

PRACTICES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL TEACHER CANDIDATES' SCREENING AND ADMISSION CRITERIA: SHAMBU TEACHERS' EDUCATION COLLEGE

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Abstract: This study aimed to assess effectiveness of English language teacher candidates' screening and admission criteria used to admit quality teacher candidates to English language teacher preparation. An evaluative case study design was employed. Document analysis and semi structured interview methods were used to collect the data. The study employed purposive sampling techniques to review admission guideline document, choose three English language teacher educators, six teacher candidates, college vice Dean and practicum coordinator. The researcher analyzed data thematically in relation to the research questions. The findings show that the screening and admission criteria of English language teacher candidates do not consider candidates' English language background knowledge, proficiency and interest to teach it. The entrance and interview exams also don't address candidates' English language knowledge and communication skills. Overall there is no particular attention to assess candidates' English language competence and interest to teach English language in the process of screening and admission. To alleviate these gaps, English language teacher preparation program needs to assess candidates' English language background, communication skills and interest to teach English as screening and admitting criteria to teacher preparation.

Key words: *teacher preparation, screening criteria, admission criteria, English language teacher candidates*

INTRODUCTION

The provision of quality education that builds strong and quality citizens depends on quality of teachers. Teachers' quality relies on quality of teacher preparation (Teshome, 2005). Effective teacher preparation matters quality of teachers, their teaching and success of students' learning (Nguyen, 2017) since it determines teacher candidates' understanding of basic concepts, principles of teaching profession and teacher responsibility (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Boudersa, 2016). One of the important aspects of teacher preparation quality considers teacher candidates'

screening and admittance criteria to teacher preparation (Green, Eady & Andersen, 2018; Coggshall, Bivona & Reschly, 2012). The screening and admitting criteria quality of teacher candidates are the key ingredients which determines competences and characteristics of teacher development (Texas, Mundy, Varela, Ybarra, & Yuma, n.d.).

Screening knowledgeable and skilled teacher candidates to teaching profession is the beginning step for teacher preparation (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). Effective criteria screen help to potential teacher candidates for initial teacher preparation. They are pre set criteria used to assess and filter candidates out from pool of applicants who fit the requirements of institutions for initial teacher preparation and teaching task (Klassen, Kim, Rushby & Bardach, 2020; De Carvalho, 2018). According to these authors, screening criteria help the selectors to collect robust data about applicants' cognitive attributes on their academic background records and potential such as high school grade point average, class rank, entrance exam and composite scores to determine candidates' readiness for coursework and teaching preparation.

Since the primary goal of teacher preparation is to produce effective teachers for the level they teach, teacher candidates' admission criteria identify potential and capable applicants who succeed in the preparation process to become effective teachers (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). Admission is careful and purposeful process of evaluating candidates who possess and need to learn set of skills, competencies and abilities that enable to fulfill teaching tasks (De Carvalho, 2018). It is institutional methods that decide whether candidates can be successful in teacher preparation and become effective teacher or not. Further, it is benchmark that prevents ineffective teacher candidates from entering teacher education program and teaching profession (Mihelic, Bosch, Boyd & Miller, 2019). In addition, admission criteria identify candidates' potential in level of literacy and numeracy, interpersonal and communication skills, willingness to learn and motivation to enter teaching profession (De Carvalho, 2018). Moreover, admission criteria are standard of assessments that formally evaluate against specified set of valid criteria that check candidates' suitability and potential to become effective teachers.

As admission criteria to teacher preparation determine the quality of teaching professional, the concern for sorting quality applicants to each subject teaching is crucial. However, the emphasis given to admission criteria for diploma English language teacher candidates' preparation in Oromia, Ethiopia, it seems very low. The preliminary investigation

shows that majority of graduated candidates from the department couldn't pass English subject knowledge and subject teaching method certification of competency exam offered to ensure their competencies to be English language teachers. They show poor proficiency in the target language use. Tesfa (2014) points out that graduated primary school English language teacher candidates showed poor English subject mastery, language proficiency and subject teaching methods at the end of teacher preparation completion. One of affecting problems could be attributed to the early admission criteria of the teacher candidates to teacher preparation program since the eventual success of graduate teachers provides information about the effectiveness of admission criteria and process to initial teacher preparation (Casey & Childs, 2011). This inspired the researcher to assess effectiveness of screening and admission criteria teacher education colleges employed to prepare English language teacher candidates for English language teaching.

