

Effective Teaching Practice - A Bridge between Theory and Practice in Teacher education: A Case of Evelyn Hone College. (Conference ID: CFP/656/2018)

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of Teaching Practice with a view that an Effective Teaching Practice is an indispensable bridge between Theory and Practice in Teacher education. The study regard student teaching practice as an apprenticeship phase of teacher training for students to gain practical and professional experience by translating all the educational theories they have acquired or learnt during training into practice. To achieve this noble purpose, there is need for a serious and continuous modeling, scaffolding and proper communication among all stakeholders. Students need to be very well reinforced as they are being introduced into the professional demands of teaching.

A case of Evelyn Hone College (EHC) revealed that students acquired and developed pedagogic skills necessary for them to teach well, however, the teaching experience would have been more fruitful if its organization, supervision, and communication was improved between the college and the schools, the lecturers and mentor teachers as well as between supervisors and students.

It is also of noteworthy that students as apprentices should be more open minded to adapt and fully embrace professionalism regardless of the circumstances prevailing during their attachment in schools. On the other hand, lecturers, mentor teachers, in-service teachers and both institutions – the college and the secondary schools should maintain efficient communication and harmonization of all their duties of supporting student teachers in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Key words: Teaching Practice; Apprenticeship; Mentorship; Teacher Education

I. INTRODUCTION

The Zambian government emphasizes on the importance of teacher education, that until a teacher is properly trained, the desired end in the teaching and learning process which is high quality education, cannot be achieved. Teacher education, in the Zambian context, refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, and wider community (Chishimba, 2008). The shaping of a teacher to develop such desired qualities depends on how they were trained and oriented into the teaching profession way before they left teacher training institutions.

Evelyn Hone College of Applied Arts and Commerce is a public institution, one among many other public and private institutions which offer a three years Secondary Teachers' Diploma. The diploma program of the Department of Education (now the School of Education) sends students for teaching practice twice; in term two and three in the second and third year respectively. Therefore, a student must have completed 24 weeks (six months) of teaching practice as a pre-requisite for graduation.

The cooperating schools assign mentor or cooperating teachers who are selected based on their competence while the college assigns supervisors who are lecturers under the school of Education. The mentor teacher and the lecturer are expected to observe the student-teacher at least once during each teaching practice session respectively.

Therefore, student teaching practice is a kind of an apprenticeship stage during which the students are sent out to schools to gain practical and professional experience by translating all the educational theories they have acquired or learnt during training into practice (Fagbulu, 1984). It is a practical teaching activity by which the student teachers are given an opportunity in actual school situations to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skills over a period. The term practice teaching 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 (Stones, 1977).

Whatever definition is given to Teaching Practice, the utmost importance 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 and develop competence as well. In the process of bridging the gap between educational theories and practice, the student-teacher, through a program of cooperative and interactive guidance, acquires valuable skills in teaching and the management of teaching from experienced teachers thus improving their own teaching quality.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FIELD WORK

In Zambia, teacher education is made up of two most important components; that is, the theoretic and the practical aspects of training. A qualitative method was chosen for this study to develop an

understanding of how well the two aspects of teacher education are linked together in teaching practice. As demonstrated by the apprenticeship theoretical and conceptual frameworks, such a program is multi-faceted and complex; therefore, a qualitative study which is descriptive should yield a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of all TP stakeholders.

Materials

The interview questions were designed based on the research questions, literature and from the researcher's professional practice and experience. According to Glesne (2006), questions about experience or behavior tend to be the easiest for respondents so the first set of questions were designed to establish a rapport and put the interviewee at ease. Glesne also advises that questions about the past or present tend to be richer in description than asking participants to predict the future. The questions included both closed and open-ended types of questions. However, in instances where the open-ended question did not generate a full answer, probes were used to encourage a more detailed response. (Glesne, 2006).

Design

This study employed a case study design. A case study may be of one person, class, district, country, continent or family. Therefore, this study qualifies as a case study because it drew its respondents from one institution EHC and those who were based in Lusaka District.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

In this study, the sample comprised one (1) teacher education college (EHC) and 10 Secondary Schools within Lusaka district. In terms of the student teachers, the sample had 30 respondents with an equal gender representation. Ten (10) head teachers or mentor teachers, one (1) was female, one from each school and Five (5) EHC lecturers, two (2) of whom were female, from the School of Education were sampled. Comprising of 45 respondents in total. Then for the purposes of triangulation, 100 LORFs were randomly selected out of the 310 students who did their second teaching practice in 2016. This was possible as all the student-teachers' files were still under the custard of the Teaching Practice Coordinator at EHC.

Both simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used. According to White (2003), the simple random technique is a selection technique that provides each population element with an equal chance of being included in the sample. (White, 2003). In this study, simple random sampling was used to come up with the 10 schools. This was done by getting a TP supervision schedule, taking an inventory of all the secondary schools in Lusaka District where EHC student teachers were placed for TP and then conducted a ruffle to draw 10 schools from the total of 42 secondary schools to which EHC were attached within Lusaka District.

