to each period."

Respondents T₁, T₂, T₃, and T₄, on the other hand, responded that in Pedagogy, a course offered at the ATTI, they learned to relate the topic to the environment and to the previous lesson as far as possible. They admitted that they needed to omit the less important part of the content, or modify or elaborate whenever necessary. Moreover, they responded that when they apply the topic to the environment and to the previous lesson properly, they never faced any problem in preparing the lesson content. Elaborating these points, T₂ said:
First grade students might have heard that “Filfil” (a place which is found in Northern part of Eritrea) is a very green place, but students might not know much about “Filfil” because, we are not living in “Filfil” but in a different location. You might tell them that “Meraguze” (a place where T2 is teaching) is green or the book says “Taff” grows in “Hazemo” but we teach them that “Taff” grows in “Meraguze.” The other lessons or content can be related to the environment similarly.

The above example given by T2, however, is not said to be a good example of relating the content to the environment. That is when the statement is constructed like “Filfil is a very green place” the students are expected to develop the skill of constructing correct sentences in “Tigrigna” and also expected to know that there is a place named “Filfil” in Eritrea which is relatively green.

Though relating the content to the environment is necessary and useful, it should not be emphasised at the expense of other aspects of learning. Of course, the students should see the relevance of the content to their lives but this should not dominate the students’ attention. Instead, teachers should stress the relationship between subjects as well as the relationship between the same subject taught in different grades. This broadens the students’ mind and enables them to think globally. In other words, the narrow subject matter is explored extensively and related to other areas and fields.

From the respondents’ responses, one understands that though they do face problems in selecting and preparing a lesson content, one can say that the pre-service training provided them with some skill for this purpose.
4.3 Teachers' perception of the importance of pre-service education to choose proper teaching methods

Like selecting lesson content, selecting an appropriate and effective method is the mark of a successful teacher. Hence, teachers' training institutions do their best to equip student teachers with this skill. To find out how equipped they think they came out after ATTI, I asked the respondents if they think they had the necessary skills to select the most effective method for a particular lesson.

All the respondents said that the pre-service education helped them to select proper teaching methods. They also stated that they acquired knowledge and skills relating to selecting effective teaching methods, both theoretically and practically. They said that they practised how to select effective teaching methods, using microteaching while in training and had useful feedback from their peers and the trainer at that time. In selecting relevant teaching methods, however, T₆ explained, the academic background of the students, the physical environment where the school is located, and the age of students need to be taken into account.

They explained that teachers need to be introduced to the full concept of teaching methods. This enables them to use these methods with different subjects to attract students' attention and promote meaningful teaching and learning. They need to make informed decisions about different methods for different contexts (situations). Respondent T₅ said: "In a class with large number of students we use the lecture method. If the number of students is not too large, the demonstration method of teaching or a variety of methods of teaching may be used." T₁ recalled how the training at ATTI helped him:
While we were in ATTI, we have been taught that before we started teaching a given topic or chapter we have to know how to teach first. What method should we use so that the students understand the topic easily? Before we choose group discussion, lecture or any other method, we study the topic carefully. The method, what we are going to use has to encourage participation or the students, if it is a teacher-dominated approach it is useless. This is what we got in ATTI. There are a variety of methods, what is best is, you have to go with each chapter or topic.

However, all the respondents mentioned that the school environment, in their respective schools, did not allow them to apply the acquired knowledge and skills properly. They mentioned the following reasons prevented them from using proper teaching methods:

- The large number of students in a class (mostly 60-70).

- The sitting arrangements in the classroom.

- The physical situation of the classrooms; the classroom is too narrow to arrange the chairs to be suitable for group discussion or other similar teaching and learning activities; the chairs are difficult to move from place to place, because one chair is made to serve three students...

These and other problems limited their choices and hence, most of them frequently used lectures and question and answer methods. This, however, by itself doesn’t mean questions and answers are ineffective. Harris (1995: 15) argues that in combination with other methods, question and answer provides a way to enliven class lessons and enables the exchange of information.
In general, however, though they responded that although they had been taught different methods of teaching, they found it difficult to apply the skills and knowledge they acquired practically due to some physical constraints in the school.

