

TEACHING PRACTICE: A CORE EDUCATIONAL PLANNING ATTAINMENT FOR STUDENTS CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This study was on teaching practice, a core educational planning attainment for students, challenges, and prospects. The purpose of the study was to find the perceptions of students about teaching practice and the challenges facing student-teachers during teaching practice exercises. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The study employed a descriptive survey research design in which only existing variables were investigated without manipulating them. The targeted population for the study were students' teachers, numbering a total of 188 from our five units of the Department of Science Education. The study employed simple random sampling to select participants. A total of 100 participants were randomly selected from Integrated Science Education, Mathematics Education, Physics Education, Chemistry Education, and Biology Education in the Faculty of Education, Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden. The instrument used for the collection of data for the study was a questionnaire tagged teaching practice questionnaire (TPQ). Mean scores, standard deviation, and t-tests were used for the analysis of the collected data. A mean score above 2.50 indicates high while a mean below 2.50 indicates low. In conclusion, teaching practice is in constant practice and is the foundation of teaching. Based on this, it was recommended, among others, that a proper orientation for student teachers should be carried out using efficient means of communication like seminars, workshops, conferences, and discussion before they go for teaching practice.

Keywords: Teaching, Practice, Core, Education, Attainment.

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INTRODUCTION

All professional schools, from medical schools to departments of engineering, from seminaries to schools of education, are charged with preparing their students for clinical practice. Yet practice has always had an uneasy relationship, at best, with higher education. Even as higher education has embraced professional education as part of its mission, or in some cases, built universities on the foundations of teachers' colleges, universities have been ambivalent about the status and content of the more practical coursework that is part and parcel of most professional programs. Courses within professional preparation programs are implicitly tied to practice; there is generally exists a set of courses that explicitly focus on the development of practice. Such courses are known by various names – homiletics or practical theology in the preparation of the clergy; trial advocacy or legal writing in the preparation of lawyers; clinical interviewing in the preparation of clinical psychologists; and methods of teaching in the education of teachers.

Teaching practice is a core and compulsory part of the student teacher's course necessary to qualify a student as a teacher in Nigeria. This practice exposes student teachers to action-oriented experiential training practicals. Practice is often defined by what we do rather than who we are or how we think. Marais and Meier (2004) assert that the term "teaching practice" represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. According to Emereole (2000), the term "teaching practice" is an experience of guided teaching in which the trainee teacher assumes increased responsibility for directing the learning of a group over a period of time. Imart (2003) explains that the term "teaching practice" has three major connotations: the practice of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher, the whole range of experiences, and practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies. Teaching practice is the name of the preparation of student teachers for teaching through practical training.

The National Policy on Education (2004) highlights the purpose of teacher education to include producing highly efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system. For teachers to teach competently and efficiently, they must be adequately exposed to both the academic (theoretical) and practical aspects of teaching.

McGee and Fraser (2001) emphasize that it is in teaching practice that student teachers are baptized with the experience to gain knowledge of how teachers go about the many and complex tasks involved in actual classroom practice. All these definitions indicate that teaching practice is a vital exercise that provides the opportunity for beginning teachers to become socialized into the profession.

In Nigerian universities and colleges of education where students are prepared, teaching practice is an essential aspect of teacher education. It prepares students and teachers for their future teaching roles and responsibilities. During teaching practice, the trainee teachers are sent out from the university to primary, secondary, commercial, and technical schools to teach for a period of three months as a part of their training. During this practice, a student teacher is supervised and evaluated not only by a supervisor allotted to him or her but also by a group of other lecturers who supervise the student teachers and the collaborating teacher.

Akpomi (2001) argues that the need for this different evaluation is to make sure that the student teacher is properly corrected and graded.