Purposive sampling was used to select head teachers/mentor teachers and EHC student teachers in the sampled schools and the EHC lecturers from EHC school of Education. This was done because after randomly selecting the Lusaka based schools, the students and the EHC lecturers are all linked in the schedule for supervision to those schools and hence purposively identified. While the mentor teachers were identified by the school administration. These groups of people were all directly linked to the sampled secondary schools. They needed to be purposively selected so that they could represent the relevant variables in this study.

However, there were challenges associated with the respondents. For example, some student teachers refused to be interviewed and kept on postponing the appointment for the interview. As a result, data collection took longer than expected as the researcher visited some individual respondents more than once. Regarding lecturers, the study intended to interview 8 lecturers with a representation of two lecturers from each section (Communication skills, Art, Music, and Social Sciences) in the School of Education. However, only 5 lecturers out of the targeted 8 were interviewed. The reason was that the others claimed to have been busy and that they could not find time for the interview. Some of the respondents (among the 5) postponed the appointment more than once before they finally made themselves available for the interview.

Each participant was contacted individually so that a mutually acceptable time to discuss and establish the parameters for the study. Participants were sent a consent form which advised them that the study had been reviewed and approved by the EHC Research Ethics Board. The consent form also included a questionnaire which stated that if the participant was willing to participate in a follow-up interview they needed to give explicit permission. It also indicated that the follow-up interview would be about 45 minutes in length and that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected. Therefore, identity codes were used for participants and no names of schools or school boards were revealed or used in any report or publication except for the college - EHC. Participants were also told that they could withdraw from the study at any time up to two months after the interview had been conducted. They were also informed that once the interviews were conducted, they would be sent a verbatim copy of the interview so they could edit their responses. A copy of the consent form was received from all the participants prior to their participation in this study. A copy of the consent form and an interview protocol are included in the Appendix.

The candidates were interviewed in person or on the phone. Prior to the interviews, each participant was sent a copy of the interview protocol which contained some questions to give him or her some time to think about and answer the questions. The interview protocol was designed as a questionnaire to provide mainly qualitative data and some quantitative data for verification purposes. The interviews, which varied in length from twenty-five minutes to fifty minutes, were digitally recorded and then transcribed with their prior permission. The participants received a copy of the text by email within fifteen days of the interview and were given the opportunity to modify their responses. Despite being given the opportunity to edit or add additional comments, none made any alterations to the original transcript. The verbatim

data provided direct quotations that were used to present the perspectives of the participants with the exception that identifications of educational institutions or faculty was removed.

Research Instruments

The instruments used to collect data were focus group discussions, interviews and document analysis. The interview and Focus group discussions (FGD) were based on a mainly qualitative interview guide which was issued to all who accepted to participate in the study. FGD of five (5) student teachers each were later used to solicit answers from EHC Student teachers. FGD were used because the student-teachers who were sampled were many and they could easily be reached through focus group discussions. An interview guide was used to interview the head teachers/mentor teachers, and the lecturers from EHC. An interview guide containing closed and open-ended questions was important as the researcher could ask follow-up questions and sought clarification where the respondent was not clear. In addition, document analysis was used to get data from the Lesson Observation Report Forms by both EHC lecturers and school Heads of Department/mentor teachers.

Data Analysis

The qualitative approach was used to analyze data that was collected from the focus group discussions and interviews. Document analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the Lesson Observations Report Forms' (LORF) comments. The comments lecturers made about observed lessons were studied to find out the pedagogical experiences of students during teaching practice. The observation instruments were also studied and analyzed to examine their adequacy to fully assess the teacher's readiness to teach. The researcher also looked at the quality of guidance and support provided by supervisors to students through the observation comments which were made by supervisors. It must be mentioned that the data was grouped under identified themes guided by research questions and objectives.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using the "Constant Comparative Method" developed by Glaser and Strauss, (Glaser, 1997). Initially, the answers for each question were studied for recurring themes and temporary codes were assigned to each theme or category. As other similar comments were identified and placed together, they were compared with existing comments in the category to find "recurring regularities" (Merriam et al., 2006) so that the final categories could be created and named. Once the final categories had been identified, the data was combed again to collect and regroup the quotes from other questions which fit in the category. The categories were then grouped not based on the individual questions but on the data from all the questions together and regrouped along with the supporting quotes to produce themes that formed the major findings for analysis in terms of thematic items. Finally, the data were regrouped into the three categories of analysis outlined in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as in relation to the three (3) research questions – that is, pedagogic competencies, supervision, and duration of teaching practice.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter is an outline of the findings. It is structured and presented as responses to research questions and objectives.