Literature Review

Literature reveals that appropriate teacher candidates' admission criteria and process improve quality of teacher preparation for the teaching profession (Rani, 2017). Cooper and Alvarado (2006) assert that appropriate standard of screening and admission criteria of teacher candidates have impacts to the effective teacher preparation. The admission process sort candidates who have knowledge, skills and dispositions against the pre requites of teacher preparation (Denner, Salzman & Newsome, 2001). English language teacher candidates' preparation also requires potential candidates that are identified through effective screening and admission criteria (Pourdana & Karimi Behbahani, 2013). Parker (2018) ,on the other hand, asserts that ineffective admission criteria yield poor graduated teacher candidates who can't secure students' learning because the criteria can't filter competent English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation.

Since effective screening and admission criteria collect relevant information about the applicants' potential, the admission criteria and process need to focus on factors that affect effectiveness of teachers to secure quality education. Casey and Childs (2007) assert that admission criteria identify potential teacher candidates and foresee their success in teacher preparation. These criteria involve academic achievements, completion of secondary school, GPA, interview exam etc (Pourdana & Karimi Behbahani, 2013; Govinda, 2004).). Further, Klassen et al (2019) reveal that effective admission methods address candidates' academic background from

transcript, secondary school leaving national exam, aptitude test and related results. The authors also describe candidates' interpersonal skills, motivational essay, interview, interest to the profession etc. as qualitative admission criteria. Besides, effective criteria sorted candidates' potential, interest to English subject and teaching profession at entry stage (Castaneda, 2011; Djigunovic, 2012). The world best performing countries use teacher candidates' willingness to learn, motivation to teach, and communication skills admission criteria for teacher preparation (Hobson, Ashby, McIntyre & Malderez, 2010). In Australia, candidates' cognitive ability, verbal reasoning skills test, tertiary level entrance exam, subject specific ability, motivation to teach, communication skills, willingness to learn, and so on are the admission criteria to teacher preparation (AITSL, 2020).

Regarding English language teacher, Emery (2014) presses that candidates' English background knowledge in speaking, writing etc are used English language teacher candidates' admission criteria. Candidates' performance in the subject (English) at secondary schools, standardized test result and reference statements are also future performance predictor criteria (Worrell, Brabeck, Dwyer, Geisinger, Marx, Noell, & Pianta, 2014). The performance test that differentiates the academic capacity of the subject knowledge and judges their success in initial teacher preparation is another criterion. Entry English language teacher candidates' interview assesses their language proficiency as prerequisite to initial teacher preparation (Craven, Beswic, Fleming, Fletcher, Green, & Richards, 2014; Hayes, 2014)). Teacher candidates' spoken and written English proficiencies are criteria of choosing English language teacher candidates (British Council, 2005).

When we come to Ethiopian context, there are some practices of teacher candidates' admission criteria to teacher preparation in various parts of the country. Desta's (2002) study from Tigray region shows admission criteria of in service English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation .He identifies academic performance assessment such as candidates' secondary school completion, GPA, subject specific entrance exam and non-academic criteria that involve service rendered, discipline records, and academic rank in career structure criteria of admission. Further, Temesgen's (2017) study shows that the admission criteria involve secondary school transcript result, general education GPA result, entrance exam, and preference to English subject. Teshome's (2005) comparative study in Oromia primary schools public and private teachers' preparation

shows the colleges apply general candidates' admission criteria such as secondary school transcripts , GPA at least C and above in Afan Oromo , D and above in English language and female candidates' affirmative action.

