

The Conducts of Teaching Practice Exercise in Colleges of Education and Universities in Nigeria: A Call for Revitalization

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Abstract

Teaching Practice is a crucial aspect of teacher education programme. Despite its importance, the programme is confronted with numerous challenges. Consequently, this paper examines the conduct of teaching practice in Nigerian Colleges of Education and Universities: A Call for Revitalization. The paper starts with introduction followed by concept clarification; the objectives of teaching practice at Colleges of Education and Universities level were discussed. Emphasis was also placed on the conducts of the teaching practice exercise at both level of Education in Nigeria, the problem facing the exercise were discussed. Among others, it was recommended that more time should be allotted to teaching practice and re-training programmes should be organized for lecturers on the best practice in the internship aspect of teacher education.

Keywords: Teaching Practice Exercise, Teacher Education, Colleges of Education and Universities.

Introduction

Teaching practice is recognized as a crucial aspect of teacher education programme (Farrell, 2008). Teacher education institutions worldwide, including Nigeria, are under increasing pressure to prepare their student teachers better for the actual world of teaching. The teaching practice, therefore, provides an avenue by which this expectation may be addressed.

The business of teaching is the major preoccupation of teachers in the school system in Nigeria. For teachers to be effectively involved, they must have gone through adequate, relevant and appropriate training. This specialized training separates a trained teacher from a quack in the school system (Awoderu, 2007). The importance of adequate preparation is highly emphasized in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), the major educational policy in Nigeria which states that teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teaching practice is of great importance in teacher education programme. It is a component of training leading to the award of

the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Bachelor degree in Education (B. Sc. (Ed) or B.Ed) in Nigeria.

Teaching practice offers student teachers the opportunity to learn the basic skills of teaching and put their hitherto acquired knowledge into actual practice (Jekayinfa, 2012). The exercise allows student teachers to get familiar with educational ethics and the rules and regulations governing the practice of education as a professional career. Through the teaching practice, students get to interact with school environment, administration and academic staff, classroom management, workload and other students in the practice school.

On the importance of teaching practice in teacher education scheme, Furlong, Hirst & Pocklington (1988), noted that it affords the teacher-in-training unique opportunity to internalize certain social behaviour that is inherent in the noble profession. It can also serve predictive purposes, especially, concerning the actual performance of the trainees when finally engaged as permanent staff. Furthermore, Gujjar (2009) identified with the views of Trowbridge & Bybee (1990) on the potential of teaching practice to make student-teachers feel fulfilled, grow in experience and internalize the enviable culture of teaching, while they are engaged in productive challenges.

During teaching practice, the student teachers are given the opportunity to experience and 'experiment' their knowledge and skills in an authentic teaching and learning environment. A good teacher education programme should seek to assist the student-teacher to grow and develop as a total person and equip him/her with necessary skills and professional abilities that will help him/her become an effective teacher. Teaching practice is designed to give the student-teachers an opportunity to put into practice, the theories relating to the principles and practice of education, which they have learnt.

As part of the package, teaching practice is allocated specific period of time during which student teachers are posted to schools to teach, demonstrate in practical terms the knowledge and skills they had acquired during training. This is like housemanship in Medicine and Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) for engineers and some other related courses in Colleges of Education and Court Attachment for Lawyers (Nnenna & Olanrewaju, 2015).

The student-teacher should not just go through the process of teaching practice, teaching practice should also go through the student-teacher such that its aims and objectives are achieved rather than defeated. The student-teacher is also regarded as part of the school system and thus expected to participate in all teaching activities within the school system until the expiration of the exercise. Teaching

practice exposes the student-teacher to the real school and class situation where he acquires some practical experiences in the art of teaching, as well as get adapted or acquainted with the social settings of the institution. Although, the primary concern is passing useful educational knowledge over to the pupils/students using every achievable means until learning takes place in them, they still have to participate in all teaching activities within the school system.

Concept Clarification

Teaching Practice (TP)

The term TP is defined differently by many educationists. A few of these definitions are, however, worthy of note. These are:

According to Oyekan (2000), Student Teaching Practice is a pre-service professional preparation for interested persons, aspiring to become teachers with a credible vision for sustainable human development.

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 (Nnenna & Olanrewaju, 2015).

According to Tanaja (2000), Teaching practice is usually interchanged with such words as practice teaching, field studies, in-field experience, and internship, among others.