Pedagogic Competencies Acquired from TP

Pedagogy refers to the art, science or profession of teaching. Practice refers to what you do in the classroom (MoE, 2007). There are a variety of skills needed to be exploited in a classroom situation to enhance effective learning. The combination of the various skills that teachers use in the process of teaching and learning is what we describe as pedagogy. Therefore, Pedagogy involves planning lessons, planning the chalk board, organizing group work, making or using teaching aids, encouraging communication, questioning for teaching and learning, reflecting, exploiting text books, using local environment, testing for teaching and learning, drawing, using songs, games and rhymes. In other words, teachers are expected but not limited to using a variety of skills that would enhance effective learning.

Research question 1: Do students effectively acquire pedagogic competencies during teaching practice?

Most of the student teachers narrated and confirmed that TP helped them apply the teaching skills they learnt in class (e.g. Interviewee, ST006); developed problem-solving skills in their teaching (Interviewee, ST0010); to master the subject matter (e.g. Interviewee, ST0024; application and use of different teaching-learning methods and materials (e.g. Interviewee, ST0017); improved classroom management skills based on feedback from school based supervisors (e.g. Interviewee, ST0013); took part in giving tests, marking and records keeping; and that it helped them to identify learners with difficulties and attend to them (Interviews, 2016; ST001 – ST0024).

Most of the student teachers, strongly agreed that they acquired pedagogic skills agreeing to what was stated by one student teacher that;

“...TP was an effective experience which allowed me to have the feel of the real classroom situation and helped in consolidating the theoretical knowledge... School teaching practice was very effective because it helped me to build up confidence, develop a positive attitude towards the teaching profession and it helped me to apply the teaching skills I learnt from different theories in college...”. (Focused Group Discussion (FGD002)).

Although most respondents were of the view that the school teaching experience was effective as stated above, others had an opposing view. They believed that the school teaching experience was not effective. Some respondents pointed out that EHC school teaching experience was not effective because students did not receive help from lecturers or adequate guidance and support from their in-service teachers in the schools they taught. Their view of not being support or guided sufficiently, was confirmed also from the LORF in some lecturers' and mentor teachers' comments which were not substantial to guide a student

teacher, for instance some supervisors just commented like; ‘can do better’; ‘well taught’; and many similar comments like this which provided no substance on what should be done or what was done well. To this effect, four student teachers believed that it was not effective as two of these narrated that

“... EHC school teaching experience was not effective because as student teachers, we did not receive help from lecturers or adequate guidance and support from our mentors nor in-service teachers in the schools they we were attached...it was like the supervisors were there only to fail or pass us, not to help us learn more ...”. (FGD004).

Generally, lecturers and school-based supervisors confirmed student-teachers’ acquisition and their abilities in applying the learnt pedagogic skills into practice. The document analysis of the 100 supervisors’ LORFs also indicated that students could apply to a very high extent all the afore mentioned pedagogic skills. Again, most of the student teachers scored high above average in their supervisors’ Lesson Observation Report Forms (LORF).

There is a problem of lack of educational materials limiting the diverse use of a variety of teaching and learning materials making student-teachers to be stack to what was workable. One respondent lamented that,

“It was very difficult to teach properly because the school had no teaching and learning materials other than a few books which were shared among all of us teaching (that subject). My mentor teacher on the other hand expected me to even use the content materials from the college as he thought that I had gone there with some latest content materials from college.”

Supervision of Teaching Practice

Supervision of Teaching Practice is a form of serious professional support to student teachers; a practical and cognitive support for student teachers to develop pedagogic skills and to be properly initiated into the teaching profession.

Research Question 2: Is there effective supervision of students during teaching practice?

A closer look at the findings reveals that the supervision by the cooperating teacher is more effective than that of the EHC Lecturer supervisor. It is important to notice that the mentor or cooperating teacher is closer to the activities of learning and teaching as compared to a lecturer who visited only once and mainly for the purposes of grading the student-teacher’s work and unfortunately towards the end of the teaching practice period in most cases.

In item 9, it was discovered that student-teachers observed their mentors’ lessons before they began their teaching practice. Most of the student teachers responded that

“...it was very helpful to see and learn from the experienced teacher because it made it easier for us student teachers to imitate and improve on how to deliver a lesson effectively...”. (FGD003)

However, some pointed out that “... *it was not good for some mentor teachers to introduce us (student teachers) as students to the learners as this made some learner to look down of the student-teachers...*”. (FGD003)

The data also revealed in item 10 that, majority of what student teachers were teaching was not pre-checked by the mentor teachers. The interview responses from some respondents indicated that some mentor teachers left student teacher without proper assistance as one respondent put it “...*some mentor and in-service teachers took advantage of us to abandon their classes on us, we were at times left alone to stand in for them when they went on doing their business....*”.

It was a discovery that many mentor teachers checked the file regularly rather than discussing the student teachers’ classroom activities before or after the lesson. On the other hand, some students pointed out that “...*some mentor teachers did not seem to understand what was expected of them...*”.

