

# Analysis of the Perceived Professional Importance of Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) Program from Dire Dawa University Student Teachers' Perspective

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**Abstract:** In 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher education programs should capacitate teachers with effective reflective practitioner skills that could help them address students having diverse learning interests, styles and backgrounds. Hence, the purpose of this study was to analyze the perceived importance of Ethiopian teacher education program called postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT), particularly summer modality, from student teachers' point of view. To this study purpose mixed research method was employed. A sample of 108 summer student teachers was selected by using simple random sampling method (lottery system). Questionnaire (having close-ended and open-ended items) was used to collect data. Its validity was checked by senior teacher educators and it was also found to be reliable ( $\alpha=0.71$ ). The document of student teachers' grade record was used as source of data. Quantitative data were analyzed by using one sample t-test (two-tailed), frequency and percentage while narrative approach was used to analyze qualitative data. The study found out that student teachers have positive perception on the importance of PGDT program though their academic achievement in many courses is found to be very low. Finally, the need to evaluate effectiveness of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) program via value-added model was forwarded as a recommendation.

**Keywords:** Diploma in Teaching, Teacher Preparation Program, Professional Development, Effectiveness

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## 1. Introduction

In 21<sup>st</sup> century the role of teachers is not to pass on knowledge to the learners but to steer them towards self-learning. Accordingly, teachers are responsible for communicating effectively all curricula contents. Thus, teachers are at the forefront of educational quality assurance endeavor. According to American Psychological Association, effective teaching has always been important so that the effectiveness of programs to produce high-quality teachers has become an issue of national concern [2]. Likewise, to improve the quality of teachers as well as education, Ethiopian Ministry of Education has introduced in-service teacher development program called Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as key component of Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) since 2005 [14].

Tremendous literatures have asserted that the quality of learning cannot take place without qualified and

professionally capacitated teachers. In this regard, recent scholarship has highlighted methods that can be used by teacher education programs to demonstrate that the candidates who complete their programs are well prepared to support student learning [2]. To produce professionally well equipped teachers that are able to ensure quality of education abundant reforms have been made in the teacher education system of Ethiopia.

According to research evidences, teacher education in Ethiopia is undergoing a continuous change to adjust to a wide variety of arising situations in the country including the political, social, economic, and cultural contexts [14]. Similarly, turning teaching into a profession of choice has become key strategy of teachers' development in Ethiopia [6].

Moreover, Ethiopian Secondary school Teacher Education

Program, called postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT), is committed to producing secondary school teachers who have the desired academic knowledge, sufficient professional skills, good citizenship, attitudes and skills, and those ethical and democratic values enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution [11, p. 5].

Though development of teachers is given special emphasis in ensuring the quality of education in the country, weak quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training programs in Ethiopia is identified [17].

Based on the study about growth and development of teacher education in Ethiopia, it was strongly recommended that the curriculum for teacher education should be modeled in a way that focuses on core classroom skills and pedagogies that are more effective in gaining desired results [14]. Shoeb [14] further suggested that the duration of the teacher education course including training needs review for regarding its practicality and effectiveness. Similarly, APA [2] contends that the desire for evidence of program impact arises primarily from the acknowledged ethical and professional responsibility of teacher education programs to assure the public that they are preparing effective teachers.

Since 2011 secondary school teacher training program in Ethiopia has shifted to bachelor degree in major fields plus one year professional training, which is called postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT), instead of bachelor degree of education of different disciplines [9] [17]. Thus, to become secondary school teacher, those diploma holders need upgrading to the next level to fit to the new standards. Upgrading to degree in summer modality takes up to six summers including one summer postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) courses. This paradigm shift in teacher education program, as a new concept, might have faced certain implementation difficulties. In this regard, student teachers misconception of the program and their negative attitude towards the program were found to be great challenges [1] [9] [12].

According to American Psychological Association, the focus on teacher education is fueled by competition and comparison which require programs to demonstrate that their candidates are capable of having strong positive effects on student learning. Moreover, a report by American Psychological Association task force underscored that the teacher preparation programs need to demonstrate with evidence that teacher education makes a difference in preK–12 student learning [2]. Likewise, the Ethiopian prevailing teacher education program called postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) should demonstrate such qualities to effectively respond to educational policy query for well equipped competent citizen.

