

Lecturers' Perception on Impact of Teaching Practice Exercise on Student Teachers' Professional Growth Anambra State

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Abstract

In Nigeria, teaching practice exercise is a very important component of teacher preparation programmes in teacher education institutions. It gives the student-teacher the practical experience of the teaching profession. The major significance of the exercise is that it helps the student-teacher to acquire teaching skills which are necessary for advancement in the teaching profession. It is also an opportunity for the would be teacher to overcome stage fright. The main purpose of this study was to ascertain the perception of lecturers on the impact of teaching practice exercise on student teachers professional growth. Thus, the study investigated the perceived impact of teaching practice exercise on student teachers' professional growth in Anambra State of Nigeria. It was a descriptive survey design guided by three research questions. All the lectures in Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka formed the population of the study. From the lecturers, 60 of them were purposively selected for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire with four-point option scale. The instrument was duly validated by experts and the reliability was also determined. The researcher together with five research assistants administered the instrument on the respondents. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. The findings showed among other things that teaching practice helps student teachers to acquire knowledge which enhances the mastery of subject content areas. This to a very large extent leads to achievement of professional growth. It also revealed that teaching practice to a large extent enhances skill acquisition, the use of appropriate methodology and use of instructional materials. Based on the findings, it was among others recommended that student teachers should be advised to always study very hard to facilitate knowledge development and mastery of content areas. The findings of the study have a number of limitations. This study was conducted in public institutions. The findings may not be generalized to private institutions. Secondly, the findings of the study are also limited to student-teachers. Their application to teachers who are already in the field may not make much impact. The limitations however did not invalidate the study.

Keywords: content mastery; teaching skills; teaching methods; teaching practice; student-teachers; teaching profession

INTRODUCTION

Education across the globe has been seen as the only veritable tool for progress and survival of a nation. The formulation and translation of good policies are dependent upon quality education. Educational institutions exist primarily for the purposes of cultivating, generating and supplying of manpower needed for the attainment of aims and aspirations of the society through developmental programmes (teaching and learning), conducting research to solve existing and anticipating problems as well as expanding other frontiers of knowledge by providing other varieties of services to the communities (Egbo, 2007). The development of a nation is highly dependent on the quality of education received by her citizens. Maduekwe (2003) asserted that education world over is generally accepted as a mobilization tool to stimulate growth and development of economic, political, sociological and technological resources of a nation. The teacher is the principal actor in the implementation of policies and

procedures in the educational process. It is the teacher who translates the nations educational goals and objectives into meaningful reality through the inculcation of worthwhile values, knowledge and skills to the pupils (Mgbodile, 2005). He further maintained that the child's motivation, zeal for studies, ambitions in life, his creativity and reflective potentialities and his ability in independent thinking are all ignited and fired on by what the teacher does in the classroom and the kind of direction provided by the teacher's management style.

Education aims at producing children who are honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative and obedient. Ajala and Popoola (2000) asserted that education is the process of bringing up children who have respect for our ancestors, the elders in the community, appreciate and pursue societal values and adhere strictly to the societal norms. To succeed in carrying out this sacred dual function of life-moulding and nation-building, teaching practice becomes imperative.

Olaitan and Agusioba (1981) defined teaching practice as a guided teaching experience, where the student's teacher is given the chance of performing the functions of a teacher under the guidance of a supervisor. It is a necessary pre-service training experience which serves as an avenue to translate theories into practice in a real classroom, situation. In Nigeria, it is organized for twelve weeks for students of Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education in the universities.

In all professional fields, training is a crucial aspect with an attempt of testing and assessing the skills attained by learners before the actual consumption in the world of work. This stands as vital to the teaching profession where teacher-trainees need to attend field training for the purpose of assessing their teaching skills and testing the theories learned in classrooms in actual schools context. This field exercise which is responsible to orientate teacher-trainees in their learning process in colleges of education and universities is called teaching practice. Kirbulut (2010), Al.Mahrooqi (2011), Ngidi and Sibiya (2003) in Kiggundu (2007) emphasized that teaching practice course provide an opportunity for pre-service teachers to apply the theoretical learning offered by university teaching programs in the real life of school settings.

