

CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENT TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE.

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ABSTRACT.

Student teachers including those in Open Distance eLearning (ODEL) university are required to engage on teaching practice annually for the duration of their studies. This study explores the challenges faced by student teachers during teaching practice. This qualitative study uses an exploratory case study research design. The Situated Learning Theory was adopted as the theoretical lens. Eighteen student teachers from one open distance education institution in South Africa were purposively sampled as participants. Online open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data and analysed thematically. The findings show that student teachers experience challenges during teaching practice, such as the inability to manage the learners in the classroom, lack of guidance from the mentor teachers and failure to balance teaching practice with their studies. The study concluded that despite the concerted efforts by the ODeL institution to improve student teachers' experiences during teaching practice, student teachers still encounter challenges during teaching practice. Based on the findings, the study recommends that teacher training institutions and schools where student teachers are placed should work closely to solve challenges that are faced by student teachers during teaching practice.

Keywords : Mentor teachers, Mentoring, Student teachers, Teaching practice

INTRODUCTION.

Student teachers are expected to engage in teaching practice during their studies. In line with this, student teachers registered for Bachelor of Education (Bed) in ODeL that was studied engage in teaching practice for 5 weeks annually for the duration of their studies while those registered for Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) engage in teaching practice for 10 weeks per year. Teaching practice is fundamental for student teachers because it shapes their beliefs and perceptions about the teaching profession .Ray et al., likened teaching practice to an internship where student teachers get an opportunity to be initiated into the real-life world of work. In other words, student teachers get to be introduced into the teaching profession during teaching practice, thus teaching practice has the potential to shape their views about the teaching profession.

During teaching practice, student teachers engage in various activities including lesson preparation, development of teaching aids, lesson delivery, marking of class activities and classroom management . Hence, we understand teaching practice as exposing student teachers to a wide range of activities that are associated with the teachers' work. Osiesi et al., concluded that teaching practice is important for student teachers' professional development, and it cannot be sidetracked or neglected in teacher education.

Furthermore, teaching practice creates a space for student teachers to link the theories learned from the university and the practice . This assertion means that teaching practice allows student teachers to act out the theoretical knowledge they acquired from the university. As part of their teacher education, student teachers acquire content and pedagogical knowledge of particular subjects . Therefore, during teaching practice, they get to showcase their content and pedagogical knowledge in the real school context. Getting a chance to showcase different knowledge domains during teaching practice may help them acquire teacher attributes and skills that are needed by the teaching profession. This view is also stressed by Annan-Brew and Arhin who state that teaching practice equips student teachers with essential skills fundamental to their professional development as future teachers. This is because during teaching practice, student teachers observe, examine, evaluate and think critically about what happens in the school, which helps them to think logically and act with foresight.

Based on the discussion above, it can be inferred that teaching practice plays a significant role in exposing student teachers to the teaching profession. The benefits of teaching practice outlined in the preceding discussion cannot be overemphasized. Hence, teacher training institutions in South Africa consider teaching practice as a fundamental course in their curriculum . Due to this, teacher training institutions send student teachers to different schools to engage in teaching practice to implement what they have studied . Despite having teaching practice as a fundamental course in teacher education, many student teachers face several challenges when engaging in

teaching practice. This study explored different challenges encountered by student teachers when engaging in teaching practice in South African schools. The focus of this study was on student teachers from one ODeL institution in South Africa. This study closes a gap in the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on various challenges faced by student teachers during teaching practice. Initial teacher training institutions will benefit significantly from the findings of this study when devising programmes to support student teachers during teaching practice. To achieve this, we have formulated the following research question: “What are the challenges student teachers from an ODeL institution encounter when engaging in teaching practice in a South African context?”

OBJECTIVES.

To examine challenges teacher trainees face during teaching practice supervision in public secondary schools in Nairobi County.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE.

Ball and Frozani (2009) highlighted teacher educators should prioritize the clinical as part of teaching. To make practice the core of the curriculum of teacher education requires a shift from a focus on what teachers know and believe to greater focus on what teachers do (p.503). In this scenario, grossman et,al (2009) pointed out that, empirical evidence is needed to fully understand how access to various aspects and types of practice both support and hamper the development of student teachers about their teaching skills. Teaching being a skill cannot be taught merely through training during teacher education courses. It only equips student teachers to build knowledge and sketch school class room teaching environment theoretically.