4.4 Teachers' perception of the importance of pre-service education to assess their students' performance

Testing or assessment is an integral part of teaching. For this reason, teachers are often required to assess their students' knowledge, skills and/or attitudes. Thus, in addition to the knowledge of subject matter, teachers are expected to possess testing or assessment skills. Training institutions, therefore, make sure that student teachers possess these skills. Are the student teachers from ATTI well equipped? What do the respondents think?

Asked to respond to these questions, all the respondents said that the pre-service education helped them to assess their student performances. They said they used oral questions, classwork, homework activities, tests, and examinations most frequently for assessment procedures.

All of them mentioned that they felt confident to prepare oral or written questions that evaluate/assess their students' knowledge. They stated that they found assessing the other two aspects i.e. the skills, and attitudes of students acquired as a result of teaching a certain subject or content a little bit difficult. T5 provided an example:
Mostly the training focused on how to assess the knowledge of students at the time of examination. Our assessment procedure, mostly, aims to assess to what extent our students grasp the content taught to them during the teaching learning activity. Even if we learned how to assess our students' skills and attitudes, acquired as a result of teaching and learning activity mostly I found that it is difficult to assess the performance of students in these terms. Therefore, I can say that so far I have not tried to assess the students' skills and attitudes. Perhaps we may obtain these from oral questions or from some activities.

However, when they assessed skills, they said, they tried to assess their skills by asking them to draw some objects (for example, flowers, human skeleton of...) as a project, and that it is limited to the skill of drawing only.

Similarly, assessing student attitudes is not easy. Respondent T₄ pointed out that assessing attitudes is difficult. However, he indicated that he doesn't ignore assessing attitudes completely but attempts to do it in rare conditions. He further explained that concerning attitude he uses questions such as 'what is your idea about...?' He illustrated how he used this approach: "In grade three, for example when I teach about the barter system and the introduction of money in transaction, I ask them: 'Which transaction system is more effective? Why?' This helps me to evaluate their attitude."

In general, the respondents felt that the pre-service education enabled them to assess the performance of their students through oral questions, classwork, homework, tests, projects and examinations. However, they found it difficult to assess the attitude of learners, which the students develop in the teaching and learning process.
4.5 Teachers' perception of the importance of pre-service education to manage the classroom

Asked how their pre-service training helped them manage their classes, the respondents replied that the knowledge and skills they acquired in their pre-service education enabled them to manage classes and to create an effective teaching and learning classroom atmosphere.

All the sample teachers said that they had been trained how to motivate students, a fundamental factor that promotes effective teaching and learning. According to their responses, the following were some of methods they used to motivate their students:

- Relating the topic with the environment.
- Being friendly or building a positive relationship with students.
- Using a variety of teaching methods.
- Using reinforcement.
- Telling stories (if possible, stories related to the topic).
- Asking questions before starting the lesson.

Respondents T2, T5, and T6 admitted that they found managing classes difficult. In addition, they found it difficult to enforce discipline without
corporal punishment. They stated that because most of the students in primary schools were very small kids, they sometimes found it necessary to use corporal punishment, without which, they said, it was difficult to create a conducive classroom atmosphere. T₃ defended his action: "In ATTI we learned not to use punishment. Instead, we were informed to use proper punishment. However, the conduct of some students does not encourage you to apply this theory."

Opposing this idea, T₁ and T₃ responded that enforcing discipline through corporal punishment was harmful or detrimental. T₃ said,

Here, teachers often use corporal punishment. But what we learned was that, we shouldn't punish them. They might be afraid of one or two of them but from my experience I understand that the students get worse if they are beaten. They get angry, to spite the teacher even if one beats one student, from what I observed. I don't feel like beating the students. The reason is they don't receive what is taught.

