

Review

Teacher and the student practice teaching programme in Nigerian educational system

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The science of pedagogy involves many specific skills which prospective and serving teachers must understand, practice and habituate. The much talked about fall in the standard of education demands that a more positive attentive attention be given to the teacher education programme in our institutions of learning with a view to improving the professional preparation of teachers in the 21st century. It has, therefore, become imperative that educationists should evaluate and appraise various aspects of “teacher education programme” and suggest ways that will better teachers’ performance and bring about qualitative education. This paper appraises the student practice teaching as an important component of the “teacher education programme” and posits that if teacher education must meet the challenges of the 21st century, certain changes must be effected in the area of the duration of the pre-service training generally; the student practice teaching in particular and the method of supervision/evolution.

Key words: Teacher, student, practice teaching, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Practice teaching occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education. It is a culminating experience in teacher preparation. It provides opportunity to beginning teachers to become socialized into the profession (Furlong et al., 1988). Performance during practice teaching provides some basis for predicting the future success of the teacher. Outgoing popularity and centrality of practice teaching is an important contributing factor towards the quality of teacher education programme. During practice teaching, working with students in schools provides a high degree of emotional involvement of a mostly positive nature. Student teachers feel themselves grow through experience and they begin to link to a culture of teaching. During practice teaching, they feel engaged, challenged and even empowered (Shah, 1995). In sequel, the call for improved standards in our school system is unequivocal. Educationists are now addressing the different aspects of “teacher education programme” with a view to making meaningful contributions that will ultimately raise the standard of education in our country. This paper examines in broad terms the three stages in teacher education-the pre-service training, practice teaching and in-service training

with an in-depth focus on the student practice programme as an important component of the teacher education programme.

The researcher uses the procedure of the students practice teaching programme of the Federal College of Education, Obudu as the model and then raises some critical observations on the duration of the teacher education generally, the duration of the student practice teaching and the procedure of supervision/evaluation. The writer then posits that if teacher education must meet the challenges of the 21st century, some changes must be effected in the aforementioned areas of the teacher education programme.

PRACTICE TEACHING DEFINED

A number of terms such as the practice teaching, student teaching, teaching practice, field studies, infield experience, school based experience or internship are used to refer to this activity (Taneja, 2000). The term practice teaching embraces all the learning experiences of student teachers in schools (Akbar, 2002). The term a

practice teaching has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies (Taneja, 2000).

Teaching and the stages in teacher education programme

Teaching has been decried as an attempt to bring about desirable changes in human learning, abilities and behaviour. As a process, it involved three components; the teachers, the learner and the materials. A teacher can simply be seen as one who supervises this learning process. The training of a teacher has been classified by Taneja (2000) into three phases: pre- service training, practice teaching and in-service training. Each of these three phases has its own purpose and serves to complement the other, even though still serving as a complete sub-programme by itself.

Pre-service training

This is usually taken at two levels, non-graduate level and the graduate level. At the non-graduate level, the prospective teacher, a school certificate holder of its equivalence, enters a College of Education of Polytechnic for a three year course to qualify as an elementary school teacher. Or the School Certificate holder enters into a Faculty/Institute of Education for a four year course to qualify as a teacher in the Secondary School. Here the trainee takes academic courses to update his knowledge in his subjects of specialization, some general courses and courses in the School/Faculty of Education in theory and practice of education to equip him as a teacher.

Students practice teaching

Theoretical knowledge alone cannot sufficiently equip a trainee for the arduous task of teaching. As Afe (1995) puts it: "pre-service teachers programmes cannot be expected to produce teachers who are finished products and skilled in the full range of the performance associated with high quality teaching". Infact, this fact was well-stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) as it read "no matter the efficiency of pre-service training we give to teachers, there will necessarily be areas of inadequacies". Hence the need for students practice teaching where the trainee is exposed to classroom situation and is supervised by his trainers. Briefly, this supervised practice teaching is aimed at correcting common pedagogic errors and giving confidence to the trainee. Majasan (1996) sees teaching as "the main work of young recruits into the profession". This

has to be done well before the recruit can graduate into "educating" which is the main work of school education.

In-service training

Good teaching does not begin an end in pre-service training but goes on building on the pre-service work which culminates in in-service training. In-service training is mostly self-directed and is carried on through reading books and articles on "one" chosen area. It involves attending seminars and conferences. It has the advantage of making hazy point clearer, of introducing other aspects of the subject area which fascinates the trainee and most importantly, it leads to specialization.

