

Effect of Contextual Characteristics of Teaching Practice Schools on Student Teachers' Performance in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper explores the teaching practice school context characteristics and how they influence the student teachers' performance. The sample consisted of 190 Fourth Year B. Ed students, from Moi University Main Campus and Chepkoilel Campus, selected using stratified random sampling technique based on the four Degree programmes offered in the Faculty of Education. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, and a document analysis of student teachers' assessment records from the Teaching Practice Co-ordinator at Moi University. It was analysed using the SPSS computer program and presented using descriptive statistics. It emerged that the teaching practice school characteristics of school administration, the pupils, the teachers and the learning resources affected the way teacher interns performed their duties in the schools and there was a relationship between the grades they scored for their internship and those identified factors. As such, it was recommended that school factors such as the availability and quality of teachers, the learning resources and facilities and the class sizes should be seriously taken into consideration when posting the student teachers. The findings can help create awareness on the part of the teacher training institutions on how different school contexts influence student teachers' performance and help them in establishing a better strategy of posting student teachers.

Keywords: contextual characteristics, teaching practice schools, student teachers, performance, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Teacher training forms the backbone of the success of any educational system. The role of teaching practice in quality training of teachers cannot be overemphasized. The purpose of teaching practice is to equip the student teachers with a field experience to enable them to put theory into practice and familiarize themselves with the conditions under which they will work as trained professionals. During teaching practice, student teachers are posted to different schools. It is in the schools that the student teachers develop various professional skills under the guidance of the cooperating teachers and the university supervisors, hence the importance of the placement schools. However, in all cases of teaching practice, the schools differ. This difference is noticeable in pupil-teacher relationship, pupil activities, pupil academic orientation, and discipline, learning facilities and resources, and administration. This may affect the development and delivery of services by the student teachers positively or negatively. Moreover, teacher education has not paid enough attention to the relationship of school context and teacher development. Student teachers are expected to perform equally well in the acquisition of professional skills in different teaching practice schools irrespective of their contexts. Yet, it has been observed that student teachers do not receive support

and guidance in the placement schools (Groenenewegen, as cited in Karanja, 1996).

The context of field experiences has also been noted to have a strong influence on teacher socialization. Field experiences have been criticized for merely socializing the novice in the existing school environment (McIntyre, 1996). Musvosvi (1998) states that in a school, there is the concept of socialization whereby the new teachers are initiated into the school culture by the old teachers. He notes that sometimes, the new teacher may abandon what he/she learnt in the pre-service course. "Are student-teachers exceptional?" is a question that one is bound to ask. So far to the best of the authors' knowledge, no empirical evidence exists in Kenya to show the perceptions of student teachers and university supervisors on the influence of the school context on student teachers' performance. It is, therefore, important to find out whether or not the practical experience provided to student teachers in different school contexts provides them with equal opportunity to put theory into practice and enables them to acquire the necessary skills required of a professional teacher. While some of the findings may be generalized to other public and private universities, some of them are unique to Moi University, especially due to the fact that it is the

only university in Kenya that has two sessions of teaching practice. This is because the first teaching practice may influence the student teacher's perceptions on the influence of the school contexts on their performance. The findings, however, would help create awareness on the part of the teacher training institutions on how different school contexts influence student teachers' performance and help them in establishing a better strategy of posting student teachers to teaching practice schools which would provide them with an equal opportunity of translating theory into practice and familiarize themselves with the conditions under which they will work as trained professionals. It would give student teachers insight into the importance of choosing schools for teaching practice that are supportive to their professional development. The information generated by this study would be of great benefit to teacher education in Kenya and the world over in understanding the importance of the teaching practice school contexts with the view of improving teacher training. This paper therefore aims at pointing out the influence of the school context on student teachers' performance during teaching practice.