As stated in chapter 2, changing student teachers' conceptions is difficult. Though these teachers knew the theory of classroom management and could create a conducive classroom atmosphere, most failed to apply the theory. Instead, most resorted to corporal punishment to manage their classes and to force learners into submission. One reason that these student teachers use the rod could be because during their student days they saw their teachers excessively using it. In addition, these student teachers work with old teachers who think the only way to get students' attention is by using the cane. In short, though at ATTI they were told not to use a stick, this theory is too weak to dislodge their attitude of good classroom management.
4.6 Teachers' perception of the importance of pre-service education to make and use lesson plans

All the respondents said that preparing and using a lesson plan was one of the things they learned in their pre-service education. Respondents T₁ and T₂ mentioned that the knowledge to prepare and use a lesson plan enabled them to teach confidently and to select the proper teaching methods in making their teaching meaningful. T₂ further explained how a lesson plan enhances the effectiveness of a teacher's effort: "A lesson plan is helpful in order not to confuse students and to cover the lesson on time according to the assigned time. It also helps the teacher gain confidence and manage his/her work properly." Similarly, T₆ explained that a lesson plan guides a teacher's activities to achieve an expected goal. Furthermore, T₆ underlined the importance of a lesson plan in evaluating a teacher's efforts. "We always attempt to use it to evaluate our own performance and students' understanding of the given lesson and budgeting of the allocated time for that particular subject matter."

On the other hand, T₃ said that she gained the experience to prepare lesson plans through practice—not through training. During the time of teaching practice, she said, she sought the help of experienced teachers to assist her to prepare it. She said that she and the other prospective teachers were not adequately trained how to prepare lesson plans while they were at ATTI. She further explains:

On my side, I cannot really say that we discussed the essential features of the lesson plan. The reason is that the trainer did not give us opportunity to examine and discuss the content of the lesson plan.
The trainer brought us a single format paper, which was done by previous trainees. Then, he instructed us to have a look at the format paper. However, the trainer ordered us to return the paper soon and gave us assignment to prepare a lesson plan. At that time, we were very busy to refer books and we did not receive feedback individually from the trainer. What I did was to consult teachers how to prepare a lesson plan effectively when we were exposed to teaching practice for a month.

The others had different experiences. They said that they had done sufficient practical work and that they used the skill they acquired in their practical work situation. T2 explained:

We have practised repeatedly, even through teaching practice, peer teaching and micro teaching, so I never have any problem to prepare lesson plans. Neither have I any problem to use it. To divide the allotted time and prepare the lesson plan and implement the lesson has not been a problem to me.

Most of the respondents indicated that while at ATTI they were trained how to write and use lesson plans. Most also felt that their training helped them to teach confidently and effectively instruct their students.

4.7 Teachers' opinion of their pre-service teaching practice period

Prospective teachers, however, were not introduced only to theoretical principles of teaching at ATTI. Student teachers are required to go out for teaching practice for a month before they graduated from the institute.

Teaching practice, in the form of sending prospective teachers to selected primary schools which are found in Asmara has been introduced in ATTI recently. At the very beginning student teachers took teaching practice in the
institute in the form of peer teaching. The respondents said that doing teaching practice helped them to observe what goes on at school, what relationship teachers have among themselves, between teachers and students, teachers and the director (principal). They also observed that other important activities of a school. Respondent T1 for instance said:

We were out for teaching practice. It was very helpful. It was a real time of applying theory in practice. In other words, it was a means of assessing and showing how much one understood and how much one was prepared for real teaching.

The practice teaching was for one month. Before they were exposed directly to teaching practice, they observed primary school teachers at work in class for one week. At the end of each class, they discussed with each other and with their trainers, raising the weak and the strong sides of the teaching they observed. Respondents said that this enabled them to learn more from experienced teachers. After the one week observation period, the student teachers spent three weeks practising teaching, learning the profession practically.

All the respondents, however, said that the duration was much too short. This, they said, forced the trainers to observe the student teachers at work only once a week i.e. the trainers observed each student teacher only twice during the whole period of teaching practice. They said that the time was not sufficient to obtain the necessary feedback, which enables student teachers to understand their weak and strong sides. Because they were new to the profession, they badly needed the feedback, which would have improved their teaching significantly. They complained that they were observed not because it was
thought it would help them but for the sake of assessing their performance. Here we can understand that the trainers used formative assessment only to assess the ultimate success of the teaching practice programme. However, using formative assessment, which is aimed at giving feedback towards improvement of student teachers’ performance during the teaching practice period is forgotten. But, this type of assessment also enables student teachers to have a clear image about their way of teaching and also enables the trainers to observe some weak and strong parts of the ATTI programme in general so as to promote the necessary change for the next training session.

