

ABSTRACT

Teachers' Perceptions of Training Needs and Competence in Elementary School Mathematics

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The purpose of the study was to determine pressing perceived training needs and assess perceptions of teacher competence in mathematics teaching skills at the elementary level. A set of 28 mathematics teaching skills was investigated, using a Likert type questionnaire. Information on teachers' perceptions of their training needs and teaching competence was collected from 100 elementary school teachers in the district of St George East, Trinidad and Tobago. Statistical procedures included descriptive statistics, rank-ordering, Chi-square tests of association, and t-tests. The findings indicated that the most pressing perceived needs (and those teachers perceived as having least competence) were catering for the slow learner and mathematically gifted as well as teaching newer content areas in mathematics. Participants and non-participants of the Ministry inservice programmes differed significantly on perceived desire for further training on 71% of the skills, but no significant differences on perceptions of teaching competence were found on all the skills. Fifty-five percent of the pressing/important perceived needs of teachers were not offered by the Ministry inservice programme. Teaching level and years of experience were not found to be related to perceived training needs. Level of attainment in mathematics was found to be unrelated to perception of teaching competence. The results implied that there is greater need for collaboration between Ministry planners and teachers, if inservice training is to adequately meet the needs of elementary school teachers in mathematics. In addition, more effort and resources should be placed on preparing teachers to cope with students at the extreme ability levels in the mathematics classroom.