The above statement was confirmed in one of the mentor teacher’s view that

“... *us teachers helping students are left out, sometimes we just use improvisation in helping students, ... it would be easy if mentor teachers and lecturers were closely working together... in designing how best the schools could supplement college efforts in training high quality teachers...*” (MT001)

Furthermore, it was discovered that there is no proper communication between the lecturer and the student-teacher’s day to day activities as in items 17-18. Some of the respondents said that they expected cordial relationships with the schools, mentors, in-service teachers and EHC lecturers. Student teachers said they wanted a lot of professional advice from the serving teachers, which, unfortunately, they did not get. One female respondent asserted:

“*I expected them to be more friendly and helpful in terms of writing lesson plans together, but their attitude towards us from some of them left much to be desired. They were a bit hostile, indifferent and sometimes accused us of just disturbing their classes because they thought that we will not teach well and will leave them to re-teach what we might have not taught well...*”.

In addition to the above stated findings, most student teachers rated the support from mentor teachers as average as one student teacher highlighted that “*mentor teachers seemed not to have a clue on what they had to look for during the lesson observation and there is need for EHC to closely work with cooperating schools to standardize the lesson observation instruments.*”

Item 17, shows that in most cases lecturers did not visit students early enough in the term such that the lecturer’s observation was reduced to a mere exercise for awarding marks as it usually came towards the end of the term. The dates on the LORFs confirmed that many lecturer’s student teacher’s lesson observations took place in March, a few weeks before end of term tests. It was found that students were not happy with late lesson observations as it came out in one group discussion that

“...*late supervision from lecturers was a let-down to us because we expected lecturers to guide us early enough in a practical way for us to try and implement their suggestions to make our*

teaching more effective... but it seems that lecturers only came to award marks and leave us to sort ourselves...” (FGD001)

Another group raised another factor that,

“...sometimes lecturers were too much in a hurry to make all lesson observations within a short period of time hence they made us organize ad hoc classrooms for convenience observations only... Sometimes our classes were lined up – one after the other and by the end of it all, no proper guidance was provided nor was there any meaningful discussion of the lesson observation...” (FGD005)

Some respondents said that they expected the lecturers to be available for consultation throughout the teaching practice period. Others said that they expected lecturers to provide guidelines on how the student teachers should behave during teaching practice. One female student teacher stated:

“...we expected a lot. We thought that lecturers would help us with teaching materials and to observe us twice or more and tell us our weaknesses. I expected regular follow-ups, checking if I am facing any challenges. I expected my lecturers and mentor teachers to give me guidance on how to go about the process of the TP. Unfortunately, there was insufficient guidance....”

Other than the expectations stated in the above quotes, student teachers complained of a lack of effective communication from the lecturers. The lecturers only communicated when they were going to observe the student teacher. Most respondents; some of whom said; “... we were not given contacts for lecturers who we could call when we had any problems...” which they said was very unsupportive of those who should take keen interest in the student teachers’ developmental welfare.

Duration of Teaching Practice

The duration of teaching practice is a very important aspect of the teaching experience because it entails the duration of support, scaffolding or mentorship a student teacher will enjoy and whether it is sufficient and effective or not. Sufficient support for an appropriate period is important and cannot be overemphasized in the view of TP as a form of Apprenticeship. Therefore, question 3 in this study is a verification of how well and for how long student teachers were supported as they were learning to teach through teaching practice.

Research Question 3: Is the duration of teaching practice adequate for students to acquire competencies?

This question was answered in affirmative; that almost all respondents stated that the duration of teaching practice was adequate to acquire the necessary competencies. In cognitive Apprenticeship, this is important because scaffolding is as important as its duration and timing.

The duration for the teaching practice exercise at Evelyn Hone College is not inadequate in terms of duration but has an element of ineffective or poor communication between the EHC as an institution and the secondary schools as cooperating partner institutions of teacher training. In addition to that, lecturers and mentor teachers do not have proper formal structure of communication.

Most of the cooperating mentor teachers complained that they did not have proper contact with the EHC lecturers assigned to the students they were mentoring. They stated that;

“... I did not even have any idea as to when the lecturer will come to observe the lesson of the students...” (MT002)

“... it is not in order that supervisors abruptly with no prior communication and not giving enough time just come and observe student teachers’ lessons. It is not just a matter of courtesy but also a very effective way of working together....” (MT005)

“ I did not even have a chance to meet the lecturer who observed the student because for one reason or another, the lecturer had no time other than a few minutes with a student after the lesson observation....” (MT008)

The above quotes are confirmed in the lecturers’ description of the challenges they faced as they went for TP observations as one lecturer pointed out that

“... the huge number of students allocated per lecturer coupled with a lecturer’s meagre resources allocated to them and the delay in the allocation of the same resources, puts lecturers in an awkward position in which they sometimes have to rush through an observation in order to manage all other subsequent observations thereafter....” (Lt003)