Immediate feedback/comment is crucial for student teachers to understand their weaknesses and strengths. This enables trainees to take corrective measures and build on their strong areas. On the contrary, lack of feedback and constructive comments encourage harmful practices to continue to be practised and affects student teachers’ performances, and ultimately the students at the school.

During their teaching practice, respondents said, they obtained inadequate support from their trainers. Considering that there was a shortage of time, and a relatively large number of students, however, the respondents said that they do not blame their trainers for not observing them more than twice during their teaching practice.

To overcome the problem, the respondents suggested the idea of involving experienced teachers in the training or support student teachers at their respective schools. They said that their teaching practice would have been
more helpful in shaping their future careers if schoolteachers were more involved during their teaching practice. T_2 discussed the suggestion:

Of course there might have been the shortage of time for our trainers to observe us frequently. However, the schoolteachers could also have done it as experienced teachers. I think they had time to observe us and give us constructive comments since, at that time their teaching load was taken by student teachers.

The respondents’ comments about the participation of the schoolteachers during the pre-service teaching practice period is constructive. A systematically organised programme that involves schoolteachers and the ATTI instructors may maximise the knowledge and skills to be gained through practice teaching.

In general, they responded that as prospective teachers, the teaching practice period enabled them to investigate what goes on at a school, access the experience of experienced teachers, and to have feedback about their teaching.

However, they observed that the result would have been more fruitful if their trainers’ visits had been more frequent and if they had obtained constructive comments from the schoolteachers in the place of their trainers’ who were too busy to do so.

4.8 Teachers’ opinion on the duration of the training for the pre-service education

The duration of the training in ATTI is one academic year. All of the respondents, except T_2 and T_4, mentioned that one-year training is too short
to train as a primary school teacher. These two respondents felt that there were too many courses, which covered vast portions, which kept them very busy throughout the year and despite this, failed to cover the content of the courses. Respondent T₃ elaborated this:

There was too much to cover. One subject is given on top of the other. For example, the time in which one should have been engaged is lost to doing some assignments. I believe, there should have been separate time for such assignments.

On the other hand, Respondents T₂ and T₄ believed that the duration of the training was sufficient. T₄ said that it was essential that student teachers were kept busy because in the practical school situation they are forced to be busy since there was a shortage of teachers in the country and that their stay at ATTI trained them to cope with the load of work at schools. T₂ argued that additional courses were not necessary because they had taken courses on primary school level content areas and already had sufficient knowledge from their primary and secondary school level courses. Rather, student teachers needed to receive training only on how to teach and handle students properly to create effective teaching and learning situations. Therefore, this respondent argued the duration was sufficient if more attention is given to Pedagogy and Educational Psychology courses.

In the whole, the majority of the respondents held that since the duration of the training was short they were forced to finish the courses in flimsy ways without mastering the courses in the manner they were expected to do. Moreover, they believed that their pre-service education would have been better if the duration was longer than one academic year, the time currently allocated for the training to be completed in.
4.9 Teachers' perception of the importance of the courses of pre-service education.

To be equipped for work, student teachers need to take different courses at ATTl. To find out how useful the courses offered were, I asked the respondents about them.

According to the teachers interviewed, the courses in ATTl were helpful. Especially Pedagogy and Educational Psychology were suggested by all of the respondents as the most important and useful courses. These courses deal with the concepts of how to treat students, how to identify students with problems, and how to help them, how to present the subject matter more successfully and effectively, and how to make and use teaching aids.

The respondents also mentioned that they were trained how to calculate the level of difficulty of questions for assessment, using the idea of statistics, so as to store relatively more helpful questions to evaluate their students' performance. However, they stated that it was impossible to use this idea in the school due to various reasons. The large number of students in a class, and the number of subjects they teach are some of the constraints they mentioned to have prevented the practical implementation of this idea.