Teacher Education

The teacher is considered the cornerstone of the educational process and one of the most important elements of developing educational systems the world over. The teacher plays an important role in achieving educational objectives, implementing educational policies and contributing to the upgrading of the quality of educational services (Al Busaidi & Bashir, 1997; Shiundu & Omulando, 1992; Makau, 1986). It is the teacher who organizes the learning experiences and manages the learning environment for the benefit of the pupils who must experience the curriculum. That is why low pupil achievement is regularly blamed on the quality of teachers. A report of the Kenya Education Commission, as cited in Makau (1986), notes that the most important contribution that the government can make to the schools of Kenya is the provision of a well-educated, keen, competent, respected and contented teaching force. In order to maintain quality and relevance in education, the teacher charged with the implementation of curriculum content must be suitably and adequately trained (Awuor, 1982). Awuor (1982) further notes that among the three elements which are important in raising the quality of education, namely the relevance of the curriculum content, instructional materials, and the teacher, the latter seems to stand out. This is because the quality of a teacher, who translates educational objectives and curriculum content into reality by the use of manipulation of the instructional materials, is reflected in the work performance and attainment of the pupils. The scholar further stresses that "no educational system can stand above the quality of the teachers in the schools. The importance of suitably

trained and qualified teachers in any school system cannot be over-emphasized (p. 3).

For the teacher to be able to educate others, he/she must be educated. This requires systematic training with a proper balance between general and professional studies. Since the teacher is an essential tool in the implementation process of the curriculum, the teacher preparation component of any curriculum is very important (Njue, 1986). Sullivan and Mousley (1997) state that "Teacher education is about raising awareness of the complexity of teaching and of the process of gathering evidence on which teaching decisions are made" (p. 48). Some of the specific national goals of teacher education as laid down in various government documents as outlined by the Ministry of Education (1987) include to: develop the ability to communicate effectively; develop professional attitudes and values; equip the teacher with knowledge and ability to identify and develop the education needs of the learner; create initiative, a sense of professional commitment and excellence in education, and enable the teacher to adapt to the environment and society.

All these can be achieved through the professional and academic courses done at the university as well as during teaching practice in the placement schools. Oakland (1995) and Shiundu and Omulando (1992) explain that the teacher education programme requires successful completion of a comprehensive programme of studies consisting of three components: general education requirements, study of the subject content areas, and the professional education programme which includes a sequence of courses and experiences in professional studies, and teaching methodology. Student teachers develop skills of observation, reflection and decision-making, and the ability to transform content into the knowledge that is necessary for future professional responsibilities. In this way, student teachers become teachers who are responsible and reflective decision-makers in a global society (Oakland, 1995, p. 12).

Patel (1996, p. 373-377) specifically outlines some of the competencies expected of a teacher. These are: contextual competencies where the teachers are expected to be fully familiar with their working environment; content competencies which requires the mastery of the subject content, transactional competencies which are the use of the methods learnt; conceptual competencies where the student teachers should be familiar with the basic principles of education, pedagogy, child-development, and psychological aspects among others; competencies related to other educational activities such as initiative and participation in out-of-class and even out-of-school activities; competencies to develop teaching-learning materials; evaluation competencies;

management competencies, and competencies related to working with parents and the community.

Performance of Student Teachers during Teaching Practice

In general, student teachers do well in teaching practice so that hardly does any one of them fail. Al Barwani (1997) states that “while grades indicate near-mastery in teaching practice, students’ reflection after graduation leads one to question the actual impact of the teaching practice experience on students learning how to teach” (p. 137). Research has revealed that there are a number of factors that influence/affect student teachers’ performance during teaching practice though there is no consensus on their co-relational significance. These factors include academic ability, attitudes, creativity, social background, placement school, and gender among others. A review of studies by Pullman (1995) indicates that academic ability has not shown a consistent strong correlation with teaching success; that is, it is not a significant predictor of successful teaching performance.

Abuloum and Al-Ghazawi (1997) argue that there is a significant effect of the training place on the level of acquisition of teaching skills in the fields of classroom management and evaluation of the learners. They also observe that there are significant differences in the public schools in comparison to private schools.