On the other end, most students observed that

“...there is a difference in how the same TP lesson evaluation form is understood by the EHC lecturers and the mentor teachers in school. Some mentor teachers did not understand the items on the form and did not tick or highlight any item when observing us they just indicated marks without any clear comments on how one can improve future classroom activities...the lecturers’ lesson evaluation is clearer than that of mentor teachers” (FGD005)

Therefore, these findings as outlined above, signifies that despite the duration of TP being adequate, it has been characterized by challenges against effective communication among the TP stakeholders. This may mean that the EHC teaching practice experience could have been more effective if there was proper and effective communication among all stakeholders. Effective communication between the Apprentice and the Master is indispensable in the process of apprenticeship.

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Accordingly, the discussion of findings is influenced and presented as responses to research questions and objectives. The first question is a discussion of whether students effectively acquired pedagogic competencies during teaching practice; secondly is a discussion of how effective the student teachers' mentorship and supervision was; and lastly the discussion addresses the duration of teaching practice as a period of support which student teachers had for them to effectively internalize and acquire the teaching competencies.

Pedagogic Competencies Acquired from TP

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Research question 1: Do students effectively acquire pedagogic competence during teaching practice?

The student teachers and all other stakeholders who interacted with this study, confirmed that pedagogic skills and competencies were highly achieved. The majority average of 80% performed very well in terms of teaching properly, they could plan, related well with their pupils and fellow teachers, achieved their lesson objectives, and generally confirmed that the teaching practice was a worthwhile experience for their professional development.

Lecturers and school-based supervisors confirmed student-teachers' abilities in applying the learnt skills into practice. The document analysis of the 100 supervisors' LORF also indicated that students could apply to a very high extent all the afore mentioned pedagogic skills.

However, it is lamentable that most of the interviewees indicated a shortage of teaching and learning materials in schools and college. That this problem limited the diverse use of a variety of teaching and learning materials leaving student-teachers to be stuck to what was workable regardless of how good or bad it was.

Concerning lesson observation, the findings in this study agrees with Manchishi (2013) and Monyatsi (2010) that there should be more lesson observations to assess the competencies of student teachers. This will not only improve the objectivity of assessment but also will greatly transform assessment-based TP

into a more apprenticeship-oriented TP. Once teacher education institutions start regarding TP as a serious apprenticeship, the quality of teacher training in Zambia will improve.

It was surprising that some student teachers expected to be given the teaching methods that they would use. This means that those student teachers were not adequately prepared in their methodology to deliver the content. With the courses, they did in teaching methods, one would expect that they would be able to select and integrate the methods to use for a lesson. It appears that some student teachers even had problems with lesson delivery, which in turn implied that there was no adequate mentorship and support to adequately prepare student teachers to deliver the lessons in class; support is adequate only if it makes students to later stand on their own, different students need different kinds and duration of support and it takes proper communication to identify this important aspect in apprenticeship.

These findings agree with Allen and Peach's study (2007), which established that one of the major and long-standing challenges of pre-service teacher education programs has been to strike a balance between the theory and practice of the profession. According to Hartocollis (2005, 2), a widely-held concern is that "one of the biggest dangers we face is preparing teachers who know theory and know nothing about practice." Apprenticeship model of teacher training may help to resolve this gap between theory and practice.

However, both the interviews and the document analysis indicated that the aims of the teaching practice exercise are being achieved as it allows students to acquire competencies to a very large extent.

Finally, it can be said that acquiring competencies is one aspect but on the other hand, it matters how those competencies were acquired. How was the quality of the acquisition process? Therefore, the quality and effectiveness of the EHC Teaching Practice can be said to be relatively good as there are areas that need to be improved upon to achieve a more improved acquisition of pedagogic competencies. Aspects such as supervision, mentorship and institutional support are other essential components of TP that can widen the gap between theory and practice. The EHC supervision of teaching practice is insufficient and inefficient.

Supervision of Teaching Practice

Research Question 2: Is there effective supervision of students during teaching practice?

A closer look at the findings reveals that the supervision by the cooperating teacher is more effective than that of the EHC Lecturer supervisor. It is important to notice that the mentor or cooperating teacher is closer to the activities of learning and teaching as compared to a lecturer who visited only once and mainly for the purposes of grading the student-teacher's work.

It was discovered that there is no proper communication between the lecturer and the student-teacher's day to day activities as in *items 17-18* in the findings (*Table 4-3, pg 33*). In cognitive apprenticeship,

observing the students' teaching, forms the basis of their coaching and mentoring. However, it was discovered that in most cases lecturers did not visit students early enough in the term such that the lecturer's observation was reduced to a mere exercise for awarding marks as it usually came towards the end of the term. No proper mentorship, coaching, or scaffolding is given to the student-teachers under such circumstances of supervision.