In general, being confident in their work, being able to make and use teaching aids and being able to use different teaching methods were some of the main benefits they say they gained from their pre-service education.
Some of the respondents, however, thought that the courses offered at ATTI were insufficient. They argued that to equip student teachers better, some more courses needed to be added into the ATTI curriculum. Respondents T₁, T₃, T₄, and T₆ stated that “Tigrigna” and Civics should be added to the curriculum of ATTI. These respondents argue that these subjects are taught to primary school pupils and teachers are expected to teach them before they have adequate knowledge of the subjects, which puts a burden on the teachers to start from scratch and build their knowledge of these subjects. T₆ explained:

I would like to say it would have been better if the concerned body could introduce “Tigrigna” and Civics. During the reign of “Dergue” (before independence), there was “Amharic” (Ethiopian official language). Isn’t it a language? And one can study through it. They used it starting from Grade 1 up to Grade 12. Now the same is with “Tigrigna”. “Tigrigna” should have been offered because “Tigrigna” is difficult to teach. There are lots of things one doesn’t know about the language. The same is true about Civics. The courses that are taught at the primary school should have been offered.

T₃ and T₄ made the following comments respectively, which show how significantly important pre-service education had been for them. They, however, did not deny the problems and constraints they face that hindered their progress to put the theory into practice. From their comments one sees that though they were equipped theoretically, extra measures and ample support from schools needs to be provided to teachers to effectively teach learners.

Before I joined the ATTI I had tried to teach as a self-employed teacher, teaching privately. It is not that I had the necessary knowledge but out of the idea to try my hands at something, I know nothing. But one learns a lot in the ATTI. There is a lot of difference
between what I had used and what I learned from the ATTI. Before I taught haphazardly. I mean, I taught as I felt was right. Later, I gained many interesting things that one should not start immediately, that one has to observe students…(T3).

The schools don’t have sufficient materials to support your class with relevant teaching aids. Even the school’s situation itself does not allow one to divide the class into groups for group discussion. There is no ample place even for better sitting arrangement. In general, if these and some other problems were controlled, our pre-service education would be helpful to be an effective teacher (T4).

4.10 Conclusion

According to the data obtained from the interview, these six teachers acquired helpful knowledge and skills to prepare and use teaching aids, which enabled them to motivate their students and to create meaningful teaching-learning activity. They argued that using teaching aids was advantageous because it gives students the opportunity to scrutinise the subject matter and to understand the content of the work.

Even if, as two of the respondents (T1 and T3) expressed, the economic background of the schools hinders the preparation of teaching aids, the rest of the respondents argued that their pre-service education enabled them to prepare teaching aids using materials which can be found easily in their environment.

Most of the respondents also believed that their pre-service education was helpful to prepare the lesson content, i.e. to relate it with the environment. They also mentioned that their ability to prepare lesson plans was acquired
from their pre-service education and that thus they faced no problems to prepare and use lesson plans.

They also replied that they prefer to use lectures, and asking and answering methods of teaching most of the time, because the large number of students in a class, the sitting arrangements, and the physical situation of the classroom forced them to apply these methods only. However, they believed that if these problems were solved they knew how to use other methods of teaching they learned in ATTI, such as group discussion.

Respondents indicated that they found the pre-service teaching practice period to be too short. They discussed that they had not been observed by their trainers sufficiently to gain helpful advice, because the trainers couldn't do more than what they did in that very limited time. However, the interviewees believe that this problem would have been solved if the schoolteachers participated in observing them, at the time when the trainers were not observing them.

Respondents also argued that the duration of the training is too short to cover the courses and contents properly. Because of this, most of the courses were covered in a hurry. The majority of the sample teachers recommended that the training be longer than one academic year so that the student teachers would be able to master the courses – especially, Pedagogy and Educational Psychology.

Making a friendly approach or positive relationship with students, using a variety of teaching methods, using reinforcement, telling stories, and asking
questions were different methods they used to attract the attention of their students so as to make the teaching-learning process effective. However, three of the respondents felt that corporal punishment was more effective in controlling their students and promoting effective classroom interaction.

Most of the respondents believed that assessing their students’ attitudes and skills acquired from the teaching and learning process was difficult because, they didn’t have ample knowledge or skills in these aspects. As a result, almost all of the questions they prepared were directed at assessing the knowledge of their students.

Generally speaking, the respondents believed that, in their pre-service education, they acquired knowledge and skills which was helpful to prepare and use teaching aids, to prepare lesson content, to choose teaching methods, to assess the knowledge of their students, to manage the classroom, and to make and use lesson plans, which enable them to teach effectively in primary schools. However, they replied that, the practical situation of the schools hindered them to apply properly the knowledge and skills acquired from their pre-service training.