In Nigeria, teaching practice is the name that donates the preparation of student teachers for teaching by practical training (Nwanekezi, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi, 2011; Kiggundu, 2007). Pre-service practical training has been established in many teacher education colleges and universities with teacher education courses both locally and internationally (Albasheer, 2008). For instance, preparing effective teachers for school systems require that those teachers are competent in content, theoretical and practical aspects. Nwanekezi (2011) added that during teaching practice, student teachers feel engaged, challenged and even empowered. The exercise represents the range of experience to which student teachers are exposed when they work in the classroom and school (Marais and Meier, 2004 in Kiggundu, 2007). The need for teaching practice originates from the concept called "Learning to teach". Elliot (1993) insisted that learning to teaching is a matter for learning the technical skills which enable individuals to function effectively in the education system.

Effective teaching requires knowledge and understanding of the subject the student teacher is going to teach, and learning the curriculum. Teaching students implies exposing the individuals to knowledge and skills as well as practical experience as a basis for professional learning. Training a teacher is collaboration between academic and practitioners in the field. People learn how to teach

from watching and imitating others. They learn from experience and reflection (Stuart, Akyeampong, Groft, 2009; Karthogen, Loughran, & Russel, 2006, Tailor, Fraiser, & Fisher, 1997). Teachers also learn through practice, acquiring knowledge and reflection on their experience (Elliot, 1993; Tailor et al, 1997). Learning about teaching is also enhanced through student teachers doing research on their own, practice the facts which are facilitated by teaching practice exercise. Teacher trainees have the potential to become good and empowered teachers if they are given the opportunity to do peer teaching and made to develop their own teaching aids (Kagoda, 2011).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

One important condition for teaching to take place is that the teacher, at least, assumes that he/she is more knowledgeable than the person he is teaching. Thus, to be able to bring about learning, the teacher should know what teaching involves, what content he wants his students to master, and various approaches he has to evolve to facilitate the mastery (Okeke, 1989). This condition makes it mandatory that student teachers should be exposed to practical teaching exercise to enable them meet the stated conditions. Unfortunately, most student teachers lack the knowledge of the subject, the necessary skills, appropriate methodology to be applied in order to facilitate teaching and learning. The problem of the study therefore is to investigate lecturers' perceptions on the impact of teaching practice exercise on the professional growth of student-teachers.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to ascertain the perception of lecturers on the impact of teaching practice exercise on student teachers professional growth. Specifically, the study ascertained:

1. extent student teachers mastery of content areas during teaching practice can help them to achieve professional growth.
2. extent acquisition of necessary skills during teaching practice can help student teachers to achieve professional growth.
3. extent the application of teaching methods during teaching practice can help teacher trainees to achieve professional growth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent can student-teachers' mastery of the content areas during teaching practice help them to achieve professional growth?
2. To what extent can student-teachers' acquisition of necessary skills during teaching practice help them to achieve professional growth?

- To what extent can student-teachers' application of teaching methods during teaching practice help them to achieve professional growth?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Abunbade (1995), a descriptive survey design is one that selects a sample from the population and studies the relative distribution and interrelations of the variables of the study. The area of the study was Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The population of the study was all the lecturers in the Faculty of Education of the university. A sample of sixty (60) respondents was purposively selected and studied.

The instrument used for data collection was four point scale questionnaire with options such as Very Large Extent (VLE), Large Extent (LE), Small Extent (SE) and Very Small Extent (VSE). The options were assigned number 4,3,2 and 1 for positive items and 1,2,3 and 4 for negative items. The questionnaire was face validated by three experts from the science education, department Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State. The amendments they made were affected accordingly. The instrument was analyzed for internal consistency and reliability coefficient of 0.90 was obtained using cronbach Alpha statistic. This indicated the instrument was highly reliable.

The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of five research assistants who were recruited and trained personally for the purpose of the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions. The decision as to the extent of provision of the results was based on the following range scale used for interpretation:
 3:1-4:0 Very Large Extent (VLE)
 2:1-3:0 Large Extent (LE)
 1:1-2:0 Small Extent (SE)
 0:1-1:0 Very Small Extent (VSE)

Results

Table 1: Mean Responses on Mastery of Content Areas

s/n	ITEMS	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
1.	Student teachers are conversant to the topic they teach	2.34	1.71	LE
2.	They have adequate knowledge of the subject	3.58	1.10	VLE
3.	Prepares the lesson before going to the class	2.01	1.21	LE
4.	Teaches the subject with authority, zeal and devotion	2.75	1.09	LE
Ground Mean		2.67		Large Extent

The first research question sought to determine the extent teaching practice enable student teachers to acquire mastery of the subject they teach. The study found out that teaching practice enable student teachers to acquire knowledge that leads to mastery of the content areas of the subject they teach. This is shown by the ground mean score of 2.67 (table 1), which is in the region of large extent. This finding agrees with the views of Okeke (1989) on the need for student trainees to go for teaching practice because of its positive impact on students. This finding is also supported by the fact that teaching practice help student teachers acquire knowledge that leads to mastery of the content areas of subjects they teach thereby resulting to professional growth.