According to Awuor (1982), 40% of the tutors in primary teacher training attribute poor performance during teaching practice to poor teaching practice administration while 20% attribute it to lack of cooperation in the practice schools. Barret (1986) points out that student teaching grades are usually high regardless of the evaluation instruments used. These inflated grades may be due to improved field experiences before student teaching. The high grades, Barret notes, could be reflected on evaluation of the student teacher’s potential rather than a measure of demonstrated skills. Other reasons for the high grades stem from the assessors who evaluate student teachers. The effectiveness of the evaluation process depends on the person assessing the student teachers. Barret finally concludes that a comparison between superior and average student teachers cannot be made when reading evaluation reports because of grade inflation.

It is evident from the foregoing that student teaching grades are usually high and that various factors influence student teachers’ performance among which are placement site. However, it is not yet clear what specific factors within the teaching practice school influence performance. Hence this paper is aimed at filling these gaps.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based in Moi University, which is one of the public universities in Kenya. The University is, by design, in a rural setting on land which was originally a wattle plantation, at the Southern boundary of Eldoret Municipality. The subjects for the study were drawn from the five hundred and seventy eight (578) Moi University Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) Fourth Year students. Other subjects were drawn from the hundred and four (104) supervisors involved in the exercise. This group was inclusive of the eleven (11) Area Supervisors. The co-ordinator of teaching practice was also involved in the study. The sample consisted of one hundred and ninety (190) Fourth Year B.Ed students selected using stratified random sampling technique based on the four Degree programmes offered in the Faculty of Education at Chepkoilel Campus and Moi University. The data collection instruments used included questionnaires, interview schedules, and a document analysis schedule. The authors also collected copies of assessment records of the student teachers from the Teaching Practice Coordinator at Moi University for analysis.

After receiving the completed questionnaires, the authors first inspected all of them for completeness, appropriate marking of responses, and suitability for coding. The open-ended questions were categorized and coded together with some of the dosed-ended questions which had not been pre-coded. An item-by-item analysis of the data was then performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme whereby descriptive statistics; frequencies and percentages were computed for each school category, namely Provincial, District and Other. Tables were used in presenting the analyzed data. Responses to the interview questions were reported directly as given by the interviewees in relation to the responses from the questionnaires. Finally, the information from the teaching practice supervision forms was analyzed using the document analysis schedule.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the Teaching Practice Schools

The student teachers responded to items concerning the school administration, the pupils, the teachers and the learning resources. When asked whether or not there were regular staff meetings, a large proportion of 70.3% of respondents were in agreement in all the three school categories. This implies that a majority of the teaching practice schools in all categories had regular staff meetings as is required of any efficient school administration (Mbiti, 1974). The fact that a total of 29.7% respondents were in disagreement or undecided implies a number of teaching practice schools might have either had no staff meetings or the meetings were not held regularly or the student teachers were not involved and hence were not aware.

This means that the student teachers in these schools never experienced the decision-making process in the school in line with the findings of a study conducted by Tang Yee Fan (1996).

On whether or not the teachers interacted freely with the head teacher, the responses varied in the three school categories. A total of 53.4% disagreed. This implies that the head teachers in a majority of the provincial secondary schools did not interact freely with the teachers. This may be explained by the fact that most of these schools are large with a high population of both teachers and pupils, thus the head teachers may have little time to interact with the student teachers except in a group or in formal meetings.

Furthermore, these school categories have provision for other administrators to deal with curriculum and instruction matters among others. These include the senior masters/mistress and the heads of department to whom the head teacher delegates some of his or her duties on curriculum and instruction. The teachers, the student teachers inclusive, therefore, interact with these senior staff more than with the head teacher. On the other hand, such administrative positions are lacking in the small district schools and therefore the student teachers have to consult the head teacher on all matters thus enhancing free interaction. In contrast, the majority of the respondents in the district and 'other' school categories were in agreement with a slightly higher proportion in the district schools. In the 'other' schools categories, the proportions of those in agreement and those in disagreement were almost equal. This may be explained by the fact that this 'other' school category was composed of varied institutions ranging from small private secondary schools to various kinds of post secondary institutions whose administration may differ from that of the secondary schools.