Meaning and importance of students practice teaching

The terms "practice teaching and teaching practice" are normally used by educationists interchangeably, Afe (1995). The two terms refer to the first opportunity the student teacher has to participate in the activities of involved in the teaching-learning situation. In a broad sense carefully conceived and directed to attain a degree of expertness in understanding the science of pedagogy Olaitan and Agusiobo (1981) see "practice teaching" as that phase of the pre-service education of teachers in which the student teacher is given an opportunity to bring together educational theory and actual teaching procedures under competent supervision. As Ajala (1985) puts it, "practice teaching is to the prospective teacher what internship is to the medical doctor or apprenticeship is to the technician".

Aim of practice teaching

The aim of practice teaching is to give student-teachers the opportunity of learning at first hand the actual work of a teacher in typical classroom situations. It provides the student-teacher the opportunity to meet learners as they are and to practicalize the theories acquired in pre-service training. The practice teaching, therefore, is the most important aspect of teacher education programme as it offers the prospective teacher an opportunity to put into practice, the theories and principles of education which he has learned in the classroom. It offers the practicing student an opportunity to engage in profitable experiences in observing in sharing and participating, and in teaching with the supervision of more experienced teachers (Cohen and Manion, 1983). Teacher education is not just concerned with acquisition of knowledge, but equally and more importantly with the utilization of knowledge. Pearson (1989) puts in that "the outcome of "teacher education" is intended to be the ability to teach

not just knowledge about “teaching”. Without practice teaching, the student-teacher’s knowledge can remain knowledge about teaching. This underscores the essence of supervised practice teaching.

Through practice, one becomes more aware of what one is doing and it increases the knowledge one has of the skill one is performing. With practice teaching, the student teacher acquires context –specific knowledge that helps him in the teaching task. For the experiences acquired through practice teaching to be meaningful to the prospective teacher, it must be, as Pearson (1989) puts it “reflective”. This means that the student- teacher must engage in the revision of his beliefs, acquired knowledge and context specific experiences. This will help him to adopt to different contexts since what is learnt in one context cannot be applied verbatim in other contexts without some revision. In a nutshell, according to Akbar (2002), the followings are the objectives of practice teaching:

- 1) To provide the prospective teachers with an opportunity of establishing an appropriate teacher pupil relationship.
- 2) To provide an opportunity for evaluating the student potential as a teacher and suitability for the teaching profession.
- 3) To develop personal relationship with others: administrators, teachers, parents and students.
- 4) To provide the future teacher with practical experience in school to overcome the problems of discipline and enable him / her to develop method of control.
- 5) To provide with an opportunity to put theories into practice and to develop a deeper understanding of educational principles and their implication for learning.
- 6) To enable the student teachers effectively to plan and prepare lessons.
- 7) To develop skill in the use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods of teaching.
- 8) To develop desirable professional interests, attitudes and ideas relative to teaching profession.
- 9) To enable student teachers to acquire desirable characteristics / traits of a teacher and to display appropriate behaviour.
- 10) To provide student teachers with an opportunity to have teaching evaluated and to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism.
- 11) To provide an opportunity for self evaluation and to discover own strengths and weaknesses.
- 12) To develop skills in future teachers related to teaching like fluent speaking, meaningful reading, using blackboard and other teaching material.
- 13) To provide an opportunity to liaise with school environment, its functioning and with community and its resources.
- 14) To provide for the exchange of ideas and methods between practicing school and teacher training institution, by teacher training institutions’ staff and students, perceiving new ideas material and equipment in use in

practicing schools and introducing new ideas, material and equipments into the school.

STAGES IN PRACTICE TEACHING

Primary stage

It is necessary to make a trip of student teachers to that particular school, where they are going for practice teaching. The main aim of this tour is to see the concerned head teacher, class teachers and school staff in order to acquire information about school and its environment. Student teachers must observe the teaching methods of school, methods of concerned class teacher, copies or notebooks of the students and their usual routine. On return from the tour student teachers must have the details about scheme of studies, age of the students, strength of the class, abilities and specific problems of the students, timing of the school, textbooks and teaching aids.

Preparation of lesson

For the preparation of lesson student teachers must know the subject, the relevant books and audio visual aids. Which he/she is going to teach. Because already prepared lessons give confidence to the teacher. Student teachers and supervisor can reform the teaching learning process after its evaluation.