Nakpodia (2011), states that teaching practice comprises of all the experiences in and out of classroom which preservice teachers gather as they embrace real teaching in real classrooms.

All of the foregoing definitions are valid for the purpose of this presentation. Whatever definition is given to TP, the most important thing is that it is a professional exercise which is focused on helping the student-teacher to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education. In the process of bridging the gap between educational theories and practice, the student-teacher, through a programme of cooperative and interactive guidance, acquires valuable skills in teaching and the management of teaching etc. from experienced teachers/supervisors. A meaningful TP embodies laboratory/clinical (microteaching) and field teaching experiences in actual school classroom situations.

Teaching practice is an important pre-qualification requirement that affords the teachers-in-training the opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt in theory. It is like the laboratory for practical demonstration. The scope of teaching practice, according to Idowu (2000), is not limited to the cognitive domain; it also covers the affective and psychomotor domains. He further stressed that the responsibilities of student-teachers are not limited to classroom teaching (cognitive domain). They also include the promotion of the psycho-social development and growth of their pupils/students. Experience has shown that this very crucial aspect of teacher education is being confronted with many challenges which have given various stakeholders a lot of concern. For instance, Idowu (2000) observed that the programme is beset with a multiplicity of problems and difficulties confronting student-teachers, cooperating teachers as well as the co-operating schools and the supervisors. He stressed that most of the problems are not resolved even at the end of the exercise. Some of the problems identified include psychological makeup of the trainees, pedagogical preparations, classroom adaptation, and mode and means of assessment. There seems to be a controversy among the stakeholders as to what is to be done to revitalize the scheme for the general good of the beneficiaries of education enterprise.

Revitalization

According to American Heritage Dictionary of English Language (2016); Revitalization is the act of reviving or condition of being revived or bringing again into activity and prominence; “the revival of education”. So applying this to teaching practice means given a new direction to the conduct of the exercise different from what is obtainable now.

Objectives of Teaching Practice at University Level

According to the National University Commission (2004), the mandate of all Faculties of Education is summed up as follows:

- i. Production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the education system;
- ii. Encouraging further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- iii. Help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and enhance their commitment to national objectives;
- iv. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world, and
- iv. Enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession.

To facilitate the realization of the laudable mandate, the Basic Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) for all Faculties of Education was developed in 2012 by NUC. The important of this isto set parameters that would lead to the attainment of the desired goals. The BMAS is in use in the Nigeria Universities today.

The Conduct of Teaching Practices Exercise at University Level

Currently in Nigerian universities, teaching practice is a compulsory course in the Faculties of Education and it attracts 2 or 4 credit load, depending on the nature of the programme being offered by the students. In some University, Teaching practice duration usually last for six weeks (e.g. Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto; Kebbi State University of Science and Technology etc.) which begin in the third and fourth year as teaching practice (i) and (ii) respectively of studentship as undergraduate. Students are usually required to practice in their schools of choice and teach based on their areas of specialization. Although, teaching practice is expected to expose student-teachers to all school programmes, emphasis is laid on classroom practice during which they are supervised by lecturers and given instant feedback.

Various educationists and educators (Yahaya, 2000; Yusuf & Ajidagba, 2010) have commented on the quality of teaching practice. This may be due to the calibre of teachers that are being produced. To some, teaching practice as being currently run is considered as inadequate, while others did not see anything wrong in the way it is organized. The divergence in the views might be due to a number of factors, among which are gender, job status and years of experience of lecturers. Studies such as Omosewo, (2000); Yusuf & Ajidagba (2010), have shown the way and manner in which a person assesses a programme may be influenced by a number of variables.

Objectives of Teaching Practices at Colleges of Education Level

Teaching practice is of great importance in teacher education. It is a component of training leading to the award of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in Nigeria. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (1996: 45) highlights the objectives of teaching practice as follows:

- To help the student-teachers develop positive attitude towards the teaching profession;
 - Expose student-teachers to real life experience under the supervision of professional teachers;
 - Enable student-teachers discover their own strengths and weaknesses in teaching;
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Provide a forum for student-teachers to translate educational theories and principles into practice;

Familiarize student-teachers with school routines;

Expose student-teachers to the total school environment;

Provide student-teachers with the necessary skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experiences for real time teaching after graduation; and

Serve as a means of assessing the professional competences of student-teachers.