School routine was strictly adhered to in most of the teaching practice schools irrespective of the school category with the proportion of those who were in agreement being 68.9% respondents. This implies that although there were a few schools where the school routine was not strictly adhered to, the highest proportion of such schools were in the district category. Some activities would be carried out at the expense of others as it was pointed out by the student teachers and the university supervisors in the open ended questions. For example, the pupils would be late for class due to extended assemblies which in some cases would take all the time for the first lesson in the morning. The university supervisors cited instances where they would go to a school and find that the pupils had gone for co-curricular activities without prior information. This would interfere with

the supervision schedule as well as the teaching practice exercise as a whole.

Regarding attendance at morning assembly, the majority of student teachers in all the school categories were in agreement that it was compulsory. Some substantial percentage in all the school categories was in disagreement while others were undecided giving a total of 31.1%. This implies that there were some teaching practice schools where morning assembly was not compulsory for the teachers. In such cases, it may mean that even the student teachers did not attend and thus they did not get an opportunity to participate in this important school activity (Mbiti, 1974).

The authors also sought to know the student teachers' perception on the statement that 'the school had clear regulations that governed absence from duty'. A large proportion of the respondents in the provincial school category were in agreement. For the district school category, a total of 53.2% respondents agreed. The 'other' school category had a high percentage of respondents in agreement with the statement. This shows that most of the institutions which fell under the 'other' school category had clear regulations that governed absence as opposed to the district schools which had a high percentage of 46.9% respondents who disagreed. This implies that a good number of schools in the district school category had no clear regulations which governed absence from duty. This explains why some supervisors experienced problems with student teachers, in some schools, who would not be found in the school yet they were expected to be teaching as revealed by an interview with the area supervisors as well as the document analysis. The student teachers in such schools, therefore, tended to be less committed to their duties unlike the schools where clear regulations were stipulated in accordance with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) code of regulations.

Regarding the statement that 'every teacher was required to submit records of work and schemes of work,' a total of 84.4% respondents were in agreement. Although a total of 83.0% agreed, a few respondents in the district school category were in disagreement. These findings show that in a majority of the schools in the three school categories, records of work and schemes of work were maintained by all the teachers. The varying proportions, however, imply that this was done in the majority of the provincial and district schools as opposed to the institutions in the 'other' school category. Preparation of schemes of work and maintaining of records of work is a requirement of every efficient and effective teacher because they give direction to the teacher in the teaching-learning process. They show what has been taught and to what extent (Mbiti, 1974). It is also one of the important areas that are required of a

student teacher as they translate theory into practice. Therefore, student teachers may find it contradictory when they are required to prepare schemes of work and records of work when the experienced teachers in the field do not. This leads to a conflict between theory and practice which may affect their professional development in line with the findings of Law Sin Yee and Fu Yin Wash (1996).

The timetable was stable and the lessons were fairly distributed in the majority of schools in all the three school categories. Although 20.8% and 8.3% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively, the majority of the respondents in the 'other' school category were in agreement that the timetable was stable and the lessons were fairly distributed. Those who agreed were a total of 17(70.8) respondents. This is in agreement with the recommendations of Ayot and Wanga (1987). The fact that a few respondents in all the school categories were in disagreement implies there were some schools in which the time table was not stable and the lessons were not fairly distributed. This concurs with the findings from the university supervisors who experienced problems in some schools with unstable time tables. This affected their supervision schedules.