The central thrust of reforms in the teacher education programme is to produce teachers who can perform adequately in the world of work and meet the present day challenges. Teaching practice is a vital aspect of the teacher preparatory programme in teacher training institutions and in Faculties of education. It serves us an opportunity for student – teachers’ vis-a-viz supervisors to be exposed to the realities of teaching and professional activities in the field of education. Every profession has its own practical side. The training lawyers, doctors, engineers and other well-known professions make adequate provision for practical work which forms an integral part of the total training of the professions, hence the teaching practice exercise is the practical aspect of the teacher education programme. A sound profession and teaching practice constitutes an important and indispensable component of the process involved in the adequate preparation of professional teachers.

According to Adesina et al., (1989) teaching practice can be defined as a teacher education programme or activity which involves the student teacher putting in to practice his/her acquired theory of teaching under the genuine experience of the normal classroom situation. It is an opportunity for student-teachers to face the realities of their chosen careers in terms of its demands, challenges and excitement. It can also be seen as the periods when student teachers are aided to put in to practice the theories and principles of education which they have learnt in the classroom as they teach.

Practice teaching is an important component towards becoming a teacher. It provides experiences to student teachers in the actual teaching and learning environment. During teaching practice a student teacher is given the opportunity to try the art of teaching before actually getting in to the real world of the teaching profession. Student teachers also know the value of teaching practice and they perceive it as the important aspect of their preparation for the teaching profession since it provides for the real interface between student hood and membership of the profession (Rakesh Ranjan,2013).

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The framework for teacher education proposes the preparation process of teachers be done in such a way that it reflects the paradigm shift from the content-based to competency based approach in teaching and learning (TIE, 2009). Schultz (2005) provides support for the concept of day-to-day problem solving capacity development through practicum learning. The study highlighted the need for teacher preparation to support new teacher inquiry to help teacher candidates use problem solving approaches when they face the day-to-day challenges in a class room. A study by Brouwer & Korthagen (2005) confirmed the role of the practicum in the overall development of competent teachers. While both class room theory and practicum experiences were found to be contributors to a new teacher’s development, the practicum in a school context was more influential than the course component of the teacher education program on the development of teaching competence.

METHODOLOGY.

This study used a mixed-methods research approach using a convergent parallel design. Both cross-sectional and phenomenological research designs were integrated. The targeted population comprised of 101 principals, 2,455 teachers, 560 teacher trainees, and 11 sub-county directors. Stratified, simple random, systematic sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to select approximately 437 participants, comprising 15 principals, 333 teachers and 84 teacher trainees. Data collection instruments included questionnaires, in-depth interview guides, a document analysis guide, and an observation checklist. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Pearson Correlation), which were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. Quantitative data were presented in tables using frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed and presented in the form of narratives and direct quotes.

DATA ANALYSIS.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data that was generated through online questionnaire. Braun and Clarke, define thematic analysis as a type of analysis that is used to identify, analyse and interpret themes in qualitative data. In this study, raw data was transcribed by the researchers into one sheet. The authors read the raw data multiple times to familiarise themselves with the raw data. Codes were assigned to the raw data, and they were later converted to initial themes by amalgamating some codes while collapsing those that were not significant. The initial themes were reviewed, defined and revised by the authors. Four final themes were identified at the end, and they were used to report the findings of this study.

FINDINGS.

This section presents data through the four identified main themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes are as follows:

- Classroom management issues.
- Sub-theme 1: Struggling to manage the learners in the classroom.

- Sub-theme 2: Difficulty in managing large class sizes.
- Sub-theme 3: Lack of respect.
- School inadequacies in creating worthwhile teaching experiences.
- Poor mentorship experiences; and.
- Difficulty in balancing schoolwork and teaching practice.

SUGGESTIONS.

Based on the results of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

- conducting training workshops and meetings for university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and pre-service teachers to discuss and arrange their specific roles and expectations.
- conducting training workshops for pre-service teachers during field training to enhance their abilities in good planning and practicing modern teaching methods.
- the provision of guides specific to teaching practice with unified visions for educational supervisors, students, school principals and cooperating teachers.
- adding a practical part into the course description of other courses in the study plan because this practical part may increase students' academic achievement throughout their university study
- conducting similar studies with another larger and more representative sample and a study of these challenges from school principals' and cooperating teachers' perspective in order to be more comprehensive.

CONCLUSION.

The findings suggest an exposure of the student teachers to a learning environment in which they can contextualise the theoretical knowledge they gathered during their training. The environment further provides student teachers an opportunity to find out whether they are on the right career path. In this regard, it can therefore be said that teaching practice prepares the student teachers for the classroom. In as much as teaching practice prepares student teachers for the teaching profession, there are quite a good number of challenges that come with pre-service training. In view of this, these researchers think that the placement of student teachers in schools at the end of the year is not such a good idea because this is a critical time for the host teachers and their learners.

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