Qualities of a good lesson

A good lesson has the following qualities:

- i) Lesson planning should be in complete detail.
- ii) Lesson should be interesting.
- iii) Effective and timely use of teaching methods and teaching aids.
- iv) Student should be ready for learning.
- v) Students should be involved practically in teaching learning process.
- vi) Lesson should be taught in professional and friendly environment.
- vii) All students should be given same attention by keeping in view their individual differences.

Teaching in classroom

The stage of teaching in the classroom is known as practice teaching. Student teachers while teaching in the classroom passes through different steps of his/her teaching (introduction, presentation, recapitulation) and concerned teacher/supervisor assesses/observes his/her lesson.

Evaluation of teaching practice

In order to evaluate the teaching practice supervisor observe the student teacher while teaching in the classroom. Supervisor evaluates/observes the punctuality, lesson planning, teaching methods, use of audio visual aids, adequacy of audio visual aids, pitch of voice, dress, start and end of lesson, interest of the students, discipline of class, use of black/white board, students' notebooks and objectives of the lesson.

Participation in other routine works of school

Teaching in the classroom is not only the objective of teaching practice, but also to provide training in all activities/work which student teachers are going to perform in future during their job. For this purpose they have to spend whole day in school as teacher. They have to participate in all the activities of school for example, preparation of timetable, preparation and maintenance of different registers, evaluation of class work and home work, arrangement of tutorial groups, sports/games, morning assembly, co-curricular activities, duty during recess, duty as day master, duty before and after school timing, decoration of classroom, preparation and maintenance of attendance board, news board, information board, look after and arrangements of AV aids room, home economics room, science laboratories and library. How to deal with students' parents, officers of the school, school employees and guests are also the part of teaching practice.

Duties as invigilators, preparation of question papers for examinations, evaluation of answer scripts and compilation of results is also part of teaching practice.

Role of supervisor in teaching practice

Supervisor has an important role in practice teaching as:

- i) A resource person
- ii) An adviser
- iii) A general moral booster
- iv) An interpreter of feedback
- v) An assessor

Supervisor's duty is not only to evaluate the lessons of teaching practice, but by using his/her all the abilities to make this experience (all the stages of teaching practice) result oriented. He/she should have all the planning before hand. He/she should have meeting and conversation with teacher educators, experienced teachers of the institution, educationists, concerned school head teachers and other teachers. Introductory lectures should be arranged before the departure of student teachers to the practicing schools in order to create awareness of the

student teachers about the preparation of lesson plans and other assigned activities. During teaching practice it is the duty of supervisors to supervise their lessons, other assigned activities, guidance and counseling as well as provide the student teachers with feed back and to enable them so that they can criticize and reform themselves. During the teaching practice student teachers should not be criticized in front of the practicing school staff and students. If there is a need then all the student teachers should be gathered and should be scolded and warned without nominating and asking the name.

Supervisors' role is to prepare teachers for future, therefore he/she should act as a facilitator.

THE DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY, ABRAKA, NIGERIA MODEL OF PRACTICE TEACHING

The researcher wishes to draw as his model on the practice teaching exercise in the Delta State University, Faculty of Education model of practice teaching. In this Faculty, the students practice teaching is handled by the teaching practice Committee which is statutorily chaired by coordinator appointed by the University through the Dean of the faculty. The Teaching Practice Committee arranges all the activities of the practice teaching-posting of students and supervising lecturers, supply of materials for the exercise, general supervision of the programme and computation of the final scores for the practicing. The Delta State Ministry of Education Calendar for the session determine the timing of the practice teaching. Normally, practice students go out in the first term of the Secondary School Calendar. The College has adopted the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) minimum standard guidelines for Teaching Practice, so students who have completed their second year are sent out for practice teaching for a duration of twelve weeks. Towards the end of the second semester, a circular is issued to all second year students on the proposed practice teaching.

The students are asked to propose a school of choice. Letters are written to principals of co-operating schools asking them to indicate the number of student teachers they need and the subject areas of need. The principals are also reminded of their responsibility to ensure that accommodation is provided for the student- teachers. The students are then posted, as much as possible, according to their choices and the principals' requests. An annual orientation seminar is usually organised and made mandatory for both the prospective student teacher and the college participating supervisors. The participating supervisors are made to present papers of lead in the discussion of various related aspects of the teaching practice exercise. Topics so discussed only serve to reinforce what the students have been taught by their Education and subject method lectures. The school participating lecturers are drawn from all the Schools in

the College using the NCCE minimum standard guidelines. The students are supervised at least two times at the end of the exercise. Supervision is combined with evaluation. Sometimes, however, due to some exigencies (for example, strike action) this target is never achieved. The Faculty of Education uses the generalist supervision where supervisors supervise practicing students irrespective of their teaching subjects. However, in grouping the lecturers, attempts are made to ensure that every group has lectures from all the schools of the College.