Regarding the statement "the school has a well organized co-curricular activities' programme", a total of 56.5% were in agreement. Those who disagreed were 19.5%, 10.4% strongly disagreed while 11.7% were undecided. In the district school category, a total of 57.5% agreed. Those who disagreed were 21.3% while 14.9% strongly disagreed. Only 6.4% were undecided. In the 'other' school category, 29.2% agreed while 20.8% strongly agreed giving a total proportion of 50.0%. Those who strongly disagreed were 29.2% while 16.7% disagreed. In this category, the proportion of those who were in agreement and those in disagreement is almost equal implying that a good number of institutions in this category did not have a well organized co-curricular activities' programme. It is also evident in these findings that there were a good number of schools in all the school categories without a well organized co-curricular activities' programme. The indecision of some of the student teachers may also imply that either the school had no clear programme on the co-curricular activities or the student teachers were not involved and hence they were not aware. Yet during teaching practice, student teachers should participate in all school activities just like the regular teachers as pointed out by Tang Yee Fan (1996), Werner (1995) and Andambi (1985).

Concerning the requirements for the teachers to participate in the co-curricular activities, a total of 58.6% respondents were in agreement. Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed were 20.8% and

6.5% respectively while 13.0% were undecided. Those of the district school category who agreed 55.3%. On the other hand, 25.5% disagreed, 12.8% strongly disagreed while 6.4% were undecided. In contrast to the provincial and district school categories, a total proportion of 45.8% agreed in the 'other' school category. The proportion of those in disagreement was slightly higher than those in agreement giving a total of 50.0% respondents. This implies that in most institutions in the 'other' school category, teachers were not required to participate in the co-curricular activities. Most private schools do not involve the learners actively in co-curricular activities while in some post-secondary school institutions, there are staff who are specialists in such activities as sports so that the rest of the teachers may not be required to participate unless they are interested. However, the indecision of the student teachers may also imply that they were not involved or they were not interested in the activities and therefore, they were not aware if the teachers were required to participate or not.

In the provincial and district school categories, the school's expectations of the student teachers conformed to the university recommendations. A large proportion of the respondents in the provincial schools, 79.3%, agreed. Similarly, in the district schools, a total of 78.7% agreed. The 'other' school category on the other hand had 33.3% respondents who indicated 'agree' while 25.0% strongly agreed. Only 8.3% were undecided while a total proportion of 33.4% disagreed. This implies that the proportion of those who were in agreement was slightly higher than those who disagreed, meaning that a good number of the institutions in this category, which were mainly post-secondary institutions, may not have been keen on such regulations governing the student teachers as outlined in the Teaching Practice Guide.

A large proportion of 76.4% of respondents in all the school categories considered together indicated that the pupils adhered often and very often to the time schedules in the schools. A very small proportion indicated otherwise implying that, in a few schools, the pupils did not strictly adhere to the time schedules. In the free response items, the student teachers cited poor response to bells and lateness when coming to school especially in day schools, as one of the problems they experienced with the pupils. When the student teachers were asked to rate the statement that 'the pupils' general behaviour was commendable,' 48.0% indicated often while 20.9% indicated very often giving a total of 68.9% respondents in all the three school categories combined. The proportion for the provincial school category was, however, slightly higher at 71.5% than the others implying that the general behaviour of the pupils was often and very often commendable in

more schools in this category as compared with the others. It is also evident that there were a few schools in all the categories in which the pupils' behaviour was not commendable as pointed out by the student teachers in the free response questions. Pupils in some schools were noted to be indisciplined and uncooperative. Yet discipline is a contributory factor to successful teaching and learning (Eshiwani, 1993). This, therefore, affected the teaching-learning process and hence the professional development of the student teachers. Drawing from the responses, a larger proportion of 54.2% and 50.0% of the student teachers indicated that the pupils often and very often maintained silence in class during their private study time in the 'other' and provincial school categories respectively, while in the district school category, a large proportion of 57.4% respondents indicated rarely, very rarely and never. This implies that in the majority of the district schools, the pupils could not work on their own without close supervision from the teachers as well as in some other few schools in the other two categories. This may be blamed on the school ethos as pointed out by Cohen and Manion (1989).