However, as teacher educator the researcher has observed pitfalls of PGDT program, particularly in summer modality. In line to this, abundant studies have investigated the challenges and the state of practices of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) program. For instance, some educators have studied the challenges of PGDT as secondary school

teacher preparation program in Ethiopian universities [4] [10] [12] [15].

Undoubtedly, prevalence of the aforementioned challenges could have negative impact on the effectiveness of the program in producing qualified secondary school teachers. This in turn could negatively affect students learning as far as there is a strong association between teacher quality and student learning performance. In connection to this, American Psychological Association asserted that student learning is the central element of effective teaching and should be an ongoing part of teacher preparation, with implications for quality control, program improvement, and program fidelity-assurance [2].

Accordingly, assessing the perceived importance of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) as secondary school teacher preparation program from student teachers point of view is found to be essential. Thus, this study intended to analyze student teachers rating of the importance of PGDT program to their professional development. Moreover, it aimed at analyzing program effectiveness vis-à-vis student teachers' academic achievement (course grade).

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1. PGDT as Secondary School Teacher Training Program in Ethiopia

Teacher preparation programs are where prospective teachers gain a foundation of knowledge about pedagogy and subject matter, as well as early exposure to practical classroom experience [7]. In recent years focus on the effectiveness of teacher training programs to produce high-quality teachers has sharpened [2].

Though the first modern school in Ethiopia was established in 1908, from that time up until 1944, there was no teacher education system, and Western teachers and principals populated the schools [16]. According to UNESCO [17], the 1994 Education and Training Policy provides policy environment for teacher development initiatives in the country.

Before the introduction of PGDT program in 2011, secondary school teacher preparation program was delivered as bachelor of education in different disciplines. According to Adugna [1], secondary teachers in Ethiopia have traditionally been trained at universities in four-year degree programs, which combined educational coursework and practicum experience with academic courses in various disciplines. Afterwards, the new program called postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) has launched as secondary school teacher preparation program.

Beginning from 2011, a new modality of secondary teachers' preparation, Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT), is practiced by ten universities where candidates are given a one year professional courses and practicum experience before joining the teaching force [17].

Currently, the secondary school teacher education of Ethiopia envisions seeing secondary school teachers who are

capable of producing responsible and competent citizens, committed to their profession and ready to lifelong learning, and who respect and behave in accordance with the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution [11]. The duration of the current modality of secondary school teachers training is shorter in which trainees take only a one year face to face training [11]. The PGDT was designed to respond to content and pedagogical gaps that have persisted in the practice of teaching in secondary schools [17]. Throughout educational quality assurance journey, Ethiopian government has put great emphasis on teacher professional development. In this regard, teacher education program has passed through different remarkable reforms.

## 2.2. Objectives of Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) in Ethiopia

It is known that the effectiveness of a program should be evaluated through the achievement of its objectives. Accordingly, the Ethiopian Secondary school teacher education program called Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) has to be assessed for effectiveness based on the achievement of its objectives. As Ministry of Education [11] underscored in curriculum document, PGDT program is intended to achieve the following objectives:

- Equip trainees with the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to become effective secondary school teachers;
- Enable trainees to become reflective practitioners who are able to analyze, evaluate and act to improve their own practice and develop further professional knowledge and skills;
- Develop understanding of the nature of teacher professionalism, the responsibilities of teachers and the professional values and ethical practice expected of them;
- Create awareness that a central characteristic of teaching as a career is engagement in a lifelong process of professional learning and development;
- Develop trainees' capacity to engage in research to inform and develop their practice.
- Institutionalize equity in the teaching force and reach underprivileged areas in the provision of quality secondary education.
- Provide teacher trainees with the theoretical and practical experience they need to achieve all the standards and competencies set by Ministry of Education (p. 6).

Conventionally, success of curriculum or educational program objectives is evaluated vis-à-vis the learners' academic achievement. Accordingly, the achievement of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) program objectives should be evaluated based on the grades student teachers' have scored in each PGDT courses.