The above studies consider candidates' admission criteria as subcomponents in their studies. This paper prioritized assessing effectiveness of English language teacher candidates' admission criteria because quality of graduated diploma English language teacher candidates showed poor performance in securing students' learning language. They had poor English subject mastery, language proficiency and subject teaching methods at the end of teacher preparation (Tesfa, 2014) although they have been expected to have the required language knowledge and teaching skills. Eba (2014) also mentions that English language teachers couldn't understand what they teach, how they teach and use the target language in classroom interaction. Many stake holders (parents, schools, educated people etc) also complain that most primary level English language teachers are unable to address students' language learning and help students to use and improve their English language.

Though ineffectiveness of the teachers could be attributed to various factors, effectiveness of criteria used to screen and admit (Cogshall, Bivona & Reschly, 2012) open chances of admitting poor potential English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation (Parker ,2018) and yielding ineffective teachers. Poor standard admission criteria are the causes to produce lower academically qualified teacher candidates (Texas, Mundy, Varela, Ybarra & Yuma, n.d). Thus, this study aimed to assess effectiveness of screening and admission criteria teacher education college in Oromia, Ethiopia employed to teacher preparation and suggest improvement needed in candidates' admission criteria. To achieve this, the study targeted to assess relevancy of screening and admission criteria used to accept potential English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation in the process of the study.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted to assess effectiveness of screening and admission criteria employed by Shambu Teacher Education Colleges in Oromia, Ethiopia to admit English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation.

Research Design

The evaluative case study design was employed to describe and present information on effectiveness of the admission criteria used to English language teacher preparation. Bassey (1999) asserts that evaluative case study is an in depth study that provides information which evaluators use to determine the effectiveness of candidates' screening and admission criteria and share to the interested/concerned audiences. This study gathered information that enabled to assess effectiveness of English language teacher candidates' screening and admission criteria for English language teachers' preparation.

Participants of the Study

Though case can be individuals, classroom, offices or institutions such as schools or large-scale community profession (Gilliam, 2000), the current study case is assessing effectiveness of teacher candidates' screening and admission criteria used for primary level English language teacher preparation. Selection of study participants /cases in case study began from specifying contexts and units of analysis. The context of the case study is English language teacher candidates' teacher preparation at Shambu Teachers' Education College in Oromia, Ethiopia. Units of analysis of the case are entities that form the case study. The units of analysis of this study include admission guideline document, English language teacher candidates, teacher educators, college vice dean and practicum coordinator. The researcher employed purposeful and relationship case selection methods to select unit of analysis this case study.

Instruments

Document analysis and interview were data collection methods used. The researcher examined and interpreted the documents to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop practical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The researcher reread and reviewed the contents of the document to identify relevancy and effectiveness of admission criteria. The entrance exam sheet was reviewed to see whether the exam composition question types are subject specific and relevant to assess candidates' background or not. The researcher used semi structured interview guide questions prepared based on literature review (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020) to gain participants' experiences, opinions and motivations in the process.

Procedure

The researcher collected two years of admission guide line materials and entrance exam sheets from staff teacher educators and reread and reviewed to analyze. The researcher interviewed three of English subject teachers, college vice dean, practicum coordinator teachers and group of six teacher trainees on their free time. The researcher recorded interview on mobile, and took notes simultaneously. The researcher analyzed thematically the data based on research question framework. The admission guide line document was carefully, closely read and reviewed the contents in terms of relevance and effectiveness to get overview and create meaning. The recorded interview data was listened repeatedly and transcribed using intelligent transcription method (Rincon, 2018). Then, the researcher organized and analyzed thematically in relation to each research question.

Result of the Study

The results of the data were presented based on the sequences of the research questions.

Teacher Candidates' Screening Criteria

This study reviewed relevance of screening criteria used for English language teacher candidates from document and presented teacher educators, teacher candidates, practicum coordinator, and vice dean reflections on the criteria. The study reviewed two years of screening guideline criteria documents.