In addition, pupil discipline was enforced by all the teachers in most of the schools as indicated by the large proportion of 25.7% and 28.4% respondents who indicated often and very often respectively giving a total of 54.1%. This, however, shows that there were still a substantial number of schools where the converse was true. This was particularly so in many district schools as shown by the total number of respondents, 49.0%, who indicated that the enforcement of discipline by all teachers was done rarely, very rarely or never. This may suggest that there was a problem of pupil indiscipline in these schools as indicated by the respondents in the free response questions. This was also evident in the 'other' school category where 29.2% indicated that pupil discipline was never enforced by all teachers while 4.2% and 12.5% indicated very rarely and rarely respectively. This, however, may be explained by the nature of the institutions in this school category which were mainly post-secondary. The learners in these institutions are mature and they are expected to be responsible and self-disciplined.

The pupils in the majority of schools in all the school categories participated actively in class. A large proportion of 45.3% and 25.0% indicated often and very often respectively giving a total of 70.3%. The proportion is higher in the provincial and 'other' school categories unlike the district schools. This implies that there were several schools in the district school category where the learners rarely or never participated actively in class. This may mean that the regular teachers some of whom are untrained might have still emphasized the traditional methods of teaching where the learners passively listened to the

teachers and the learners had been conditioned to this. This could also be due to the background of the learners who might be weak and may not be fluent in the language of instruction as was pointed out by the student teachers in the free response items.

In all the school categories, the learners often performed well in continuous assessment tests as indicated by a high proportion of respondents who indicated 'often' 52.7% and 'very often' 10.8% giving a total of 63.5% respondents. The proportion in the provincial school category was, however, much higher than the others; that is, 71.4% compared to 57.5% in the district and 50.0% in the 'other' school categories. The implication is that there were several schools generally in which the learners did not perform well in continuous assessment tests but more were in the district and 'other' school categories. Pupil performance is determined by various factors such as the quality of the teachers, the nature of the administration, the availability of learning resources as well as the nature of the learners themselves, in terms of their academic background and discipline. However, these are negatively portrayed in the findings in most of the district schools and this explains why the pupils rarely or never performed well in continuous assessment tests.

Regarding the statement on whether or not most of the pupils were quick in understanding the lesson content, results show that this was rare in most of the schools and especially in the district schools. The results showed that most of the learners rarely or never understood the lesson content quickly in most of the district schools and a few in the other two school categories. This may be attributed to the nature of the learners in the district schools, most of whom join Form I with very low marks as compared with those in the provincial schools. Coupled with this was the quality of the teachers, as well as their availability, and the learning resources which were indicated as lacking as revealed in the open response items.

A low proportion of the respondents in the provincial school category indicated that the pupils' textbooks were unavailable, not adequate or very inadequate. This had the implication that these learning resources were quite adequate unlike in the district and 'other' school categories where the inadequacy is indicated by a large proportion of 61.6% and 66.6% respondents respectively. This shows that there was diversity in the availability and adequacy of pupils' textbooks in the three school categories as pointed out by Igaga (1978), with the district school category being more disadvantaged. Concerning the teachers' reference books, a majority of the respondents, 43.2% and 17.6% accepted that they were adequate and very adequate in all the school categories respectively. Further analysis, however, revealed that a higher

proportion of 54.2% respondents in the 'other' school category felt that the reference books were inadequate which contrasts with the two other school categories. When the provincial and district school categories were compared, the proportion of the respondents who felt that the teachers' reference books were adequate and very adequate was higher in the provincial school category, 71.5%, than the district school category, 51.1%.