## 3. Methods and Materials

### 3.1. Method of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceived importance of Ethiopian secondary school teacher education program called Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT), particularly summer modality, from the student teachers' perspective. Summer student teachers' learning achievement grades of ten PGDT courses were also analyzed to look upon the achievement of program objectives.

To this study purpose mixed research method was employed. A mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem [3].

### 3.2. Participants

In the academic year of 2016, Dire Dawa University has been training secondary school teachers via postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) program, only in summer modality.

The two colleges namely, College of Social Science and Humanities (536 student teachers), and College of Natural and Computational Science (516 student teachers) had PGDT student teachers. These student teachers (total of 1052) were taken as population of the study.

One hundred eight (108) sample PGDT student teachers were selected using simple random sampling method, particularly lottery system. Of the sample student teachers, 48% were from the College of Natural and Computational Sciences, and 52% were from the College of Social Science and Humanities.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

#### 3.3.1. Instruments

The questionnaire consisting close-ended and open-ended items was used as key data collection instrument. Close-ended items were five point Likert-scaled ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The validity of questionnaire was checked by PGDT course teachers of Dire Dawa University. To check the reliability, the questionnaire was administered to pilot sample and it was found to be reliable ( $\alpha=0.71$ ).

The document of student teachers' grade records was also used as a source of data.

#### 3.3.2. Data Analysis

Data collected through close-ended questionnaire were analyzed by using one-sample t-test method while data collected through open-ended questionnaire were analyzed thematically through narrative approach.

The document of student teachers grade report was analyzed by using frequency and percentage.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Results on the Perceived Importance of PGDT

*Table 1. One-Sample t-test result of the perceived importance of PGDT (N=108, expected mean=3 & df=107).*

| Postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) program:             | Mean | Std. Deviation | Calc. t-value | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--|------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Improves my professional competence                          | 4.07 | 1.182          | 9.446         | .000            |
| Fills my professional gaps                                   | 3.88 | 1.074          | 8.511         | .000            |
| Enables me to be reflective practitioner                     | 3.79 | 1.103          | 7.417         | .000            |
| Equips me with required professional knowledge and skills    | 3.84 | 1.120          | 7.815         | .000            |
| Enhances my assessment practices                             | 3.85 | 1.101          | 8.043         | .000            |
| Capacitates me to use a variety of active learning methods   | 4.03 | 1.098          | 9.731         | .000            |
| Enables me to understand my professional responsibilities    | 3.95 | 1.106          | 8.965         | .000            |
| Enables me to understand educational policy of Ethiopia      | 3.53 | 1.219          | 4.501         | .000            |
| Improves my pedagogical skills                               | 4.03 | 1.089          | 9.807         | .000            |
| Enables me to engage in continuous professional development  | 3.75 | 1.185          | 6.577         | .000            |
| Enables me to understand students' different learning styles | 3.96 | 1.085          | 9.227         | .000            |
| Improves my classroom management skills                      | 3.91 | 1.000          | 9.427         | .000            |
| Enhances my knowledge in culturally responsive pedagogy      | 3.76 | 1.075          | 7.337         | .000            |
| Capacitates me with an overall professional skills           | 3.56 | 1.070          | 5.485         | .000            |

The study found out that student teachers perceived postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT), as teacher education program, is important to improve their professional competence. The result was statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  ( $t = 9.446$ ). Likewise, summer student teachers agreed that PGDT program is important to fill their professional gaps ( $t = 8.511$ ) and enables them to be reflective practitioners ( $t = 7.417$ ). These findings were statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ . Similarly, qualitative result revealed that:

PGDT course is important to improve teachers' professional competence [student from Mathematics Department]. Similarly, one student from Civic and Ethical Education Department reported that PGDT is important to change attitude, behavior and knowledge of student teachers if we all have professional commitment to learn.

Consistent to the above findings, [11] outlined that Ethiopian new teacher education program, called PGDT, is designed to strengthen the quality of teaching at secondary school level and fill gaps identified in the knowledge, practice and commitment of teachers prepared through programs.

