

## TEACHING PRACTICE: DISTINCT CONSTITUENT FOR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

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### Abstract

*Teaching is a complex, multifaceted activity, often requiring the need to juggle multiple tasks and goals simultaneously and flexibly. It requires specialized education, knowledge, training and ethics. On this account, student-teachers must be exposed to a period of quality tutelage in the practice of teaching. The paper contends that teaching practice is a very distinct and prominent component of the professional training in the teacher education programme. Hence every institution saddled with the responsibility of training teachers must offer quality training that guarantees sound professional competence. The paper emphasized the centrality of teaching practice and highlighted the objectives. Focus was also on components of effective teaching practice exercise and roles of supervisors and cooperating teachers. Also, the paper explicated the expected responsibilities of the student-teacher. It is pertinent to put all these into proper perspectives for successful and meaningful teaching practice exercise. Challenges of teaching practice exercise were analysed and while suggestions for improving teaching practice exercise in Nigeria teacher education programmes were offered, the paper concluded with appropriate recommendations.*

**Keywords:** Teaching practice, Constituent, Professional practice

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### Introduction

Education is defined as the acceptable processes which enable the learner to study and learn those skills, attitudes and values of the society in readiness to live a meaningful life and to contribute to the development of the society (Wosu, 2016). In simple terms, it is the major instrument for change, bringing about social and economic transformations. To Okorie (1986) education is a part of life, which is deliberately controlled, and experiences developed according to a conscious plan. Fundamentally and precisely, education is the means of universal literacy involving the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the ability to apply and transform the acquired skills into meaningful systems i.e systems embedded in political, cultural and economic contexts (Alebiosu, 2014). It is the most veritable instrument for change in any society and its quality is a function of the quality of teachers. The quality and quantity of what students learn and retain remain functions of teachers' instructional capabilities and effectiveness (Alebiosu, 2012). The teacher is the arrow head in the realization of

quality education and must be professionally competent.

Quality teachers are bound to be skilled enough to produce quality teaching whereby the goals of education are realized in schools. They must receive training to perform the duties effectively and it is in this light that teaching is regarded as a profession. Teaching requires specialized education, knowledge, training and ethics, hence student-teachers must be exposed to a period of quality tutelage in the practice of teaching. It is pertinent, therefore, that every institution saddled with the responsibility of training teachers offer quality training in the practice of teaching that guarantees sound professional competence. Consequently, teaching practice is a compulsory component of teacher education curriculum. It is a situation in which concepts, theories and principles of education are demonstrated and put into practice in the classroom situation.

Teaching practice is an important component of teacher education in Nigeria through which

necessary pre-service teaching experience is acquired. It is the core of teacher education and a necessary ingredient in teacher training, and budding teachers must experience it as part of their preparation (Alao, 1998; Afemikhe, 2004; Adetayo, 2008). The National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) giving credence to the importance of teaching practice, stated as part of teacher education goals, the provision of requisite knowledge both intellectual and professional to teachers so that they can perform their assignments i.e. teaching.

Teaching Practice is a culminating experience in teacher preparation. It provides opportunity for teachers in training to become socialized into the profession and their performances during the exercise provide some basis for predicting professional competence and their future success as a teacher (Furlong, Hirst and Pocklington, 1988). The centrality of teaching practice is an important contributing factor towards the quality of teacher education programme. During practice teaching, student- teachers feel themselves grow through experience and they begin to link to a culture of teaching. They feel engaged, excited, challenged and even empowered, but incidentally, the foregoing is not the situation. Experiences over the years revealed a continuous decline in both the quality of teachers in training sent on teaching practice from higher institutions of learning and the quality of the teaching practice exercise (Adetayo, 2008; Ekundayo, Alonge, Kolawole & Ekundayo, 2014).

Student-teachers continue to demonstrate lack of enthusiasm in the teaching practice exercise while the supervision leaves much to be desired. Quality time is not available for teaching practice component of the teacher education curriculum as it is rushed through and in most cases the feedback component of the exercise is trivialized. These and many other challenges have been put forward as confronting teaching practice component of teacher education programme in Nigeria thereby constituting obstacle to achieving professional competence among prospective teachers.

### **The Concepts of Teaching Practice and Professional Competence**

A number of terms such as the teaching practice, student teaching, field studies, practice teaching,

infield experience, school based experience or internship are used to refer to the concept of teaching practice (Taneja, 2000). The term practice teaching embraces all the learning experiences of student-teachers in schools (Ashraf, 1999). The term has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies. According to Kolawole (2015), teaching practice gives student-teachers opportunities to practically demonstrate skills such as interpersonal/relational, counseling, supervisory, content-knowledge and pedagogical content-knowledge they have acquired in the course of their preparation under the close watch of more knowledgeable and experienced supervisors.