In order to achieve the above stated objectives, the productions of teachers of high quality should and must be given top priority since teachers represent, by far, the most significant investment in public sector budget (UNESCO, 2004). Teacher quality is considered to be the greatest predictor of student teachers performance and success, it also follows that teacher professional development can improve classroom instruction and students' achievement.

The Conduct of Teaching Practice in Colleges of Education

The new NCE minimum standards as stipulated by National Commission for Colleges of Education (2009) spell out that Teaching Practice should be done in the first semester of 300 level i.e. starting from mid-September to April. This covers two terms of school year or 26 weeks. The reason for this is that the teaching method studied during course work needs to be implemented as subject to be done, which is less often done with expertise because skills are acquired and polished over time.

In Nigeria, some Colleges of Education (FCE Kontagora for instance) teaching practice used to be done in twelve/thirteen weeks but the system has now changed to a whole semester that is in the first semester of the 3rd year of NCE programme. The important areas of emphasis for teaching practice which include: instructional planning and studies in teaching methods; instructional technology; micro-teaching; minimum of six supervisors per student (FCE, Kontagora) before final computation of each student's teaching practice score; posting of students to school where they can practice their major courses of study; standard teaching load; each student teacher is to be allocated a teaching load between a minimum of ten and a maximum of eighteen teaching periods per week.

Problem Facing Teaching Practice Exercise in Nigeria Tertiary Institution

Students' Absenteeism: This is one of the major problems facing the conducts of students teaching practice exercise. Most students leaves their teaching post immediately they are been supervised not minding adverse effects of their action

on the students and even this will make them not to be able to acquire the necessary skill needed in their future teaching encounter.

Inadequate Supervisors: At least two or more supervisors need to access the activities of teaching practice students, but due to inadequate personnel, most teaching practice students do receive only one supervisor. Even a time some supervisors fail to visit their students' in field due to the students' population.

Inadequate Time Frame: The time frame of six/twelve weeks as the case may be, is too meager for these students' to acquire the needed skills and to experience real teaching- learning situation. This short time frame does not give room for supervisors to visit their students' more than one time and thus affect the quality of their assessment.

Insufficient Incentives: The incentives involve when critically observed cannot be compare with huge responsibility of supervision, this makes most of the supervisors not able to discharge their duties as expected.

Poor Students' Pedagogical Knowledge: The students' mastery of subject matter also affects the quality of their performance when in practice. Their ability to relate theory to practice and how to handle their classroom situation determined to a great extent their effectiveness in teaching.

The Growing Students' Population: The ever growing teaching practice students' population calls for more hand in supervising and monitoring of the whole exercise.

Conclusion

Effective teaching is not easy but achievable, if well prepared for (Hamilton & Joy, 2015). To be an effective teacher, teachers in trainee must make their teaching student-centered, having deep understanding and convey accurately to the students the contents areas being taught by them. This will lead to high students learning outcomes in clear and demonstrable ways.

Teaching practice therefore assures that whatever the teachers' trainee may learn during this period of training to becoming a teacher can be polished by repeated practice so that it eventually becomes habitual and automatic in performance.

Recommendations

The teaching Practice coordinator in both Universities and Colleges of Education should ensure strict disciplinary measure in order to curb the menace or absenteeism among teaching practice students'. Measures such as teaching practice repetition will reduced if not totally eradicate the rate of absenteeism among teaching practice students'.

The lecturers in the Faculties of Education and Colleges of Education must be assigned fewer students to supervise in order to enhance quality assurance. For instance, the number of student-teachers assigned to a supervisor should be to a manageable size to ensure thorough supervision. In practical terms, a maximum of twenty (25) student-teachers to a supervisor is recommended.

The duration of teaching practice should be extended to provide the teacher-trainees enough time to master the art of teaching in the practical setting of the school. This would also give the supervisors an ample time for practical assessment of the student-teachers and would engender high quality teaching practice experience.

Universities and Colleges of Education authorities should allocate more resources to teaching practice to enhance students' dedication and adequate supervision by lecturers. If this is done, it will improve the quality of the education graduates for the overall advancement of the teaching profession and, by extension, the collective interest of the nation.

The teaching practice students' needs to update their content knowledge as well as pedagogical knowledge for them to be effective and efficient in discharging their teaching duty.

There is need for government to employ more lecturers into the system for the smooth running of the whole system of education in Nigeria and to cater for ever growing students' population.

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