The 2018 and 2020 years screening guideline documents' reviews showed that English language teacher candidates' preliminary selection criteria did not consider relevant screening criteria. The two documents requested candidates' local language/Afan Oromo language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing to register. Besides, the candidates were asked minimum average of 50% mark criteria in secondary school transcript result for English subject. The candidates were also requested "C" and above in English for registration. Further candidates were asked evidences that show they were free of violence, addiction, sight, vision and mental problems from sources. The interview of teacher educators, college practicum coordinator and college vice dean showed that teacher candidates were able to register if their English and Maths transcripts' result averages were 50% and above. Besides, they reported that candidates were registered with minimum of C in English and B in local language subjects in

entrance examination. The 2020 candidates' admission guide line document displayed that candidates' entrance exam result had to be 250 and above for female and 260 and above for males. The 2018 admission criteria also requested university entrance exam result of candidates to be 125 for female and 135 for male to register them. Further, English language teacher candidates who were registered had total of secondary school transcript results 55% for male and 50% for female. Further, teacher candidates have to be 17 and above years old.

The above description showed that English language teacher candidates' preliminary selection didn't give emphasis to their English subject background, proficiency, national exam result, interest to teaching English subject and transcript results.

Effectiveness of the Admission Criteria

This section presented English language teacher candidates' admission criteria data from admission guideline, teacher educators', teacher candidates', practicum coordinator and vice dean interview.

The 2018 and 2020 years suggested that English language teacher candidates' who fitted the screening criteria were allowed to sit for college entrance exam that assessed secondary school academic performance with total of 100 multiple choice questions. The exam questions involve Afan Oromo, English, Maths, and Special Education and General Knowledge. Candidates' English language subject performance was assessed with only 20 multiple-choices. The rest 80 multiple-choice questions were other subjects prepared in local language and offered to check candidates' secondary level academic performance. Moreover, the document suggested interview contents that assessed candidates fluency speaking and spelling writing in local language. The interview also assessed candidates' knowledge on Oromo's history, culture, asset and general current situation. Further, the document suggested interview contents that assessed candidates' interest to children and teaching profession.

College teacher educators (ShCT2, ShCT3 & ShCT4) reflected that candidates took entrance exam in Afan Oromo to assess their academic performance in secondary school subjects that include English, Afan Oromo, Maths, Civics, History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry and Physics with 100 multiple choice questions. Teacher educators also reported that candidates who scored pass marks in entrance exam passed to interview exam conducted in Afan Oromo/local language. Teacher educators reacted that the quota allocated to each selection center determined

the potential of admitted candidates since the college sometimes accepted poor potential teacher candidates to fill the quota. Further, English language teacher candidates reflected that their interview assessed Afan Oromo proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and listening. The practicum coordinator and college Dean explained that candidates took college entrance exams in Afan Oromo to evaluate candidates' secondary school academic performance in Afan Oromo, Maths, English, Civics, History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. The dean asserted that the colleges have no English specific admission criteria for teacher candidates. According to the dean, candidates' university entrance exam grade and transcript results do not show actual performance of candidates since most candidates join the department with good results have shown poor academic performances in teacher preparation.

The above explanation showed that the criteria didn't consider English language teacher candidates' specific admission requirements rather they were general criteria. The entrance and interview exams given to English language teacher candidates showed that there are very little room to assess candidates' English language background, interest to English subject and proficiency in the admission process. The interview also showed that English language teacher candidates were not admitted with subject specific admission criteria to teacher preparation.