This chapter has discussed the information, obtained from sample teachers, about their pre-service education. The next chapter will present the conclusion of the paper and recommendations drawn based on the obtained data.
Chapter Five

Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The conclusion is drawn based on the research question and sub-research questions which were:

- Have primary teachers found the knowledge and/or skills acquired from the course helpful to:
  - make and use effective lesson plans?
  - prepare and use relevant teaching aids?
  - assess their students’ performance?
  - prepare lesson content?
  - manage the classroom effectively?
  - select and use relevant teaching methods?
- What recommendations would they make for improving the link between pre-service education and the demands of the workplace?
The conclusions drawn touch on different areas of teaching, namely, classroom management, duration of training, preparation and use of teaching aids, assessment of students' performance, lesson content preparation, teaching practice, lesson planning, and ATTI curriculum. The recommendations suggest ways to improve the link between pre-service education and the demands of the workplace.

The findings section brings the main findings of the study together. Based on the analysis of the sample teachers’ interviews, the findings highlight the main issues that need to be given more attention if pre-service training is to meet the demands of the everyday challenges of the primary school teacher in an Eritrean context.

5.1 Classroom management

The average age of most Eritrean elementary school pupils ranges between 7 and 11. At this age it may be difficult to manage pupils’ behaviour and to involve them in the teaching-learning process. In addition, the learners themselves may not even be aware of why they go to school. To minimise such problems and to create an effective teaching and learning environment, teachers need to possess classroom management skills. Smith and Geoffrey, as cited by Haystead et al (1982: 22), agree that management skills are important. They suggest that “teaching contains multiple facets occurring simultaneously and that teachers may vary in their awareness and ability to handle these simultaneously occurring strands.”

According to the respondents, their pre-service education helped them to
develop management skills in the classroom. However, half of the total respondents (T₂, T₅, and T₆), contrary to what the literature advocates, used corporal punishment to manage their classes. Burton, as cited by Duminy and Sohnge (1990: 32), arguing against corporal punishment, states that: "Motivation by success and reward is generally preferable to motivation by failure and punishment." According to him, motivation, rather than punishment, should be applied. Because, as Burton, again as cited by Duminy and Sohnge (1990: 32) states, motivation plays an important role in education. Burton, however, makes distinctions between different kinds of motivation. He argues that some motivation by creating favourable conditions enables students to learn rapidly, and more successfully. Stating that intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation be emphasised, he mentions the following two advantages:

1. A motivated learner learns more rapidly than one who is demotivated.

2. Learning under intrinsic motivation is preferable to learning under extrinsic motivation.

Burton makes it clear that unless channelled properly and used to enhance the students' confidence, negative motivation could have adverse effects. He argues that goals and purposes which are not geared to students' interests, activities, and maturity, usually demotivate the learners. Burton mentions the following as adverse results of excessive motivation:

1. Motivation can also be too intense. Where it is accompanied by pain, fear or anxiety undesirable learning products are normally the result.
2. Moderate motivation is preferable to excessive motivation, especially for certain kinds of learning tasks. Excessive drive can have unfortunate consequences such as general anxiety, while it may result in undesirable habits such as cheating or panicking before examinations.

The respondents in this study, however, failed to see the problems and challenges of motivating learners as mentioned above, and to recognise how these may influence their teaching. Thus, the training they received runs the risk of failing in this respect, and the teachers themselves may be guilty of failing to motivate their learners.

According to the findings of this study most of the respondents equated effective management with managing the students' behaviour. Similarly, Wilson and Cameron's work (1996: 187-190) at the University of Western Sydney, also indicates that most of the first and the second year student teachers related effective management with the capacity of the teacher to control pupils. In contrast third year students were less concerned about classroom control or teacher assertiveness, Wilson and Cameron explain. For them, preparation and flexibility were key management issues.

In relation to this study, it could be argued that if student teachers spend more time on teaching practice and follows more courses in the field of pedagogy, they will become more effective in classroom management.
5.2 Duration of the training

The duration of the training at ATTI, which is one academic year, was seen by the teachers as too short to be sufficient for teaching practice, curriculum content, methodological and pedagogical experiences. Hence, it would be better if the training is extended to more than a year. This may also minimise the problem that teachers experience with assessing students’ performance, in particular assessing the skills and attitudes of their pupils. It may also enable them to minimise the use of corporal punishment as one of the effective methods of controlling the class, and to have more time to practise teaching so as to acquire relatively better skills of teaching.