Teaching practice is a school-based internship programme with the main aim of introducing prospective teachers to teaching and its routine under the guidance of qualified professionals to develop skills, attitudes and competence in the profession (Ekundayo, et al, 2014). Teaching practice simply connotes the preparation of student-teachers for teaching by practical training. It is the practical use of teaching methods, teaching strategies, teaching principles, teaching techniques and practical training and practice / exercise of different activities of daily school life. The absence of teaching practice breeds non – professionals which Alebiosu (2012) refers to as teachers that are not adequately equipped with deep knowledge of learning and learning conditions that are essential for devising effective instructional tools. Teaching practice is the springboard for effective pedagogy and professional competence. Its efficacy paves way for sustainable, meaningful and productive teaching and learning phenomena.

Teaching requires specialized education, knowledge, training and ethics, and the professional teacher must serve the educational interests of students as they practice under conditions that enable them to exercise professional judgment. The processes which make teaching a profession must contribute to the holistic development of students, hence it is imperative that teachers are professionally competent. Teacher's professional competence is

a situation in which the teacher possesses and demonstrates a wide-range repertoire of different teaching and learning models, methods, approaches, strategies and techniques, different learning skills and learning styles, and knows how to create the right conditions for learning in order to obtain desired learning.

### **Objectives of Teaching Practice**

Teaching practice enables student-teachers develop and acquire pedagogical skills in the natural setting which is the schools of practice. We know that student-teachers enter the classroom with a degree of training which, on many occasions, proves to be of little value. This is because the practical situation in the classroom is one which is full of complexity, uncertainty, instability, and one where conflicting values exist. The skills and capacities required to act in this type of situation has deviated from theoretical acquisition to its application. It is complex requiring the demonstration of initiatives and expertise. In this vein, teaching practice provides the opportunity for linking theory and practice under the guidance of more experienced teachers and supervision by college lecturers. The quality of teaching practice to a great deal depends on the extent to which educational theory and practice are joined and integrated in teaching. The aim of teaching practice is to give student-teachers the opportunity of learning at first hand the actual work of a teacher in a typical classroom situation. It provides student-teacher the opportunity to meet learners as they are and to practicalize the theories acquired (Nakpodia, 2011). According to Afolabi (1999) cited by Ekundayo, et al (2014) teaching practice exercise is to acquaint student teachers with the practical knowledge of teaching and learning process including lesson plan preparation, presentation, class management, communication skills, evaluation and the required personality of professional teachers. According to Akbar (2002) cited by Nakpodia (2011), the following are the objectives of teaching practice:

1. To provide prospective teachers with an opportunity of establishing an appropriate teacher- pupil relationship.
2. To provide an opportunity for evaluating the student potential as a teacher and suitability for the teaching profession.
3. To develop personal relationship with others: administrators, teachers, parents and students.
4. To provide the future teachers with practical experience in school to overcome the problems of indiscipline and enable him / her to develop method of control.
5. To give the teacher an opportunity to put theories into practice and to develop a deeper understanding of educational principles and their implications for learning.
6. To enable the student- teachers effectively plan and prepare lessons.
7. To develop skills in the use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods of teaching.
8. To develop desirable professional interests, attitudes and ideas relative to teaching profession.
9. To enable student-teachers acquire desirable characteristics / traits of a teacher and to display appropriate behaviour.
10. To provide student-teachers with an opportunity to have teaching evaluated and to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism.
11. To provide an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover own strengths and weaknesses.
12. To develop skills in future teachers related to teaching like fluent speaking, meaningful reading, using blackboard and other teaching material.
13. To provide an opportunity to liaise with school environment, its functioning and with community and its resources.
14. To provide for the exchange of ideas, materials and methods between practicing school and teacher training institution and teacher training institutions' staff and students.

### **Facets and Components of Effective Teaching Practice Exercise**

Teaching practice exercise has many facets and these are implemented for a successful teaching practice exercise. They include;

1). Getting intimated with the school of teaching practice: This is the first step in the preparation for teaching practice. The student-teacher should visit the school for teaching practice to see and create a good rapport with the head of school, class teachers and school staff and obtain information about school and its environment from them, and establish an atmosphere of cordiality. The student-teacher must also observe and/or be equipped with information on the teaching arrangements of the school, teaching methods of cooperating class teacher, notebooks of the students and their usual routine, age of the students, strength of the class, abilities and specific problems of the students, timing of the school, scheme of work, textbooks and teaching aids.