Supervisors are not and should not be witch hunters who should just observe and probably without objectivity, award marks without a proper and consistent communication and support to the student. Both mentor teachers and lecturers should be united through effective professional and constant communication in order to provide relevant support where and when a student teacher is lacking in some aspects.

This shows that even though results in research question 1 indicated that student-teachers acquired competencies, with effective supervision and mentorship, the acquisition of competencies by student-teachers may be greater. We can learn something from the North Michigan University TP supervision model; in their model, a university supervisors serve as a liaison between the schools and the University, he/she cooperates with school personnel in a manner that will enhance the partnership between the school system and the university, he/she identifies and recommends potential supervising teachers, recommend assignments of student teachers, initiate conferences with student teachers, supervising teachers and others concerned with the student's progress, all aimed at enhancing the continuing growth and quality of the student teaching program. Also, valid information on student-teachers' performance is obtained only through supervision of live teaching (Gujjar et al, 2010), without which adequate coaching and mentoring may not be done. Therefore, to improve the quality of supervision, lecturers as supervisors are expected to work closely with cooperate teachers, support the student teachers, and visit the school sites often. When this is done, it will enhance the mentorship and support which is expected of the supervisors for the student-teachers.

In the findings, student teachers expected lecturers to be in contact with them and to be available for consultation during the TP period. However, lecturers did not make themselves available and accessible to student teachers throughout the teaching experience period as their perceived interest was just in classroom observation and award some marks of some sort. Reviewed literature in this study demonstrates a positive impact of university supervisors on student teachers' pedagogy, classroom management, autonomy, and efficacy. Increased frequency of supervision has also been shown to predict the teacher's planned persistence and effectiveness. This is the reason why university supervisors should always be available to students during TP. It is the best way to harmonize the mentorship between Lecturers and cooperating teachers and to consistently check the individual student-teacher's ability to effect change and implement the learned pedagogic skills. Proper apprenticeship.

It was evident from the interview that student teachers expected cooperation. For example, they expected to consult the teachers and plan their lessons together. However, in most cases as in item 10 above, most of the teachers were not available for consultation and did not encourage working as a group. Indeed,

many studies have suggested that cooperating teachers, more than other figures, have the strongest influence on pre-service teacher attitudes and learning during student teaching, and perhaps across teacher preparation generally.

It was discovered that in-service teachers had stereotyped students as fresh knowledge as they were fresh from college and with current information, so they withheld help or guidance. The most important thing they seem to forget is that student teachers who go for TP are students and that the TP is part of the learning process. In addition, they do not realize that they have a vital role to play in teacher preparation. In-service teachers are a vital link that is necessary to bridge the theory – practical gap in teacher training. Therefore, Queensland College (2011) advised that professional experience should be characterized by collaborative inquiry involving pre-service teachers and site-based teachers in a range of diverse learning contexts.

The professional experience should represent a developmental continuum. This means that site-based teachers should look at trainee teachers not only as teachers but also as people and students who are in the process of becoming teachers and are learning to implement theory into practice.

Part of the reason for the apathy that student teachers experience in their placements is because the schools are not included in the design and delivery of the school teaching experience, so they do not fully understand their role in teacher preparation. It is important that teachers and school administrators change their attitudes. This is because their attitude is against the expectation of EHC, which expects them to have a good working relationship with the student teachers. It is therefore true that there is an eminent gap between theory (teacher training institutions) and practice (schools where teaching takes place) since the two seem to operate as if they were independent of each other.

Duration of Teaching Practice

Research Question 3: Is the duration of teaching practice adequate for students to acquire competencies?

The duration of the Teaching Practice exercise is adequate. This implies that the duration for the teaching practice exercise at Evelyn Hone College is not inadequate.

Evelyn Hone College has two placements (12 weeks each) for teaching practice culminating to 24 weeks (6 months) for the entire 3-year Diploma program. The student teacher has a longer period to acquire competencies and the supervisors have enough time to make up for any lapses in their roles. However, the quality of each placement for Evelyn Hone College would be improved if there were a minimum number of hours a student is supposed to teach, because even though students claim that they do not teach less than 8 weeks during a full session, the fact remains that about 26% missed some classes for other activities.

On the other hand, the findings also signify a serious poor communication between Evelyn Hone College and the cooperating schools; and between supervisors and students. All these limitations, can make the Teaching Practice duration ineffective. It is not about the period a student will spend in a school doing all kinds of activities, but more importantly the quality of guidance and support through effective communication which is rendered to the student, makes the teaching practice period to be effective and beneficial in terms of professional development. Since there may be inconsistencies in the duration and quality of teaching per student, this may also have implications for competencies acquired and for the quality of training.

The EHC TP duration conforms to Queensland College (2011) advice that the professional experience of the program should be of an enough time to enable all students to develop the required knowledge, skills, and attributes, and to provide adequate opportunities for students to demonstrate the attainment of these against the standards. In addition, Coll and Zegwaard (2006) agree that if students are to develop enthusiasm and be accepted into the chosen profession then they need to spend more time in communities of practice, such as schools.