5.3 Teaching aids

The Eritrean primary school teachers’ pre-service education, according to the respondents, was helpful to prepare teaching aids. They used teaching aids to involve the students in the teaching and learning process. There is evidence that students learn more from what they see than through other sense organs i.e. hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. Having this in mind, teachers used teaching aids to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

Teaching aids may be locally made or commercially produced and provided from the market. However, because their economic background is very limited, most Eritrean schools, in general, and primary schools, in particular, are not in a position to buy and provide teachers with the necessary aids from the market. Taking this into consideration, the respondents explained that the training in ATTI focused on how to prepare teaching aids using materials
which can be found easily from the environment. Primary school teachers used such materials to prepare teaching aids, as is stated in chapter four. They prepared such aids as globes by using paper and glue to teach geography (T_3) and a piece of paper, a glass, and water to teach about air pressure (T_2).

Hence, I can say that their pre-service education enabled these primary school teachers to prepare and use teaching aids using materials easily found around the school environment.

5.4 Assessment

As stated in chapter two (2.1), the pre-service teacher education course aims to encourage student teachers to develop knowledge and understanding of methods of assessment and evaluation of children's work.

One characteristic of a good assessment is that it tests as reliably as possible the pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject (Farrant, 1980: 160). According to the respondents, however, they found it difficult to assess their students' skills and attitudes which may be acquired as the result of the teaching and learning process they offered.

In order to identify the possible factor/s so as to minimise the problem and to equip student teachers with adequate knowledge and skills of assessment for the next training session, therefore, ATTI needs to conduct research into the issue. The respondents mentioned that they felt that to have acquired the skill to assess skills and attitudes of their pupils, it would have been better if ATTI arranged in-service training programmes for qualified teachers. This could be
done in the summer vacation since the schools are closed for about three months during the summer.

5.5 Selecting the content

Preparing, selecting, utilising and evaluating teaching resources including textbooks is one of the general aims of ATTI programme (see 1.2). Hence student teachers are expected to select the content that they feel is important to their pupils paying attention to the interest, intellectual development of the students and the objective of the syllabus (see 2.7).

Most of the respondents, however, follow the contents in the textbook without taking the above points into consideration (see 4.2). This issue also needs to be revised by ATTI so that student teachers may have a clear idea of what selecting the content means and when and how to do it.

5.6 Teaching practice

In order to guide the student teachers to suggest what action to take when they find their teaching is not meeting with success, the trainers have to observe their student teachers while they are teaching and stay with them long enough to see them overcome their difficulties (Farrant, 1980: 7). However, one of the criticisms about teacher education, given by Gore (1995: 17) was “the quality and the quantity of feedback for novice teachers, in most countries, is insufficient and inadequate.” Similarly, the respondents in this study complained that the quantity of feedback they received from their trainers, during the teaching practice period, was insufficient. They said that this was
because the period of the teaching practice was too short and the number of their trainers was not proportional with the number of the student teachers, which hampered the trainers’ capacity to give sufficient feedback to the student teachers.

The participation of schoolteachers in observing and giving comments is also stated as insufficient. The respondents in this study explained that because the schoolteachers’ loads are taken by student teachers during the teaching practice period, and these teachers are those who have usually served for at least five years in Asmara primary schools, almost all of these teachers are experienced and have the knowledge and skills to support student teachers. Hence, the respondents recommend that schoolteachers, who teach in the schools where the student teachers are assigned for one month’s teaching practice, participate actively in observing and giving comments. This may help student teachers to improve their observed weaknesses and to establish their strengths during teaching practice. This, the respondents argue, is helpful to promote effective teaching and learning activity in their future career.

5.7 Lesson planning

Preparing and using lesson plans is also a skill, the respondents mentioned, they acquired in their pre-service education. ATTI recently introduced a new format of lesson planning and the recent graduates were trained with it. The format was sent to all primary, junior and secondary schools in Eritrea. Many teachers already working in schools were not trained to use this format. They recommended that orientation be given in how to implement this lesson planning format properly. Because the respondents mentioned that they were
confident to use this format of lesson planning, I think recently trained teachers can help other teachers teaching around them by forming clusters to learn to use the new lesson planning format.