The principal of the co-operating school is also given a chance to evaluate the students in a form prepared by them. To get the final scores for the student, the mean of the two supervisions in most cases is computed by the Teaching Practice committee and published. That becomes the score for the student in the course.

Criticism of the model

Duration

As stated earlier, the NCCE minimum standard recommends a period of twelve weeks for the teaching practice and this is the practice in most Colleges of Education. This writer is of the view that the period to twelve weeks for practice teaching is too short as it does not provide the student-teacher the sample opportunity to effectively gain the experience which the exercise is intended to encourage. In most cases there is insufficient time for the student-teacher to put his required theories into practice. This has forced the student-teachers to see the practice teaching period as a period to write examination in one of their courses- teaching practice. The result is that they return to their schools to complete their training and leave as half-baked teachers.

Supervision/evaluation

From observation and existing literature on the subject, the researcher has discovered that summative evaluation approaches are mostly used in teachers institutions. Under this approach, the supervisor visits the student-teacher and watches him teach a lesson while at the same time filling in the required information designed to assess the student-teacher's ability and competence in the art of teaching. The supervisor also records some criticism in the said form intended to correct some observed weakness. Unfortunately, the student- teachers never benefit from this criticism as their interest is rather focused more on their scores than their actual performance in the exercise. Again, some criticisms and remarks from the supervisors are rather general and sometimes meaningless to the student teacher. Secondly, some supervisors do not even have time to seat down

and discuss their observations and comments with the students-teacher. The short discussion between the supervisor and the student-teacher just after the lesson which should afford the student teacher the opportunity to appreciate his strengths and weakness are often ignored because the supervisor is often in haste to move on to the next student-teacher or the next school. Again, the current method of supervision where only the supervisors from the teacher institution supervises and evaluates student- teachers encourages truancy.

Since the student teacher knows that after a particular supervisor, he is free for the rest of the week; and because he is not attached to any teacher in the co-operating school for any form of supervision, he jumps to the streets or goes to sleep until the next week or so when he is expecting another supervisor from the college. It is common to find students- teachers counting the number of supervisions they have had and the ones remaining and this informs and influences their commitment to the programme. Since the teachers in the co-operating schools are not involved in any way, they maintain a *leizez-faire* attitude towards the student-teachers and the student- teachers complete their assignment without gaining from the vast and rewarding experiences that this opportunity could afford.

Financial constraints and students practice teaching

In the early 70s to 80s, student-teachers were given some financial assistance in the name of "teaching practice allowance. This went a long way to helping them in their up-keep and the purchase of instructional materials and this enhanced their performance. Unfortunately, the economic down turn of the late 80s forced government to withdraw this financial assistance. The result is that students now go out for practice teaching ill-equipped financially.

Suggestions for improvement

Based on the discussion aforementioned, the researcher now advances the following suggestions aimed at improving the teacher "education programme" generally and the students practice teaching programme in particular.

Duration of course

It is a matter of an irony to note that of the entire world's leading professions: "pharmacy", "law", "engineering", "medicine", the teaching profession which trains personnel for its own occupation as well as for all other professions has the shortest period of professional training. This has often been the basis for those who

argue against the professionalization of teaching. If teachers must push their case for professionalism to its logical conclusion, they must strive to achieve parity in the duration of training of training. This writer, therefore, suggests that the period for teacher education programmes in institutions of learning be increased to five years for degree programmes and four years for the NCE programmes after a good secondary school education the writer pushes this recommendation further to suggest that the fourth of the five years in the degree programme and the third of the four years in the NCE programme should be set aside for the internship education programme in the secondary and primary schools, respectively.

Financial assistance

The student-teachers should be placed on salary grade level six and five for degree and NCE student teachers respectively. This salary will help to alleviate the financial problems identified earlier in this discussion. The students-teachers will have no excuse not to use that money to purchase the basic instructional materials for effective teaching.