This also is important in terms of the support needed to reinforce a desired professional outlook of teaching. Scaffolding is essential to be sustained for a period before fading it away; to allow learners to internalize and adapt to a desired professional conduct.

The school teaching experience faces several challenges against effectiveness in both design and delivery. For example, there is normally a lack of communication between lecturer, cooperating supervisors and the student teachers. Sometimes, neither the student nor the lecturer, cooperating supervisor know when visitations will occur. Allen and Peach (2007) established that both student teachers and school supervisors felt lost and unsure of when a university representative would make contact. This is clear with EHC that other administrative aspects may make it difficult for lecturers to have certainty about TP observations, not until all logistical preparations are confirmed by the administrators.

Further, the period of teaching practice has a good timing in a sense that students can have their placements in the first and second terms which rationally provides them with a chance to get enough exposure to the teaching environment contrary to Cobbold (2011) who observed that in many instances in Africa, the timing of the TP does not allow pre-service teachers to experience school settings from the first day of the new academic year. Therefore, the EHC student teachers have an invaluable opportunity to experience actual teaching, especially because they are granted enough time to observe the cooperating/mentor teachers and to settle in and get used to the teaching and learning environment. This is attested to by some student teachers in the finding who stated that they got so used to the school environment that they wished that TP should even be longer than theory-based learning in college.

The student teachers expected a professional and cordial warm interaction between themselves and the serving teachers. While some of the serving teachers and school administrators were sociable, others were not, more to the disappointment of the student teachers. According to Queensland College (2011), professional experience should be characterized by collaborative inquiry involving pre-service teachers

and site-based teachers in a range of diverse learning contexts. Professional experience should represent a developmental continuum, allowing the pre-service teacher to move from high levels of support to practice which is both autonomous and collaborative. This means that serving teachers should be available to work and help the trainee teachers. In addition, Queensland College (2011) noted that teachers whose classes are allocated to pre-service teachers retain responsibility for the oversight and management of their classes' curriculum and assessment programs.

Manchishi (2013) also spells out another weakness that student teachers are observed only once during TP, which is not adequate. Agreeably so, he emphasized that one observation is not a fair way of appraising classroom performance. Therefore, more observations are needed to have a reliable and valid assessment, and to establish what kind of support was necessary in each distinct case.

Indeed, we can safely state that, EHC has a weak mode of linking theory and practice in teacher preparation because there is no proper communication between the college and the schools. This may suggest that teacher education is detached from school activities. Therefore, graduate teachers are negatively affected when deployed to go and teach in schools as they should seriously readjust to the school environment as if they were not trained for it at all. Some student teachers even suggested that there should be more emphasis on teaching practice compared to all other components of teacher training. Coll and Zegwaard (2006) pointed out that the changing nature of the world of work and the capacity of universities to prepare adaptable and innovative graduates is a concern to governments. They add that there is an urgent need to try to understand the future workplace into which graduates will emerge and the skills that will be required. Which means that EHC should strongly collaborate with the secondary schools through a more formalized and proper channel of communication; forming a strong partnership.

Finally, teacher education should continuously be designed to eliminate the disparity between the theory presented in pre-service programs and the practice in the workplace as attested to by various studies. (Cochran-Smith 2005; Neville et al. 2005; Liston et al. 2006).

Conclusion

In the light of the outcomes of this study, it can be concluded that some changes may be necessary to better prepare future teachers for actual teaching assignments. One important adjustment is in the mentorship and supervision of students. Mentor teachers and supervisors for the student teaching practice placement should be carefully and deliberately selected to better suit the needs of pre-service teachers. It should preferably involve teachers who strongly believe in the genuine importance of student teaching placements and have a good experience in teaching.

V. Framework to Effectively Link Theory and Practice in Teacher Education

These recommendations can clearly be expressed as in figure 5-5 below which consolidates the interactions between different teaching practice stakeholders. A picturesque explanation of how theory can be linked to practice in secondary school teacher education by following the apprenticeship theoretical framework. It is important to notice that there are three levels of interaction for TP to be effective, that is, institutional, mentorship and student's own engagement levels.

At institutional level, the interaction between EHC and Secondary schools should provide a conducive environment for preparation and practice through effective communication, collaboration, supervision, support, and aligning SEN curriculum to address obstacles to an effective TP.

Mentorship level is that theoretical and practical interaction between Lecturers, Mentor Teachers and the Student teachers. This interaction is very important as it is the central concept of apprenticeship. It entails modelling, observations, imitating, and scaffolding. Learning by doing is the method of teaching and learning appropriate for an effective TP. Let student teachers continue learning as they practice teaching, the mentors should help when necessary and closely monitor student's development regularly.