Scholars have also acknowledged that effectiveness teacher education program should produce teachers professionally well equipped and capacitated. In this regard, as depicted in the above table, summer student teachers at Dire Dawa University have recognized the effectiveness of PGDT program in equipping them with required professional knowledge and skills as well as pedagogical skills. These finding were statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  ( $t = 7.815$  &  $t = 9.807$  respectively;  $df = 107$ ). In connection to this, scholars claim that enhancing skills, knowing strategies, and understanding content and how to unpack that content in ways that students can understand can be learned and improved through effective teacher education programs [8].

As depicted in table above, the summer student teachers have responded that PGDT as teacher education program enables them to understand their professional responsibilities ( $t = 8.965$ ), understand the educational policy of Ethiopia ( $t =$

4.501) and students' different learning styles ( $t = 9.277$ ), and to engage in continuous professional development process ( $t = 6.577$ ). All these results were statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  ( $df = 107$ ).

To the contrary, not surprisingly, one student from Biology Department reported that:

PGDT is only important for regular students who have graduated bachelor degree in their major courses and need to take PGDT courses to become secondary school teacher .... However, it is simply wastage of time for summer student teachers are diploma holders and need to upgrade to degree level to become secondary school teacher.

The present study found out that summer student teachers perceived PGDT program as important to enhance their knowledge in culturally responsive pedagogy. The result was statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  ( $t = 7.337$  &  $df = 107$ ). In line to this, National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational System [13] pinpointed the need for developing effective teacher education programs that will provide teachers with the knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences required to teach ethnically and linguistically diverse students. Likewise, Teaching in Multicultural Setting is taught as PGDT course with intention to equip the trainees with the competence required to teach in settings characterized by ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, religious, gender and many other markers of diversity [11].

The results from summer student teachers have revealed that PGDT program was effective in enhancing their assessment practices ( $t = 8.043$ ) and classroom management skills ( $t = 9.427$ ) as well capacitates them with an overall professional skills ( $t = 5.485$ ). All these findings were statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  ( $df = 107$ ).

On the other hand, qualitative results from participants affirmed that:

As a teacher PGDT is important to learn about how to understand students' verity of learning interests and how

to encourage them to actively participate in teaching-learning process. He reported that PGDT is important to develop teaching professional skill [Student 1, from Sport Science Department]. PGDT helps how I improve my teaching competence; develop my teaching styles and how I assess my students in the classes, the methods that I use in class and improving pedagogical skills [Student 1 from Civic & Ethical Education Department].

#### 4.2. Document Analysis of PGDT Graduates' Grade Report

To crosscheck participants' view in the importance of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) program vis-à-vis their grade achievements. Accordingly, the grade report of eleven PGDT courses was analyzed.

**Table 2.** Document analysis of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) graduates of 2016 summer.

| Course Name   | Frequency and percentage of PGDT courses grade |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |     |       |     |
|---|--|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-------|-----|
|   | A  |      | B   |      | C   |      | D   |      | F   |     | Total |     |
|   | No.  | %    | No. | %    | No. | %    | No. | %    | No. | %   | No.   | %   |
| Secondary School Curriculum and Instruction           | 46   | 4.3  | 215 | 20.2 | 775 | 72.8 | 28  | 2.6  | 1   | 0.1 | 1065  | 100 |
| Psychological Foundations of Learning and Development | 70   | 6.9  | 317 | 31.4 | 618 | 61.3 | 1   | 0.1  | 2   | 0.2 | 1008  | 100 |
| School & Society                                      | 14   | 1.6  | 132 | 14.7 | 682 | 75.8 | 68  | 7.5  | 4   | 0.4 | 900   | 100 |
| Teachers as Reflective practitioners                  | 140  | 12.7 | 358 | 32.4 | 599 | 54.1 | 9   | 0.8  | 0   | 0   | 1106  | 100 |
| Teaching in multicultural setting                     | 27   | 2.7  | 169 | 16.9 | 614 | 61.5 | 153 | 15.3 | 35  | 3.5 | 998   | 100 |
| English for Secondary School Teaching and Learning    | 150  | 15.4 | 370 | 37.9 | 428 | 43.8 | 26  | 2.7  | 2   | 0.2 | 976   | 100 |
| Subject area method I                                 | 171  | 15.9 | 399 | 37.2 | 496 | 46.2 | 6   | 0.6  | 1   | 0.1 | 1073  | 100 |
| Assessment & Evaluation of Learning                   | 13   | 1.3  | 91  | 9.1  | 819 | 81.6 | 72  | 7.2  | 9   | 0.9 | 1004  | 100 |
| Inclusive Education                                   | 36   | 3.8  | 234 | 24.4 | 614 | 64   | 69  | 7.2  | 7   | 0.7 | 960   | 100 |
| Instructional technology                              | 145  | 14.8 | 179 | 18.2 | 567 | 57.7 | 53  | 5.4  | 38  | 3.9 | 982   | 100 |
| Subject area method II                                | 84   | 11.1 | 244 | 32.3 | 420 | 55.6 | 4   | 0.5  | 3   | 0.4 | 755   | 100 |