Supervision/evaluation

Students Practice Teaching should be supervised by the awarding institution in close conjunction with the co-operating school where special attention and specific roles are assigned to the co-operating teachers. A co-operating teacher is that teacher who should be given the responsibility to work most closely with the student-teachers. Such a teacher could be the regular subject teacher in the school or any other qualified and experienced teacher so selected by the principal of the school. While assisting the teachers, the co-operating teacher helps to develop the student-teacher's attitude towards teaching as a profession.

For these co-operating teachers to function efficiently, the teacher Education Institution should invite all appointed co-operating teachers for an orientation workshop where the drilling will answer questions like:

- i) What is the duration covered by the student-practice teaching exercise?
- ii) What is the pattern of lesson plan adopted by the teacher education institution?
- iii) How many lesson notes is the student- teacher expected to write a week?
- iv) How often should the co-operating teacher evaluate the student- teachers?
- v) Will the supervisors from the teacher education institute observe and evaluate the student- teachers on a scheduled or non scheduled basis and how often?

For purpose of clarity the specific roles of the co-operating teachers should be discussed in this orientation workshop. Some of the salient responsibilities include:

- i) The co-operating teachers should make the student teacher feel wanted and welcome by introducing them to the school staff and students, special buildings and the administrative structure and procedure of the school.
- ii) Give guidance and assistance to the student-teacher in the area of construction of unit/lesson plans and how to deliver the lessons.
- iii) Aid the student-teacher in mastering the grading system that is consistent with the school's policy.
- iv) Provide guidance and assurance in discipline problems which the student –teacher is likely to be confronted.
- v) Encourage and help the student-student in developing an appreciation for the teaching profession and pride in the contribution he can make to the world of academics.
- vi) Most importantly, provide continuous evaluation of the student-teachers functioning as a teacher and all other facets of the practice teaching assignment.
- vii) Teaching practice should not be consisted of classroom teaching only. Other aspects like attendance of students, collection of fee, calculation of fee, preparation of registers, conduct of morning assembly, conduct of co-curricular activities, preparation of question papers, marking of answer scripts, compilation of results, solution of students' problems and meetings with students' parents should be included.
- viii) Microteaching should be adopted in teacher training institutions and model lessons should be given before student teachers by experts as well as by video films.
- ix) Student teachers are not given marks only for model lessons and all the aspects of teaching practice should be included in evaluation.
- x) In order to make the evaluation of teaching practice more effective, appropriateness of lesson, teaching methods, teaching aids, practical organization of lesson, interest of students and teachers and students' answers should be included in evaluation.
- xi) It should be encouraged that student teachers make audio visual aids by them selves and student teachers should be given / provided guidance after every lesson.
- xii) In order to make teaching practice more effective, it is also proposed that student teachers should watch the lessons of experienced teachers for one week and write evaluation report about them and supervisors should provide guidelines to student teachers in the light of this evaluation report.
- xiii) It should be ensured that student teachers keep the sequence of lessons in such a way, so that they can teach all types of lessons and use different teaching methods.
- xiv) Prior to teaching practice student teachers should practice in their fellows in order to build more confidence in them.
- xv) During teaching practice student teachers should be

given projects, which cover all the aspects of teaching practice i.e. (preparation of teaching kit, planning for decoration of classrooms, betterment of environment and provision of facilities).

xvi) During practice teaching prospective teachers should be made habitual of preparing daily lesson plan.

xvii) Practice teaching should be more realistic and suited to the actual class room situations.

In performing all these and other function, the entire exercise as this might not have the negative effects of rubbing the student-teachers creativity and even the opportunity to implement the ideas and instructional procedures learned in the schools.

CONCLUSION

The standard of education of a country cannot rise above the quality of her teachers. This paper has attempted to make its contribution in the area of the making of a teacher with special focus on the student "practice teaching" as an important aspect of teacher education. The changes advocated in the paper – the extension of the "teacher education" courses from four to five years and from three to four years degree and NCE teachers respectively, the call for the extension in the "students practice" period from an average of twelve weeks to one calendar year; the appointment of and co-operating teacher – are all far reaching. But it is the contention of the researcher that if education must meet the challenges of the 3rd millenium, then teacher educators must be willing to make these changes to get prospective teacher

better equipped for this task. In fact, teaching practice is an activity, which can play an important role in the preparation of teachers. Its effectiveness is necessary for the nation. It is a milestone for professional adolescence. It is a combination of personality, professional skills, knowledge and training, which is fuel for an endless journey.

Now it is the duty/responsibility of teacher educators and teachers of practicing schools to make this fuel/expenditure endless.

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