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TEACHING PRACTICE AS AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL FOR QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice is an integral part of teacher education as it qualifies a student teacher to become a teacher. This paper therefore sought to examine teaching practice as an indispensable tool for quality teaching and learning. It addresses the concept of teaching practice, advantages of teaching practice, and barriers to effective teaching practice as well as measures for effective teaching practice. Also, teaching practice for effective teaching and learning. Recommendations were made which include enlightening the students' teachers about the exercise, adequate preparation, training of supervisors as well as monitoring their reports.

Keywords: Teaching Practice; Tool; Quality; Teaching, and Learning.

Introduction

Every profession has its own way of making professionals, teaching as a profession is not an exception. Thus, no certification is expected from an institution of learning to a student teacher except he or she has successfully done the teaching practice. What internship is to pharmacy student, what houseman ship is to a medical student is the purpose teaching practice serve to a student teacher. Education involves teaching and learning and teaching is done by none other than the teacher. Teaching profession is the foundation of other professions or simply put, teaching is the profession of the professions. The implication is that what affects the profession affect other professions. Education illuminates, because through education, growth and development is actualized for the development of the mind which is more important. Aguba (2013) opined that "if you build the road and the airport without building the mind, the underdeveloped mind will naturally destroy the road and the Airport". Thus, the need for quality education which teachers are the main determinant of and is achievable mainly through sound teaching practice.

Eze (2010) defined teaching practice as "first opportunity for student teachers to participate in activities involved in teaching in actual situations and is designed to provide opportunity and guidance in a school setting for the student-teacher in practice to develop professional competences, personal characteristics, understanding, knowledge and skills of a teacher". This definition portrays the significance of teaching practice to the making of a teacher. The exercise meant a lot for the student teacher; a time for learning, a time for assessment as it should offer feedbacks too. This implies that a student teachers' inability to pass through the teaching practice indicates his or her incapability in the teaching profession.

Successful teacher produces or makes successful learners for one cannot give what he or she does not have. Obunadike (2013) defined education as "the transmission of what is desirable to individuals to make them knowledgeable and contributing members of the community. According to Onyeachu (2011) education is "an excellent tool for national development". These definition poses a big challenge to teachers for the development of the nation lies in their hands. It is a general aphorism that "practice makes perfect", thus, teaching practice intends to make a student teacher a genius in the profession.

It will be pertinent at this point to define teaching. According to Deng (2017) teaching refers to "methods, techniques or strategies through which a curriculum is conveyed to students". Omiko (2013) defined teaching as "an act of instructing, which involves giving knowledge to someone". As the teacher is the most important element in any educational program, therefore, a teacher must be skilled enough before he or she could impact positively on others and this what teaching practice intends to serve. Teaching practice is a professional program aimed at producing functional and quality teachers, unfortunately the programme most times is not properly planned, this adversely affects the professionalism of teachers. In lending credence to this, Umezulike (2015) opined that "a teacher training programme cannot be complete without the trainee having opportunity to go for teaching practice in actual school setting".

Teaching practice is the process of allowing the trainee teacher to practice his or her theoretical experiences in the school setting in a real classroom situation. Teaching practice is not same as normal classroom teaching even though both involve teaching and learning. As the concept means a lot for the teaching profession, all measures must be put in place to ensure that it is successfully done which leads to the realization of the objectives of education and this is the focus of this work. This work was discussed under the following sub-headings:

Meaning of teaching practice
Advantages of teaching practice
Barriers to effective teaching practice
Measures for effective teaching practice
Teaching practice for effective teaching and learning

Conclusions and recommendations

Meaning of teaching practice

Onyejekwe (2010) defined teaching practice as "an exercise in which student teachers are guided to acquire skills and competencies by exposing them to environments (schools) similar to those in which they hope to work after schooling. According to Saiden (2017) teaching practice is "an essential aspect of teacher education as it forms the core of the teacher programme; aims to acquaint student teachers with the practical knowledge of teaching and learning". Kiggundu and Nayimul (2009) opined that teaching practice is "a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice".

Samphina Academy (2022) defined teaching practice is "an integral part" of teacher education which occupies a phase of its own, during the phase, there will be a teacher sent out by his or her training institution to a lower level of education for the purpose of putting into practice the skills he or she learnt under the supervision of an experienced teacher". Tshuma and Bhebe (2016) defined teaching practice as "teacher training approach that was adopted by teacher training institutes to enhance a student teachers' adeptness in the career he or she is training for".