Therefore, the student's own engagement in the whole TP experience is of paramount importance as this will enable them to learn from the experienced, their own experiences/interactions, to adapt what they learnt in college, and to develop their own professional philosophy of teaching as shown in the figure below:

Framework to Effectively Link Theory and Practice in Teacher Education

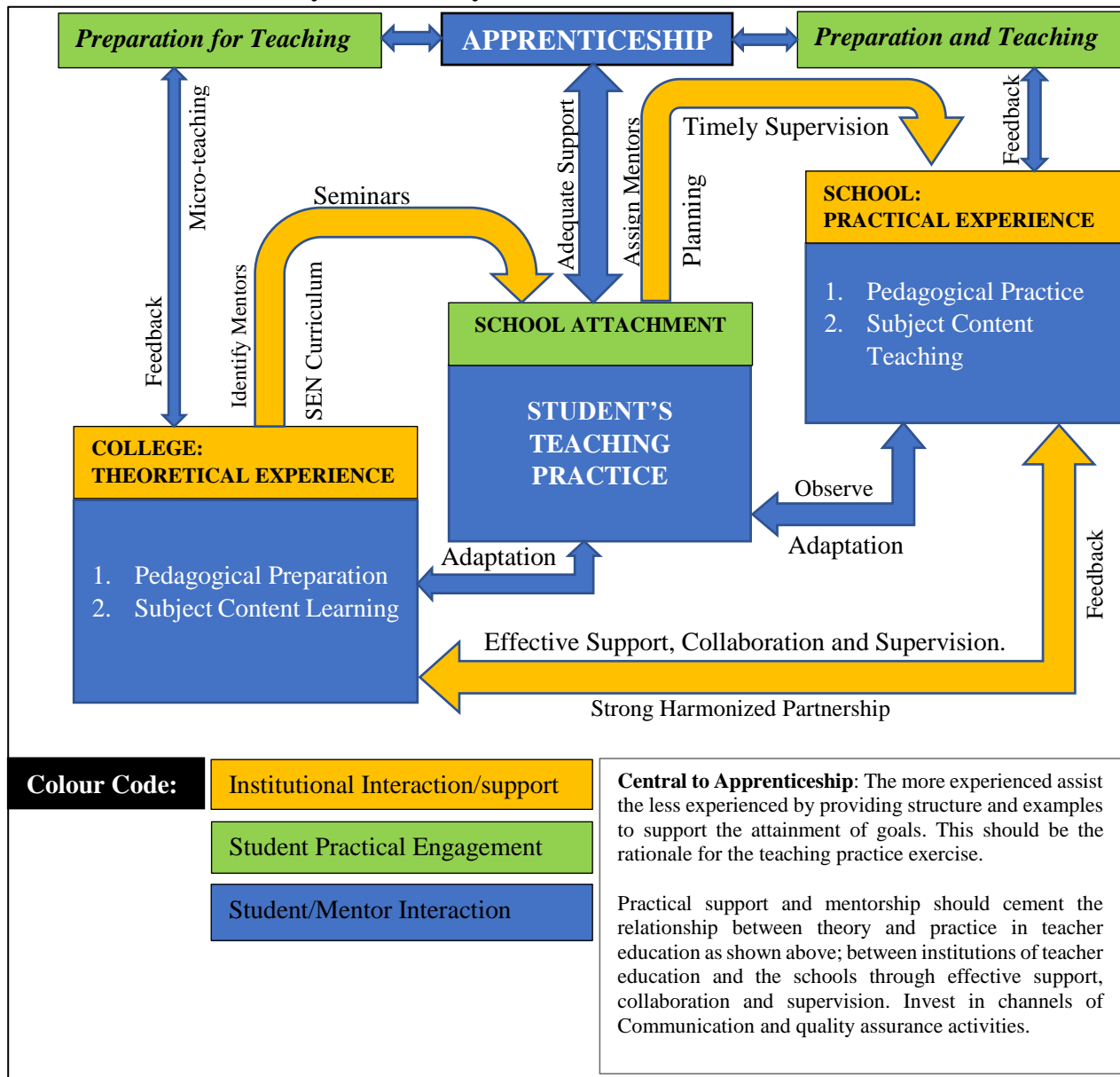


Figure: Framework to Effectively Link Theory and Practice in Teacher Education

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor Dr. NIU Changsong for the sound advice and her professional and academic support that led to the completion of this research.

I am also grateful to the Evelyn Hone College Board for allowing me to conduct this study from their facilities. My sincere gratitude also goes to the Lecturers, Head teachers, Mentor teachers, and all the Student Teachers who spared their valuable time and provided valuable information that led to the realization of this thesis.

The lecturers, other members of staff in the college of teacher of Education at Zhejiang Normal University and fellow students, I thank you for making my Masters on Comparative Education program enjoyable.

Lastly, but not the least, I am highly grateful to my entire family for their selfless love and care with which they have supported my entire period of this study.

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