5.8 ATTI Curriculum

The general aim of ATTI curriculum, as stated in 1.2, is to enable student teachers to: acquire a knowledge and understanding of the subject and interconnection of the subjects, apply a variety of teaching methods appropriately, plan a scheme of work including individual lesson plans, manage the classroom effectively, keep appropriate records and be able to report to concerned parties, play an active role in integrating school and community, demonstrate basic research skills and be able to carry out community/school-based research, develop a positive attitude to the profession and act as a model of national and cultural values, and show self-awareness and the ability to reflect on their teaching-learning activities.

To achieve these goals in one year training, ATTI offers student teachers Pedagogy and other different courses (see 1.2). As most of the respondents explained, both Pedagogy and Educational Psychology were more helpful to acquire skills and knowledge in how to present the subject matter more effectively. However, "Tigrigna" and Civics are subjects for which primary school teachers are responsible. The respondents felt that teachers do not have adequate knowledge of these subjects, as they are not included in the ATTI curriculum.
As “Tigrigna” is a language with its own punctuation and grammar rules, I do not think it is easy to teach it without having appropriate training in the subject. Because as Té mentioned it “there are a lots of things one doesn’t know about the language” (see 4.9). Similarly, since Civics is about the history, politics, and morals of the Eritrean people, and since these issues were strongly blocked by Ethiopian regime (until 1991), extra effort is needed to inculcate them in the new Eritrean generation. To accomplish this successfully, the knowledge of teachers of these issues is very crucial. Therefore, it is extremely important to offer the course in Eritrean primary schools. However, Civics methodology or content is not included in ATTI curriculum, even though teachers are responsible to teach this in primary schools. This may create problems for the primary school teachers at school level. Therefore, it would be better if the curriculum of ATTI could introduce “Tigrigna” and Civics as two of the subjects for pre-service teacher education.

5.9 Conclusion

In concluding the respondents mentioned that their pre-service education was helpful to:

- manage the classroom, however they showed the tendency of using corporal punishment to control the classroom;

- assess the knowledge of their students acquired from the teaching and learning process, even though they found it difficult to assess the skills and attitudes of the learners;
- select and use relevant teaching methods, although the school environment such as the sitting arrangements in the classroom, the large number of students in a class, and the physical situation of the classroom (see 4.2) hinders them, they said, to apply the acquired skills and knowledge properly;

- prepare and use lesson plan;

- prepare and use teaching aids using materials which can be found easily in the school environment;

Most of the respondents also mentioned that they follow the textbook as it is without referring to other materials to develop the content better when necessary and without attempting to relate it to the school environment.

Taking the above points into consideration, I can conclude from the data collected in this study that the pre-service teacher education at the Asmara Teachers' Training Institute is partially linked with the demands of the workplace in Eritrean primary school education. Although it would appear that teachers are to some degree being successfully trained, this study has indicated a number of recommendations for an even better quality pre-service teacher education curriculum.
Bibliography


Appendix A: Interview questions

1. To what extent does your knowledge or your skills acquired from pre-service education enable you:
   - prepare and use teaching aids?
   - prepare lesson content?
   - choose a proper teaching method?
   - make and use effective lesson plan?
   - manage the classroom effectively?
   - assess your students' performance?

2. What methods or rules do you use to manage your classroom so as to create effective teaching and learning activities?

3. What assessment procedures do you use to determine the understanding of your students?

4. What methods do you use to attract your students to be motivated in their classroom activities?

5. What particular teaching methods do you prefer to use? Why?

6. What general comment or opinion do you have on your educator's/trainer's methods of teaching?

7. Do you think the duration of the training, for the pre-service education, is enough?

8. Do you think there are some courses in ATTI, which are not helpful in practical teaching and learning activity?

9. Which courses are more helpful to you?

10. If you have given the chance to rearrange the courses in ATTI what changes would you promote? Why?
11. What are the main benefits you gained from your pre-service education?

12. What general opinion or comment do you have on your pre-service teaching practice period?

13. Do you think the duration of the training, for the pre-service education, is enough? Why? Why not?