Advantages of teaching practice:

1. **Professionalism:** According to Obunadike and Ughammadu (2015) teaching practice is a worthwhile programme for professionalizing in teaching. Without teaching practice, a student teacher will not be recognized as a teacher. Collaborating, Oluwafemi (2010) opined that teaching practice is "a basic professional requirement, the un-fulfillment of which the student teacher cannot qualify as a teacher"
2. **Exposure:** the training gotten during teaching practice no doubt exposes the student teacher to what is obtainable in the teaching profession. In lending credence to this, Ofoegbunam (2007) asserts that "teaching practice is a period during which the student-teachers are exposed to the practical realities of the teaching profession which form part of their programme". Also, Quick and Sieborger cited in Nyaga (2019) opined that "teaching practices exposes student teachers to real teaching world and contextualize their theoretical skills to practical skills".
3. **Mastery of the subject:** Practice makes perfect. Thus, teaching practice provides the student teachers with experience in the actual teaching and learning environment which leads to perfection. Ngugi and Thungui (2014) asserted that "the mastery of the subject matter is the foundation upon which the education of a teacher requires among other

things the skill of mastering the subject matter and being able to establish the inter-relationships between different subjects. Speaking further, they maintained that it is through the mastery of subject matter that they are able to help their learners to learn and understand the same subject matter, which these are essential for the professional growth of a teacher which contributes to the growth of a teacher as a person.

4. C**onfidence:** Through the experience gathered during the exercise, the student teachers build confidence in themselves as teachers. Collaborating, Lukman (2021) opined that "teaching practice also improves the level of confidence among student teachers, this gives them the ability to present their seminar projects effectively and also enable them to handle higher classes after graduation".

Barriers to effective teaching practice

1. **Inadequate time:** enough time is not given to teaching practice to micro teaching before the commencement of the teaching practice. This no doubt affects the exercise. In some cases, students attend lectures during the teaching practice.
2. **Financial constraint:** the student teachers are not paid during the teaching practice and this is a problem because they need money for transport and to settle their bills. In most cases, the approved schools for teaching practice within the vicinity wont absorb all the students, thus, accommodation becomes an issue too as some schools do not have accommodation. Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs portrays workers effectiveness when their needs are met, thus, student teachers are not exception. Apparently, during the period of teaching practice, they relieve the teachers of their workload.
3. **Unprofessionalism of supervisors:** Only few supervisors understand their duty (ies), ordinarily, supervisors should be friendly with the student teachers but only few are. Cases abound of supervisors embarrassing the student-teachers before their students. Collaborating, Oku (2006) asserted that "…some supervisors especially the neophytes might see it (teaching practice) as an opportunity to terrorize and humiliate student teachers thereby making them lose their self-confidence". Such condescending attitude by the supervisors definitely would mar the objectives of teaching practice. Rather than building the students professionally, it tears or destroys.
4. **Lack of co-operation from schools and teachers:** the schools the student teachers are posted to have a role in ensuring effective exercise. During this exercise, some schools are not

friendly. The teachers instead of encouraging them criticizes them only. Criticism encourages growth but only when it is constructive. Besides, seeing and commenting only on the negative aspect of an individual doesn't encourage growth. In additon, Kiggudu and Nayimuli (2009) opined that "while some mentors overload students teachers, other mentors did not have confidence in the student teachers and consequently they would not leave their classes in the student teachers' care. Others would not let student teachers teach at any time because they felt that student teachers were delaying and wasting learners' valuable time and they need to finish the syllabus before the end of the year. This resulted in the student teachers getting discouraged and expressing feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence in their ability to teach".

5. **No feedback:** feedbacks help a great deal in growth, be it in individual life, business or other ventures. Feedback is information about reactions to a product, a persons' performance of a task, etc. which is used as a basis for improvement. Quite unfortunate that students teachers are not given video feedback, like is done during micro-teaching in some schools. Video feedback goes a long way for the students get to see his or her true performance, devoid of any sentiment or influence.
6. **Wrong perception of the exercise:** it is a fact that wrong perception does harm than good. Thus, student teachers wrong perception of teaching practice poses a great barrier. Teaching practice qualifies a student teacher to a professional as inability to pass the course hinders the student dream to reality. Yet, some students see the exercise as a waste of time. Such wrong perception won't allow them put in their best and also deprive them of what they should benefit from participating.
7. **Computer illiteracy:** a student teacher who is not computer-literate will find it hard to cope in this age and time owing to modernization. Bediga and Banari (2019) asserted "the role of computer in teaching activities is becoming more important because world is in a continuous and rapid modernization and computer use in school has and will have a great role in the presentations of lessons, and for communication and information". Thus, any student teacher who is not computer literate would not enjoy the teaching practice for there are numerous benefits derivable from using the computer.
8. **Inadequate time:** in as much as the program is tagged "teaching practice". There should be preparations, trainings beforehand.

Micro-teaching is a major preparatory avenue for teaching practice. But inadequate time could affect such preparatory programme which also poses a problem to the teaching practice exercise.