2). Preparation of Lesson: The next facet to familiarizing with the school of teaching practice is to prepare for the lesson. Effective preparation requires that the student-teacher masters the content through thorough study of relevant reading materials. In addition, the student-teacher should prepare relevant teaching aids and a well laid out lesson plan. He/she must also be able to envisage un-planned / unexpected phenomena.

3). Actual classroom teaching: This component entails the actual classroom interaction involving the teaching of content. It involves the purposeful interaction between the materials, the subject-matter, the learner and the student-teacher. Effective lesson delivery is an essential component of teaching practice. The student-teacher while teaching passes through different steps of his/her teaching (introduction, presentation, recapitulation) during the which, the teacher/supervisor assesses/observes the student-teacher's lesson. A good lesson according to Nakpodia (2011) has the following qualities;

- i). Lesson planning should be in complete detail.
- ii). Lesson should be interesting.
- iii). There should be effective and timely use of teaching methods and teaching aids.
- iv). Students should be ready for learning.
- v). Students should be involved practically in teaching learning process.
- vi). Lesson should be taught in professional and friendly environment.

vii). All students should be given same attention by keeping in view their individual differences.

4). Evaluation of teaching practice: This component entails the assessment of the performance of the student-teacher while teaching in the classroom. The teaching practice supervisor evaluates/observes the punctuality, lesson planning, teaching methods, use of audio visual aids, adequacy of audio visual aids, pitch of voice, dress, start and end of lesson, interest of the students, discipline of class, use of black/ white board, students' notebooks and objectives of the lesson, including the enthusiasm of the student-teacher.

5). Participation in other routine works of school: Teaching in the classroom is not only the objective of teaching practice, it also includes training in all activities/work which student-teachers are going to perform in future during their job. The student-teacher is expected to participate in all the activities in the school. Some of these as highlighted by Nakpodia (2011) and others include;

- i). Preparation of timetable, preparation and maintenance of registers, evaluation of class work and home work, arrangement of tutorial groups.
- ii). Taking part in sports/games, morning assembly, co-curricular activities, decoration of classrooms and beautification of school environment and premises.
- iii). Performing duties during recess, as day master, before and after school timing, and as counsellor.
- iv). Preparation and maintenance of attendance boards, news boards, information boards and other boards, as well as maintenance of workshops, home economics rooms, equipment rooms, science laboratories and library.
- v). Preparation of question papers for examinations, invigilation in examinations, evaluation of answer scripts and compilation of results.
- vi). Relating well with students' parents, officers of the school, school employees and guests.

The following activities and procedures are pertinent for effective teaching practice exercise:

- i). The students are asked to propose a school of choice after which letters are written to principals of co-operating schools asking them to indicate the number of student- teachers they need and the subject areas of need. The principals are also reminded of their responsibility to ensure that accommodation is provided for the student- teachers (if possible).
- ii). Orientation activity is organised and made mandatory for both the prospective student-teacher and college participating supervisors. Papers on various aspects of the teaching practice exercise are presented and prospective student-teachers are made to ask questions. Topics so discussed only serve to reinforce what the students have been taught in their Education and subject method lectures.
- iii). The students are posted, as much as possible, according to their choices and the principals' requests and participating schools are enjoined to give maximum cooperation and support.
- iv). Supervisors are adequately mobilized and empowered with facilities required for the exercise. Such as grouping, consideration of distance in posting, consideration of area of specialization, use of standard and uniform assessment format, and so forth.
- v). The student-teachers are supervised at least two times and by more than one supervisor. The average scores are used for the final grading.
- vi). Evaluation considers both the rating of the supervisors and the contributions / comments / observations of the participating school.

### **Roles of Supervisors and Cooperating Teachers in Teaching Practice**

Supervisors play significant roles in teaching practice and the effective discharge of their duties to a large extent determine the success of teaching practice. The supervisor should have meeting and conversation with head teacher/principal, cooperating teachers and other teachers in the cooperating school. It is important for the supervisor to interact with the student-teacher to

harvest the problems and challenges he/she faces in the school for teaching practice and help to proffer solutions. Also it is the duty of supervisors to check lesson plans, supervise lessons, other assigned activities like guidance and counseling as well as provide the student- teachers with feedback and encourage them to criticize and reform themselves.