The participants' evaluation showed that English language teacher candidates' admission criteria are not relevant to admit suitable English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation. The practicum coordinator and college dean described that teacher preparation program has no English language specific admission criteria to accept teacher candidates to preservice teacher preparation. For instance, ShCT2 explained that the criteria didn't assess candidates' English background in writing, reading, speaking, listening, grammar skills and candidates' interest toward English language teaching of the candidates. ShCT3 also described that though candidates' profile shows they have good grades in secondary school leaving national exam and secondary school transcript results, the admitted English language teacher candidates were unable to write, read, speak and listen in English. Besides, ShCT3 and college dean clarified that English language teacher candidates' interview didn't assess their English language communication and spelling writing skills but their local language proficiency. ShCT4 and practicum coordinator reacted that quota-filling criteria was other irrelevant criteria that forced to admit underachiever English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation blocking the chance of potential English

language teacher candidates from other part of the region. The college dean pressed that the entrance exam was general which didn't properly identify candidates' English language background. Moreover, teacher candidates (T1 T2...and T6) interview also reported that the English language teacher candidates' admission criteria are irrelevant. T3, T4 and T5 explained that there was no subject related selection criteria to English language teacher candidates. Similarly, T2 and T5 described that English teacher candidates' admission criteria were general which did not address candidates' English language skills and interest. T3 asserted that the entrance examination did not assess candidates' English language skills. According to T3, candidates' interview contents didn't addresses candidates' "English background knowledge and communication skills".

The above discussion showed that the criteria of admitting English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation were irrelevant that can't address candidates' English background, interest and communication skills. Both the entrance examination and interview conducted during candidates' admission didn't address candidates' English language potential and background knowledge.

The teacher educators' evaluation on the candidates' English ability showed that most candidates had poor English proficiency. For example, ShCT2 described that "the candidates' English background isn't definitely good". As ShCT3 asserted, most candidates disliked English and could not write, read, speak, and listen it. ShCT4 also revealed that the admitted candidates "have very poor English background" and there were no criteria which identified candidates' English ability. Further, practicum coordinator and vice dean explained that candidates' English competences were below the standard. Besides, the dean asserted that ninety-five percent of the candidates didn't have the expected English language skills and were the least performer candidates. He pressed that most candidates disliked teaching English and resisted to teach English during teaching practicum. Teacher candidates' interview on their English background showed that T1 and T2 hardly spoke and wrote in English at secondary school. They mentioned that they were not good in English at secondary school. Further, T3 and T4 reflected that they were poor in English speaking, writing and grammar at secondary school because the English teacher was not good in English teaching".

The above description on English teacher candidates' performance evaluation shows that teacher educators perceive many of the candidates have poor English language background. This indicates that English language teacher candidates' admission criteria and process didn't address candidates' English background and interest to be English language teachers.

Discussion

This section discussed the findings that focused on relevance of English language teacher candidates' screening and admission criteria.

Teacher Candidates' Screening Criteria

The findings of screening criteria used to identify potential English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation have been presented as follows.

The finding of document analysis on English language teacher candidates' screening criteria indicated that the criteria didn't address candidates' English background in listening, speaking, reading and writing for registration. Besides, the criteria didn't request candidates' interest to teaching English subject issues. The criteria also asked candidates' minimum grade 9-12 transcripts' results (50%) and above. Candidates were expected to have the least grade in English subject entrance examination result. Further, the criteria requested candidates to be free of any violence, addiction, vision and mental problems for registration. Participants' interview showed that candidates' English background, knowledge and interest to teaching English were not given attention during candidates' screening. For instance, college teacher educator four (ShCT4), practicum coordinator and dean reflection indicated that English language teacher candidates were screened with minimum grade "C" in English and Maths subjects, 50% and above in grade 9-12 transcript results and age of 17 and above years old .