Measures for effective teaching practice

1. **Quality micro-teaching:** Allocating proper time for micro teaching is very necessary. Ikediugwu (2005) opined that "micro teaching device helps to solve some of the problems involved in the students practical teaching activities which enable the students to phase gradually into real teaching rather than being dropped hastily into the actual classroom situations". Micro teaching is an example of activities designed for effective teaching practice and should be done effectively to ensure effective teaching practice.
   The essence of incorporating micro-teaching in teacher education program is to enable teacher trainees to teach among themselves for shorter period of time so that they acquire actual teaching practice (Tata, Sharon and Aliyu, 2015). Micro-teaching and teaching practice remains compulsory subjects for undergraduate teacher students. Subramatan in Tata et all (2015) stated that "benefits of micro-teaching to pre-service teachers to include; enables them to develop and improve teaching skills and exposes them to realities of teaching". Ambili (2013) defined micro-teaching as "a teacher training technique for learning teaching skills; it employs real teaching situation for developing skills and helps to get deeper knowledge regarding the art of teaching". This implies that if micro-teaching is properly done, no doubt, the teaching practice will be done effectively.
2. **Quality supervisors:** Quite unfortunate some supervisors don't know their duty (ies) towards the student teachers. In order to improve the exercise, the supervisors should be trained specifically so as to do the right thing. According to Ode, Iloakasia and Maduka (2020) , "the supervisor should be a knowledgeable and competent professional teacher who is very versed in performance expectation for pre-service teacher and teacher education; and is expected to serve as an adviser, resource person, an assessor, an interpreter of feedbacks to the assigned pre-service teacher".
3. **Co-operation from the school and teachers:** with maximum co-operation from the teachers, the student teachers will do better. Tshuma and Bhebe (2016) opined that "…school mentors are therefore expected to play a collaborative and active role in preparing the student

teacher for teaching practice". Umezulike (2010) mentioned "relationships" as one of the ways student teachers could maximize their growth during teaching practice. Elaborating, she said "student teachers are also encouraged to make an effort to develop relationship within the school". It is only when there is co-operation that such relationships can be developed.

4. **Enlightening the student teachers:** one of the problems of teaching practice is that student teachers most times don't understand the purpose of the exercise, as some see it as a waste of time. Aglazor (2017) opined that "the central goal of student teaching programmes is to provide aspiring teachers challenging, relevant and rewarding field experiences to inculcate essential teaching skills and professional growth". Thus, enlightening them will go a long way in making the exercise a success for they will be committed to it.
5. **Adequate time for preparation:** it is a general aphorism that he who fails to plan, plans to fail. Thus, allocating adequate time for micro teaching will ensure the success of the program. This is because a student teacher that performs well during micro-teaching definitely will do well during the teaching practice.
6. **Computer literacy:** In this age and time, knowledge of the computer is a sine qua -non for success in any field as well as the student teachers.
7. **Feedback:** As it is done during micro-teaching in most schools. Feedbacks during teaching practice on the supervision day is very necessary. This will help the student teachers to improve in areas of weakness and keep up in areas of strength. It also assures them of the fairness of the exercise.

Teaching Practice for Effective Teaching and Learning.

Teaching is both an art and science of disseminating factual information, knowledge and skills to the recipients (learners) for the benefit of individuals and societies (Ekeke, 2016). The implication is that there must be a change in the learner, otherwise, teaching hasn't occurred. For effective teaching, there must be preparation or practice. Bagudo (2019) defined teaching practice as "an exercise used by teacher training institutions to expose student teachers (pre service teachers) to real school and classroom situation for a period of time to enable them demonstrate their dispositions and skills in disseminating knowledge, instructions and skills in their areas of specialization".

Perry (2016) argues that "teaching practice creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the student teachers as they commence their teaching practice". This helps the student teacher to

fully prepare for the job ahead. As an indispensable program in the educational curriculum, teaching practices no doubt ensures effective teaching and learning when done properly. The overall purpose of teaching practice is to expose student teachers to the actual teaching and learning environment. Practice leads to perfection, thus, teaching practice helps the student teacher to perfect in his career. It is an established fact that the teacher is at the centre of the education system, and this implies that the quality of the teacher determines the quality of teaching as well as learning. With teaching practice properly done, quality teaching and learning is possible in our educational system. As one cannot give what he or she does not have, quality teaching practice is essential for quality teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Teaching practice is highly essential for the student teachers as it provides opportunity for them to be trained and assessed before they become professional teachers. The essence is in making a good teacher, thus it should be given every necessary attention. Adequate preparations should be made before the commencement of the program like quality micro teaching. As every other endeavor, there are barriers to effective teaching practice which should be tackled, owing to the fact, that there are a lot to gain from the exercise. Above all, the student teachers should be enlightened on what teaching practice is all about, this will go a long way in realization of the objectives of the program.

Recommendations

As teaching practice is key for effective teaching and learning, efforts should be made in the following areas:

1. The student teachers should be enlightened about teaching practice.
2. Adequate preparations before the exercise through providing the necessary facilities during micro teaching.
3. Training of supervisors and monitoring their reports
4. Teaching practice period should be purely for the exercise, not time for lectures or other school activities.
5. The schools' students are posted to should be friendly so as to encourage them and not discourage them.
6. The supervisors day and time for visiting the student teacher should not be known to them (the student teachers)
7. Feedback after supervision devoid of sentiments.

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