In broad terms, the supervisor performs the following roles;

- i). A resource person
- ii). An adviser
- iii). A general morale booster
- iv). An interpreter of feedback
- v). An assessor
- vi). A facilitator

The cooperating teacher is the one that relates directly and closely with the student-teacher, and monitors all activities embarked upon by the student-teacher. Cooperating teachers perform the following roles;

- i) Make the student- teacher feel wanted and welcome by introducing him/her to the school staff and students, special buildings and the administrative structure and procedure of the school.
- ii). Give guidance and assistance to the student-teacher in the area of construction of unit/lesson plans and how to deliver the lessons.
- iii). Aid the student-teacher in mastering the grading system that is consistent with the school's policy.
- iv). Provide guidance and assurance in problems of indiscipline which the student-teacher is likely to be confronted with.
- v). Encourage and help the student-teacher in developing an appreciation for the teaching profession and giving it a pride of place.
- vi). Provide continuous evaluation of the student-teacher's functioning as a teacher and all other facets of the practice teaching assignment.

### **Duties and Responsibilities of the Student-teacher for Effective Teaching Practice**

The essence of teaching practice is to prepare student-teachers for future teaching roles and assignments as they teach for a period of time and

it is a vital part of their training. Teaching practice period is when the student-teacher applies the methods and the philosophy of education which he was taught theoretically in the classroom. He/she is expected to demonstrate certain roles and responsibilities. Such as;

- i). Good content mastery
- ii). Adequate lesson plan preparation
- iii). Good communication skills
- iv). Effective classroom teaching involving appropriate teacher and student activities
- v). Effective classroom management in terms of class organization and management as well as class control and discipline
- vi). Using relevant and appropriate instructional resources
- vii). Employing appropriate evaluation procedures in teaching such as periodic evaluation, evaluation at the end of the lesson, giving home assignment, checking of students' classwork and achievement of stated objectives.
- viii). Acceptable teacher's personality such as self-confidence, discipline, mannerism and dressing.
- ix). Engaging in routine works, projects and general development of the school

### **Challenges of Teaching Practice Exercise**

A lot of problems confront the prospective teachers in the course of carrying out the teaching practice exercise that seem to affect the effectiveness of the student- teachers. These challenges cause the mismanagement of teaching practice which according to Kolawole, Abdurrahman and Kolawole, (2016) is not an entirely Nigerian phenomenon. Many studies have reported inadequacies and shortcomings in the teaching practice exercise in Nigeria Universities and Colleges of Education. For instance, Ogonor and Badmus (2006) lamented improper grooming of student-teachers and weak teachers partnership in schools in which cooperating school do not provide specific aid to student-teachers to improve their teaching skills and strategies. Nakpodia (2011) remarked that the periods of teaching practice is too short as it does not provide the student teacher the ample opportunity to effectively gain the experience

which the exercise is intended to encourage. Kolawole, Abdurrahman and Kolawole, (2016) collated the following as challenges of teaching practice;

- i). Inadequate supervision.
- ii). Wrong timing of teaching practice.
- iii). Poor financial support in terms of allowances for supervisors.
- iv). Lack of discipline.
- v). Use of inappropriate strategies by student-teachers.
- vi). Anxiety whereby student-teachers often forgot the content matter and feel nervous when their lecturers sit at the end of the classroom and observe.
- vii). Poor relationship between mentors and student teachers.
- viii). Inadequate orientation of student-teachers about the school.
- ix). Negative attitude of other teachers in the school.
- x). Low level of student- teachers in other school activities.
- xi). Negative attitude to the teaching profession.
- xii). Poor and inadequate assessment due to irrelevant job status and inexperience

Problems confronting effective implementation of teaching practice can be categorized into three viz; student-teacher related problems, institutions (universities) related problems and school of teaching practice related problems (Ekundayo et al, 2014). The researchers enumerated the problems under each category as follows;

- 1). Student-teacher related problems:
  - Student- teacher accommodation.
  - Difficulty in instilling discipline in the classroom.
  - Shallow knowledge of lesson note preparation.
  - Non-challant attitude of student-teacher to give evaluation report.
  - Non- genuine rejection by student-teacher from going to the school of posting.
  - Nervousness of the student-teacher when being supervised.
  - Student-teachers inability to use variety of teaching methods when teaching.

- Inability of student-teacher to make good use of quality instructional material.

2). Institution (university) related problems:

- Short period of teaching practice.
- Inadequate preparation of student-teachers for teaching practice.
- Posting of student-teachers to inappropriate schools
- Absence of microteaching that can help students gain confidence as they go for teaching practice.
- Non exposure of student-teachers to supervisor's observations and comments after completing the classroom teaching.
- Absence of opportunity for student-teachers to interact with partnership schools before the commencement of the teaching practice exercise.