NB: The difference in the number of total student teachers is due to existence of student teachers who add and drop the course.

As to Dire Dawa University Legislation, each grade of a student has its own description. Accordingly, the document described grade "A" as excellent, grade "B" as very good, grade "C" as satisfactory, grade "D" as very poor and grade "F" as fail [5]. These descriptions also work for all Ethiopian Universities. The analysis of grade records was made by using these descriptions as a benchmark.

As shown in table 2, 775(72.8%) summer student teachers have "C" grade in secondary school curriculum and instruction course while 28(2.6%) have scored "D" grade.

On the other hand, 46(4.3%) and 215(20.2%) student teachers have "A" and "B" grade, respectively. Thus, it is possible to infer that large number of summer PGDT student teachers, 804(75.5%) have a grade of satisfactory and below from secondary school curriculum and instruction course.

As depicted in table 2 above, large number of PGDT student teachers have scored satisfactory and below (very poor & fail) in psychological foundation of learning and development (621, 61.6%), school and society (754, 83.8%), teachers as reflective practitioners (608, 55%), teaching in multicultural setting (802, 80.4%), assessment & and evaluation of learning (900, 89.6%), inclusive education (690, 71.9%), instructional technology (658, 67%), and subject area method II (427, 56.6%) courses.

To the contrary, as document analysis result revealed, large number of PGDT student teachers have scored very good and above (excellent) grade only in two courses namely, English for secondary school teaching and learning (520, 53.3%) and subject area method I (570, 53.1%) courses. Thus, as document analyses results revealed in table 2, PGDT student teachers have scored satisfactory, very poor and fail grade in nine PGDT courses while their grade score in two courses was very good and above.

As findings of the study revealed, participants' perception of the importance of PGDT program to professional development and their actual academic achievement (grade) in PGDT courses are dissimilar. This dissimilarity between their perception and their real achievement seem presage pitfalls of PGDT as secondary school teacher preparation program in Ethiopia. Given this reality, it seems doubtful to infer that student teachers have acquired the knowledge, skills, pedagogical experiences and professional values needed to become secondary school teacher.

However, it is scholarly acknowledged that teacher preparation programs are where prospective teachers gain a foundation of knowledge about pedagogy and subject matter, as well as early exposure to practical classroom experience [7]. Moreover, in order to achieve any socio-political, economic and scientific development in a country, there is the calamitous need for qualified teachers who are equipped with the desired knowledge, skills, competence and commitment, and who are empowered to perform their tasks professionally [9].

## 5. Conclusion

The postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) student teachers have viewed that the program is important to their professional development. They recognized the importance of PGDT program to improve professional competence, pedagogical skills, assessment practices, practice of active learning methods and classroom management skills. Moreover, student teachers perceived that PGDT has enhanced their knowledge in culturally responsive pedagogy and enabled them to become reflective practitioners. However, it was found that the summer PGDT student

teachers' academic achievement in many courses is very low. Thus, there seem inconsistency between perceived professional importance of PGDT program and academic achievement of the graduates of this program. Furthermore, low academic performance of PGDT program graduates might place the effectiveness of PGDT as secondary school teacher preparation program under question. Thus, it is recommended that the effectiveness of postgraduate diploma in teaching (PGDT) as secondary school teacher preparation program needs to be evaluated via value-added model.

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