The findings of document analysis and participants' interview results showed that there were no English subject specific screening criteria for English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation. This mismatches with what Pourdana and Karimi Behbahani (2013) and Hayes (2014) assert that applicant candidates' need to be screened based on their English proficiency as one entry criteria for teacher preparation and to be English language teachers. British Council (2005) suggests that teacher candidates' spoken and written English proficiency are the screening criteria for English language teacher preparation. This implies if entry candidates have poor base in English language subject, this can cause ineffective teacher preparation and in competent

production of English as a foreign language teachers. Further, candidates' interest toward English and teaching was not considered in screening criteria. Rani (2017) explains that one of good teacher candidates' selection procedures include testing of candidates' language ability and attitude toward the teaching. Castaneda (2011) points out that identifying candidates' attitude toward English subject and teaching as profession is the first stage of teacher preparation. Djigunovic (2012) also presses that trainees' attitude toward the subject (English) and teaching profession have impacts on quality of teacher preparation. The author also share this view that candidates' attitude and interest toward the subject determine their commitment and efforts they exert to develop their knowledge and skills to become effective English teachers. Caena (2014) asserts that candidates' attitude to teaching is one elements that identify primary school teacher candidates to teacher preparation.

Teacher Candidates' Admission Criteria

The finding of document review shows that the admissions criteria employed to English language teacher candidates' preparation were ineffective. The criteria assess English language teacher candidates' secondary school academic performance in college entrance exam via local language but use only 20 multiple choice of English language questions to test their secondary school English subject background. Candidates' interview exam also didn't assess candidates' English language communication, reading and spelling writing skills in the process of admissions to teacher preparation. Candidates' English subject transcript and entrance exam results didn't specifically assess English subject background. Further, teacher educators' interview findings depicted that the admission criteria hardly recognized candidates' English language background and English subject secondary school leaving exam grade. Besides, college vice dean and practicum coordinator and teacher candidates mention that there are no English subject specific admission criteria that assess English subject knowledge and interest toward English teaching to accept to English language teacher preparation.

However, this mismatches with what Denner, Salzman and Newsome (2001) explain that teacher candidates' admission process begins from assessing their subject background knowledge, skills and dispositions pre requites to teacher preparation. Besides, English language teacher candidates' admission criteria needed to evaluate candidates' academic ability and subject knowledge from a wide range of sources (AITSL, 2020; Klassen, Kim, Rushby & Bardach, 2019).

Further, the criteria should have to recognize candidates' quality in: overall level of literacy, strong interpersonal communication skills, willingness to learn and motivation to teach the subject (De Carvalho, 2018).

The researcher also claims that the English teacher candidates' admission criteria should have recognized applicants' English language literacy, proficiency and attitude toward English language, motivation to teaching and interpersonal communication skills in the target language. If the criteria didn't identify the incoming candidates' academic performance in English subject, communication skills and interest to teach at entry stage, it is difficult to predict candidates become effective in English as a foreign language teaching. First, in our country context including Oromia region, candidates who join teacher preparation are mostly those who were unable to get studying other fields and left jobless. Besides, the concurrent view of teacher preparation expects candidates to have enough English language background at secondary school levels but in our education system it is obvious that most candidates are unable to have reading comprehension and writing skills in their mother tongue let alone in English subject. The candidates' secondary school leaving examination and transcript results are also highly exposed to academic cheating and biased assessments so that their grades are less likely to show candidates' actual performance. Thus, candidates' admission committee needs to use English subject background, communication skill, writing skill, attitude toward English language and teaching profession as subject specific criteria of admission to attract relatively capable English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study focused on assessing effectiveness of screening and admission criteria employed to accept suitable English language teacher candidates to teacher preparation. The study identified that the screening and admission criteria did not consider teacher candidates' English background: knowledge, proficiency and interest to teach it. Besides, there are no English subject specific screening and admission criteria in the admission of candidates. The entrance exam, interest toward teaching and interview exam in English language criteria were overlooked in the admission process. These factors might have potential to the ineffectiveness of candidates' preparation and poor performance in English subject teaching.

Therefore, to admit effective English language teacher candidates to English language teaching profession, it would be better if the admission committee uses subject specific screening and admission criteria that assess candidates' English subject capacity. The criteria also required to involve candidates' motivation to teach English, profile in writing paragraph / essay, proficiency in speaking, and subject specific entrance exam. The interview exam needs to assess current candidates' English language background and interpersonal communication skills.

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