This implies that the reference books were sufficient in the majority of provincial schools unlike the district schools. The findings also show that a majority of the respondents in all the three school categories indicated that the materials for preparing learning aids were sufficient with a proportion of 54.7% indicating 'adequate' and very adequate. However, when the three school categories were compared, the provincial school category had a higher proportion of 59.8% while the 'other' school category had 58.3% of respondents. The district school category had 44.7% of respondents who felt that the materials were sufficient implying that the majority of the respondents indicated that the materials for preparing learning aids were inadequate, very inadequate or not available in some schools. This was also evident for a few respondents in the provincial school category. This, therefore, shows that there was disparity in the availability and adequacy of materials for preparing learning aids in the teaching practice schools with the district schools being more disadvantaged. This is in line with what Igaga (1978) points out, that schools greatly vary in the type, amount and quality of equipment. This may be attributed to the cost-sharing policy in the Kenyan education system as pointed by Kafu (1999).

A large proportion of respondents, 71.0%, indicated that there were records of all materials issued in the teaching practice schools. Among these, 75.4% were in the provincial schools, 75.0% in the 'other' school category while 61.7% were in the district schools. A few respondents in each of the three school categories indicated that the records were not available, very inadequate or inadequate. This implies disparity in the schools on keeping of records of any materials that were issued and as such some student teachers were not exposed to record keeping. This might also have contributed to the adequacy or inadequacy of the learning resources due to the losses that might have been incurred due to bad record keeping. Learning resources are vital in the teaching/learning process as pointed out by Ayot and Wanga (1987) and that is why a teacher should be competent in their use. This competency is developed during teaching practice when the student teachers translate theory into practice. This is only possible if the learning resources are available in the teaching practice schools.

When the student teachers were asked to list any other learning materials and resources for their specific subject area(s) and indicate their adequacy, several were listed. These are presented, in order of their frequencies, as: audio-visual materials in terms of maps, globes, tape recorders, radios, chalkboard among others were listed as inadequate or not available for the Art subjects; adequate audio-visual materials, adequate laboratory materials and facilities for the Science subjects as well as Home Science; inadequate laboratory and Home Science materials; adequate materials for Technical subjects; inadequate class readers and library for English, and inadequate/not available materials for Technical subjects

Though the proportions of the respondents were low for all these learning resources listed above, as the majority found the item 'not applicable,' there was disparity of resources in the schools which affected specific subjects. These were mainly the Science subjects and Home Science, Technical subjects, as well as some Art subjects such as Geography and English. This implies that the teaching and learning of these subjects might have been affected, especially where the particular resources were lacking and consequently, the application of theory into practice. Learning resources are used to support the teacher in delivering information and thus make learning easier (Ayot & Wanga, 1987).

A very high proportion of 91.2% respondents in all the three school categories were in agreement that the teachers were co-operative and helpful. There was no much difference between school categories. It is evident that only a very small percentage was in disagreement. When the student teachers were asked to cite the problems they encountered in the school in the free response items, some indicated lack of co-operation from the teachers in general, from the co-operating teachers as well as the head teacher in particular. This implies that though a high percentage of schools, irrespective of the category, had co-operative staff, there were others who were uncooperative. Hence there was a difference in the schools on co-operation and helpfulness from the teachers to the student teachers. Some of the student teachers were not accorded due support.

Regarding the statement of whether or not the teachers in the school upheld teaching as a worthy profession, 53.4% of the respondents were in agreement while the other proportion disagreed, were undecided or did not respond. This implies that some proportion of the teachers in some schools did not uphold teaching as a worthy profession and this might have had a negative influence on the student teachers. Further analysis showed that the provincial school category had a higher proportion 55.9% of the respondents who were in agreement as compared

with the district and 'other' school categories that had 51.0% and 50.0% respectively. The latter school categories therefore had more schools with teachers who did not uphold teaching as a worthy profession indicated by 46.8% and 50.0% respondents respectively, who were in disagreement. Yet past research has shown that student teachers move closer to the behaviours and attitudes of the cooperating teachers by the end of the teaching practice (Martin, 1997; Al Barwani, 1997).