3). School of teaching practice related problems:

- Rejection of student –teachers by schools where they are posted
- Non willingness of schools to distribute their schedules according to the needs of the student-teachers.
- Non availability of instructional materials in schools.
- Poor learning environment such as congestion and poor ventilation in the practicing schools.
- Non- cooperation of teachers in participating schools in serving as mentor.
- Giving student-teachers subjects outside their areas of specialization to teach.
- Uncooperative attitude of students in partnership schools towards student-teachers.

The problems constitute a major impediment to the effective implementation of teaching practice and ultimately lead to the production of poorly prepared and ill-motivated teachers who cannot teach effectively (Kolawole, Abdurrahman and Kolawole, 2016).

### **Towards Improving Teaching Practice Exercise in Nigeria Teacher Education Programmes**

Teaching practice is an inevitable part of the professional preparation and certification of teachers. In Colleges of Education and Nigerian universities, teaching practice is a compulsory course in the Faculties of Education forming part

of the prerequisites for graduation. However, observations have shown that there is a decline in the quality of teaching practice being offered in the universities at the moment with very many inadequacies. The nature of teaching practice in many Nigerian Universities is such that it is designed to take place in two or three parts. The following suggestions are proffered for improving teaching practice exercises in Nigeria teacher education programmes.

- a) In teacher training institutions teaching methods should not just be taught, the methods should also be practically demonstrated by the teacher educators.
- b) The duration of teaching practice should be increased up to 12 weeks at least, so that practical training can take a quarter of the year.
- c) Teaching practice should not be consisted of classroom teaching only. Other routine works and aspects should be included.
- d) Microteaching should be adopted in teacher training institutions and model lessons should be given by experts as well as by video films before student- teachers.
- e) Student- teachers should not be given marks for model lessons only. All the aspects of teaching practice should be included in evaluation.
- f) In order to make the evaluation of teaching practice more effective, appropriateness of lesson, teaching methods, teaching aids, practical organization of lesson, interest of students and teachers and students' answers should be included in evaluation.
- g) Student- teachers should be encouraged to make audio visual aids by themselves and they should be given/provided guidance after every lesson.
- h) Student- teachers should be made to watch the lessons of experienced teachers for some time and write evaluation report about them, and supervisors should provide guidelines to student- teachers in the light of this evaluation report.
- i) Student- teachers should be made to keep the sequence of lessons so that they can

teach all types of lessons and use different teaching methods.

- j) Prior to teaching practice, student-teachers should practice with their fellows in order to build more confidence in them.
- k) During teaching practice student- teachers should be given projects, which cover all the aspects of teaching practice i.e. (preparation of teaching kit, planning for decoration of classrooms, betterment of environment and provision of facilities).
- l) During practice teaching prospective teachers should be made habitual of preparing daily lesson plan.
- m) Teaching practice should be more realistic and suited to the actual class room situations.
- n) Universities and Colleges must adequately fund the teaching practice programme and rich and separate budget must be created for it.
- o). Stakeholders should explore school – based mentoring approach whereby the mentor (supervisor and cooperating teacher) and mentee (student-teacher) work harmoniously to teach and learn the appropriate tenets of teaching practice, accompanied with rich feedback.
- p) Cooperating schools should be adequately informed of the required activities and support.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Teaching practice is an activity that is very vital to the preparation of teachers. It is a major ingredient of professional competence and its effectiveness is paramount for a nation's education industry. Teaching practice is a combination of personality, professional skills, knowledge and training, which is fuel for an endless journey and responsibility. It is very beneficial because it provides an opportunity for the trainee teachers to teach and increase their professional competence. It offers the opportunity for prospective teachers not only to build necessary confidence and competence in lesson preparation but to develop necessary skills and attitude. A teacher's first moral obligation is to provide excellent instruction. Teachers with a high level of competence have a deep obligation to

help students learn and achieving so requires the demonstration of excellent teaching.

In addition to suggestions for improving teaching practice in Nigeria teacher education programmes, it is recommended that the government and school authorities should encourage proper orientation for trainee teachers through seminars, workshops, conferences and discussion. Faculties and Colleges of Education should organize quality teaching practice exercises in order to give the best professional practice to trainee teachers. Institutional resource centers of various institutions should be adequately equipped and expanded to enable every trainee teacher participate in micro-teaching exercise as a way of exposing them to teaching practice.

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