Statement of the problem

The educational standard in Nigeria is falling. It has reached an alarming stage. The establishment of both private primary and secondary schools in our environment has become worrisome. The way and manner in which the government is issuing licenses to the operators of these schools raises so many concerns. Most teachers employed in these schools do not possess the basic teachers' requirements for teaching. Teaching

and practicing are important tools for success in any area of teacher education. It affords the student teachers the opportunity to plan, teach and evaluate, and practice the art of teaching. The National Policy on Education (2004) stated that no educational system can rise above the level of its teaching staff. This shows the role of teachers and teacher education programs in national development. With the introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1976, only well-trained teachers can successfully translate the objectives of UBE into reality. Teaching practice is one of the most important aspects of the teacher training program in Nigeria, aimed at exposing the student teachers to the field to carry out the theoretical knowledge and experience into practice in real classroom situations under the supervision of a sound teacher.

Purpose of the study

It is the purpose of the study to examine teaching practice, a core educational planning attainment for students, challenges and prospects. In specific terms, the study intends to:

1. Find out students perceptions of teaching practice
2. Find the challenges facing student teachers during teaching practice exercises.

Research questions

The following research questions will be answered to arrive at the findings of the study.

1. What are the perceptions of students' teachers about teaching practice?
2. What are the challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses, which will be tested at 0.05 levels of significance, have been formulated to guide this study.

1. There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female students' teachers on the perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice.
2. There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female students' teachers on the challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice.

METHOD

Research design

The study employed a descriptive survey research design in which only existing variables were investigated without manipulating them.

Population of the study

The targeted population for the study were students' teachers from the Faculty of Education at Akwa Ibom State University who are currently in their teaching practice at different schools within the state, with a total number of 188 from our five units of the Department of Science Education.

Sample and sampling technique

The study employed simple random sampling to select participants. A total of 100 participants were randomly selected from Integrated Science Education, Mathematics Education, Physics Education, Chemistry Education, and Biology Education in the Faculty of Education, Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden.

Instrument

The instrument used to collect data for the study was a questionnaire tagged teaching practice questionnaire (TPQ). It is made up of two sections, namely A and B. Section A was on the biodata of the participants, while Section B was divided into sub-sections I and II. Sub-section I contained items on knowledge of teaching practice, while Sub-section II contained items on. Section A consisted of the gender of the students, which is either male or female, while Section B is designed to be rated on a four-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The instrument was self-constructed. It was given to

experts to ensure face-to-face and content validity. Various suggestions by the experts were incorporated, the instrument was pilot tested, and the data collected was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients were 0.80 for Sub-section I and 0.78 for Sub-section II, respectively. The data in Section B were scored on these points: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1.

Method of data analysis

Mean scores, standard deviation, and t-tests were used for the analysis of the collected data. Mean scores were used to answer research questions one and two, while a t-test was used to answer the hypotheses. A mean score above 2.50 indicates high, while a mean below 2.50 indicates low. The hypotheses to be tested will be upheld if the t-calculated is lesser than the t-critical. On the other hand, the hypotheses will be rejected if the t-calculated is higher than the t-critical.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of students' teachers about teaching practice?

In Table 1, item number one, the mean score is 3.98 and the SD is 0.825. The mean score is higher than the benchmark mean, which is 2.50. This means that the majority of the respondents supported the opinions of the item. In item numbers 2-10, the mean scores were greater than the benchmark mean of 2.50. The implication is that the respondents supported the opinions of the items. From the mean score of the items, it can be concluded that the perception of students' teachers about teaching practice is high.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice?

In Table 2, item number one, the mean score is 3.29 and the SD is 1.68. The mean score is higher than the benchmark mean, which is 2.50. This means that the majority of the respondents supported the opinions of the item. In item numbers 2-10, the mean scores were greater than the benchmark mean of 2.50. The implication is that the respondents supported the opinions on the items. From the mean score of the items, it can be concluded that the perception of students' teachers about teaching practice is high.

Hypotheses 1

There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female students' teachers on the perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice.