Table 2: Mean Response on Acquisition of Necessary Skills

s/n	ITEMS	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
5.	Student teachers acquire competency in teaching	3.61	1.20	VLE
6.	Student teachers acquire competency in lesson demonstration	3.50	1.21	VLE
7.	Student teacher acquire competency in lesson evaluation and use of materials	2.89	1.09	LE
8.	Student teaches acquire the skill of classroom management and organization	3.67	0.99	VLE
Ground Mean		3.42		VLE

The second research question tried to ascertain the extent student teachers acquire necessary skills during teaching practice. From the results of the analysis on table 2, the ground mean is 3.42 for research question 2, which is the region of very large extern. This means that teaching practice enable student teachers to acquire necessary skills in teaching. This shows that teaching practices is important as it impacts positively in the teaching skills of students. This finding is in line with the views of Mgbodile (2005), who states that teaching practice is necessary since it makes student teachers to acquire necessary skills for professional growth.

Table 3: Mean Response on The Application of Teaching Methods

s/n	ITEMS	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
9.	Student teachers use evaluation strategy	2.65	1.06	LE
10	Student teachers use questioning method	3.83	1.12	VLE
11	Student teachers use pacing method during teaching	2.97	0.81	LE
12	Student teachers apply discussion, demonstration and dramatization during lesson presentation	2.54	1.02	LE
Ground Mean		3.00		VLE

The third research question sought to find out the extent application of teaching methods during teaching practice help student teachers to achieve professional growth. The finding on table 3 revealed that the ground mean for research question 3 is 3.00, which is the region of very large extent. This implies that application of teaching methods during teaching practice help student teachers to achieve professional growth. This result is in line with the views of Elliot (1993) who believes that teaching practice help student teachers to acquire different methods of teaching.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

In spite of all the challenges confronting teaching practice in the college, in particular and educational system in general, the exercise has impacted positively on the life of student teachers thereby leading to professional growth.

The results of the study have a lot of implications for teaching practice in Nigeria educational institutions. It has been reported that teaching practice makes student teachers to acquire knowledge which facilitate mastery of content areas of subjects to a large extent. The educational implication is that if adequate knowledge is not acquired, student teachers will find it difficult to impart the knowledge during teaching. This is because adequate knowledge means mastery of the content area. Nobody gives what he does not have. Therefore someone should teach what he knows and not what he does not know (Abimbade, 1995).

The study also revealed that appropriate skills to large extent are acquired during teaching practice. Teaching practice is a necessary programme designed to offer student teachers the needed skills required to achieve professional growth. The educational implication of this, is that without teaching practice, student teachers may not acquire the skills that will help them to facilitate teaching and learning (Kiggyandu, 2007).

The study also found out that student teachers learn different teaching methods during teaching practice. This to a large extent has impacted positively to professional growth of student teachers. The educational implication is that without appropriate methodologies being applied, effective teaching and learning cannot take place. Therefore, methodology is necessary in the field of teaching (Mugenda, 2008).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing implications, the following recommendations are suggested.

1. Student trainees should be encouraged to take their studies seriously since good reading culture will result to knowledge acquisition and mastery

of one's subjects. Without sound knowledge of content areas, the student teacher on teaching practice will lack the capability of delivering his/her lesson thereby making the teaching practice exercise a failure.

2. Student teachers should be advised to take teaching practice exercise seriously so as to acquire the necessary skills that will enhance effective teaching and learning.
3. Appropriate methodology is an important tool in the teaching exercise. Therefore, student teachers should be encouraged to master and apply different teaching methods during instructional delivery as it will make the lesson not only understandable but also interesting and memorable.
4. Student teachers should be advised to use instructional materials during lesson delivery while on teaching practice bearing in mind the importance of the teaching aids in teaching and learning.

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