The majority of the student teachers, 73.0%, in all the three school categories accepted that the cooperating teachers were always available for consultation. The co-operating teachers, therefore, assisted the student teachers during the teaching practice period. However, a few disagreed with the statement implying that there were instances when they were not available for assistance. This is in line with previous findings that cooperating teachers were more available to the student teachers and accorded them the necessary assistance (Tang Yee Fan, 1996). As is evident from the results, the teaching practice schools that were used in the 1999 final teaching practice were varied in terms of the administration, the teachers, the pupils and the learning resources respectively. This was also supported by the responses from the university supervisors as follows in order of the frequency of each item:

1. Teaching/learning resources and school facilities were identified as having had noticeable differences. It was noted that some schools were well equipped with the necessary resources such as textbooks while others were poorly equipped.
2. The nature of the teachers was identified. It was noted that there were differences in terms of the number of teachers available, availability of co-operating teachers, and their willingness to support and assist student teachers as well as their teaching styles.
3. The nature of the pupils. The pupils differed on their academic background, participation in class activities and discipline. In some schools, the learners lacked discipline, had communication problems, lacked motivation to learn and had negative attitudes towards some subjects such as Mathematics, while in other schools they were disciplined and self-motivated to learn.
4. Administration was identified by supervisors in terms of differing leadership styles. Some head teachers were lax leading to absence of both the teachers and the pupils from the school. Some head teachers were noted as being positive to the teaching practice exercise while others were negative.
5. Support for student teachers in terms of accommodation, general acceptance and their

involvement in all school activities as well as overseeing their work.

6. Class size, specifically that some schools had overcrowded classrooms.

For the student teachers to carry out their teaching practice effectively, and for the objectives of teaching practice to be achieved, there is need for a conducive teaching/learning environment where the student teachers are accorded support. This, however, was seen to be lacking in some schools thus making teaching practice a threat to the student teachers and hence might have affected their performance (Al Barwani, 1997). These findings were also supported by the responses from the interview with the area supervisors.

The analysis of the supervision forms which were used in assessing and grading student teachers in the 1999 final teaching practice revealed that they generally had very high grades in all the school categories combined in which a large proportion 38.0% scored A while 51.0% scored B giving a total of 89.0%. None of the students failed while a small proportion scored C and D. This implies that student teachers performed well in teaching practice in line with the findings of Al Barwani (1997) and Barret (1986). Further analysis showed that a large proportion of those student teachers who scored A were in the provincial schools followed by the 'other' and closely by the district school categories. The order of performance based on the school category is also similar when both grades A and B are combined. When the means were computed, it also revealed that the provincial school category was leading with a mean score of 68.3% followed by the 'other' school category 67.3% and finally the district school category with 65.7%. This, therefore, implies that student teachers' performance differed in different school categories. This is in line with the findings of Abuloum and Al-Ghazawi (1997) that there were differences in public schools in comparison to private schools. These differences were due to the differing school characteristics in terms of the administration, the teachers, the pupils, and the learning resources.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and discussions above, it is clear that the student teachers could have chosen the schools they practiced in mainly for financial reasons other than professional considerations. Moreover, the grades they obtained were also high; hence there is every reason for them to be positive about the schools. Otherwise it is worth noting here that some student teachers had problems in translating theory into practice due to the nature of the schools and this affected their performance as it was pointed out by the university supervisors. Since the school context is sometimes taken into consideration when grading the student teachers, it

can be rightly concluded that the grades attained may not reflect the actual performance of the student teachers but their potential in line with the findings of Barret (1986).

From these discussions, it is also clear that school factors such as the availability and quality of teachers, the learning resources and facilities and the class sizes should be seriously taken into consideration when posting the student teachers. Moreover, clear guidelines should be provided to the university supervisors on when and how the school context should be taken into consideration when grading the student teachers. The university should also find ways of minimizing financial limitations to the posting and supervision of the student teachers during teaching practice.

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