The Z-test presented in Table 3 revealed that the t-calculated value for the mean scores of male and female students' teachers is -1.432. At 98° of freedom, the table value is 0.160. Since the t-cal is less than the t-crit, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This indicated there is no significant difference between the opinions of male and female students' teachers on the perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice. Thus, they are perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice.

Hypotheses 2

There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female students' teachers on the challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice.

The Z-test presented in Table 4 revealed that the t-calculated value for the mean scores of male and female parents is -1.432. At 98° of freedom, the table value is 0.951. Since the t-cal is less than the t-crit, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This indicated there is no significant difference between the opinions of male and female students' teachers on the challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice. Thus, they are challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice.

Table 1: Mean score and standard deviation of the respondents to perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice

S. No.	Items	Mean (X)	Standard deviation (SD)	Remarks
1.	Teaching practice gave me an opportunity to try out ideas and theories in a practical classroom situation	3.98	0.825	High
2.	Teaching practice developed in me the interest of teaching	2.90	1.011	High
3.	Teaching practice has made me to decide whether or not to take to teaching as a profession	3.02	0.811	High
4.	Teaching practice has made me to master professional skills	2.64	1.42	High
5.	Teaching practice has exposed me to the problems and prospects of the teaching profession	3.07	0.997	High
6.	Teaching practice has helped me learn to use reinforcement and assessment skills correctly	3.00	0.784	High
7.	Teaching practice has helped me to perfectly use instructional materials when teaching	2.79	0.871	High
8.	Teaching practice has helped me to acquire those valuable personality attributes that are associated with an outstanding teacher	2.76	1.067	High
9.	Teaching practice has made me to learn how to plan, prepare and present my lesson topics appropriately	2.76	0.821	High
10.	Teaching practice helped me to broaden my knowledge of the subject matter	2.90	0.932	High

Table 2: Mean score and standard deviation of the respondents to challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice

S. No.	Items	Mean (X)	Standard deviation (SD)	Remarks
1	In some schools, teaching staff hoard professional advice from trainee teachers	3.29	1.68	High
2	Student teachers face accommodation problems in the schools they have been posted to	3.98	1.46	High
3	Some schools lack instructional materials that are needed for effective teaching	3.02	1.48	High
4	Student teachers meet some rudely behaved Student and they have very little control over them	3.00	0.78	High
5	Student teachers are overloaded by the cooperating teachers by being assigned some of their duties	2.76	1.07	High
6	Student teachers are not allowed to interact with the permanent teacher and are even assigned a different staffroom	4.21	1.19	High
7	Student teachers are not fully involved in all school activities	3.35	1.64	High
8	Permanent teachers are not friendly and do not want to interact with student teachers	2.64	1.42	High
9	Supervision was not regularly and uniformly done	3.35	1.64	High
10	Supervisors are harsh and un friendly	2.70	2.51	High

Table 3: t-test showing comparison of male and female students' teachers on perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice

Sex	N	X	SD	t-calculated	df	t-critical	Remarks
Male	33	29.94	3.269	-1.432	98	0.160	N.S
Female	67	31.64	4.081				

Table 4: t-test showing comparison of Male and Female on challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice

Sex	N	X	SD	t-calculated	df	t-critical	Remarks
Male	33	29.94	3.269	-1.432	98	0.951	N.S
Female	67	31.64	4.081				

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results or findings of the study are discussed here one by one:

1. The perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice

The analysis of the findings in Table 1 showed that teaching practice gave students-teachers an opportunity to try out ideas and theories in a practical classroom situation and was based on the perceptions of students' teachers on teaching practice. This finding is in agreement with Marais and Meier (2004) and Perry (2004), who found that teaching practice grants student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. Teaching practice enables student teachers to understand the real world of teaching and let them know about problems and difficulties of teaching that may face them on the

course of teaching career. Hence, student-teachers understand their students "environment and accept students" diversity. Moreover, teaching practice enables the student-teacher transit from the role of students to the role of beginning teachers. Kasanda (1995) indicates that during teaching practice, a student-teacher is given the opportunity to try the art of teaching before actually getting into the real world of the teaching profession. Thus, they develop their professional and personal competencies. Student teachers also know the value of teaching practice, and as remarked by Menter (1989), they perceive it as, the crux of their preparation for the teaching profession since it provides for the real interface between studenthood and membership in the profession. As a result, teaching practice creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement, and apprehension in the student teachers as they commence their teaching practice (Perry, 2004).

Edem (2003) also explained that, during teaching practice, working with students in schools provides a high degree of emotional involvement of a mostly positive nature. Students' teachers feel that they grow through experience and that they begin to link to the culture of teaching. In this case, student teachers develop a positive attitude toward the profession and the students.

Edem (2003) further asserts that, during teaching practice, student teachers feel engaged, challenged, and even empowered. In another study, Osuala (2004) established that teaching practice exposes the trainee teacher to the realities of effective teaching and helps them to try out methods of teaching and gain practical classroom experience under experts.

Results from Table 2 indicate that there are challenges faced by students' teachers during teaching practice. This finding is also in agreement with Marais and Meier (2004), who argue that teaching practice is challenging but an important part of teacher training, especially in developing countries. Nigeria, as a developing country, is not an exception, and student-teachers encounter challenges during teaching practice. On the course of the study, the following challenges that student teachers encounter during teaching practice include: teaching staff hoard professional advice from trainee teachers; accommodation problems in the schools they have been posted to; a lack of instructional materials that are needed for effective teaching; rudely behaved students, and they have very little control over them; student teachers are overloaded by the cooperating teachers; student teachers are not allowed to interact with the permanent teacher and are even assigned a different staffroom; student teachers are not fully involved in all school activities; permanent teachers are not friendly and do not want to interact with student teachers; supervision is not regularly and uniformly done; and supervisors are harsh and unfriendly.

These challenges, if not addressed, may affect student teachers performance during teaching practice and may in the long run, affect their perception of the teaching profession. Yassin (2004) also identified the problems faced by the students during their teaching practice and established the following: the long distance between the assigned schools and the students houses; the lack of guidance provided by school principals regarding the school systems, regulations, and participation in the school activities; and the lack of respect shown by the cooperating teachers toward student teachers. Yassin (2004) further studied the challenges from academic supervisors during teaching practice and established that academic supervisors do not hold regular meetings with student teachers to discuss the challenges that face them. In addition, student teachers do not find adequate encouragement from the academic supervisors for their work; they also do not find adequate assistance in getting textbooks and teachers' guides from their collaborating teachers, did not receive adequate explanations of the required skills, and did not get appropriate guidance to motivate them to implement classroom activities.

CONCLUSION

Teaching practice is in constant practice and is the foundation of teaching. Hence, a teacher who has practiced teaching skills while teaching practice is likely to teach better. It is observed that

within the student teaching practice experience, student teachers encounter difficulties that result in problems associated with classroom management, a conducive environment, curriculum development, instruction, and supervision. The attainment of quality education will be a mirage without adequate preparation of manpower that will dispense the knowledge. Student teachers are expected to get the supervisors feedback to enable them take corrections and make amends.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The faculty of Education should organize the teaching practice exercise very well so as to give the best professional practice to the trainee teachers.
2. A proper orientation for student teachers should be carried out using efficient means of communication, such as seminars, workshops, conferences, and discussion, before they go for teaching practice.
3. Student teachers should participate at least once or twice in micro-teaching exercises as a way of exposing them to teaching practice.
4. The university should appeal to the government, non-governmental organizations like the private sector, individuals, and industries to assist in supplementing educational materials and learning resources that would prepare the students-teachers.
5. The cooperating teachers should be trained on their roles while working with the student teachers.
6. The government should provide financial support in the form of stipends for student teachers so as to boost their upkeep and their attitude toward the profession.
7. The university should train the supervisors and supervise students, while teaching practice should be done professionally.

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