

Full Length Research Paper

Towards quality supervision and assessment of teaching practice by private universities in Western Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish how the components of supervision and assessment of the teaching practice program in Kenyan private universities was being undertaken. This study addressed these issues through interviews with faculty of five leading universities in western Kenya as well as administering questionnaires to student teachers and their cooperating teachers. Principals of several high schools in four counties namely Nandi, Uasin Gishu, Vihiga and Elgeyo Marakwet were interviewed to give their views on the implementation of the teaching practicum. Concurrent mixed methods design was used in this study. The investigator collected and analyzed data, integrated the findings, and drew inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods. The findings revealed that there was poor coordination between schools and universities concerning supervision and assessment of student teachers. There was very little shared by the two except few correspondences on placement and the conclusion of the exercise. It was also evident that cooperating teachers were not properly utilised in the supervision of student teachers.

Introduction

The supervision of students on TP leads to assessment of their teaching performance (Shaw, 1995). It aims at providing information feedback to help the student teacher gain insight into his / her professional growth (Tillema, 2009). Student teachers are assessed in order to provide information on how well they are performing, to detect difficulties and alert them to areas that need to be strengthened (Nyaumwe & Mavhunga, 2005). Assessment also helps student teachers to implement teaching methods promoted in their teacher education curriculum, evaluate their teaching and reflect on their instructional practice. Chakanyuka (2006) adds that assessment serves to ensure that only those student teachers who have developed sufficiently are allowed into the teaching field and to determine how much the student teacher has acquired in terms of professional knowledge and skills.

Literature Review

Although the practicum is generally accepted as a core element in teacher preparation programmes, the assessment of student teachers' competence during practicum appears to be particularly problematic as making judgments about complex performances, such

as teaching, is a sophisticated process. As with any form of assessment, judgments are made against some criterion or normative standard, and this judgment must ultimately involve some implicit or explicit understanding of what constitutes good teaching (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001), which in itself is a contested construct.

The practicum is also a key site for determining student teacher suitability, or otherwise, for entry into the profession. The quality of the practicum will likely define the quality of teacher education (Zeichner, 2010). However; the assessment of student teacher learning during a practicum is problematic. Problematic issues include the tension between different purposes of assessment, the impact of context on practice and defining what is "good practice" (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001). In New Zealand, assessment of the New Zealand Teachers Council Graduating Teacher Standards (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007) is inherently difficult, as the standards do not lend themselves to direct, objective judgment. Moreover, if standards are to impact positively on student teachers' understanding of their practice, then the teachers and the appraisers must be part of a community of interpreters (William, 1996) who share norms of practice and agree on what constitutes appropriate evidence of good teaching.

Allen, et al. (2013), in their study, reveal that the merit and indeed relevance of university pre-service teacher education programs have long been contested. Particularly in current times with many western governments and commentators demanding higher levels of accountability in teacher performance, questions are increasingly being raised about how well teachers are prepared (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Neville, Sherman, & Cohen, 2005). In Australia, the context of this study, a range of recent reports and policy responses (Churchill, 2007; Eyres, 2005; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007; Masters, 2009) provides evidence of the issues associated with the gap between theory and practice in pre-service teacher education.

According to Levine (2006), a widely held concern is that we run the risk of preparing teachers who know much about theory and nothing about practice. Others suggest that separating theory from practice creates a false dichotomy and that teaching is a profession in which theory is embedded in and inseparable from practice (Lenz Taguchi, 2007; Schön, 2003). Nevertheless, "theory," "practice" and the so-called "theory-practice gap" are commonly used and widely understood terms in the context of teacher education and in the literature (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Zeichner, 2010). Many argue that one of the major reasons for the perpetuation of the theory-practice gap in the practicum is the continuing separation of teacher education responsibilities between universities and schools (Zeichner, 2010). The OECD's (2005) call for "stronger partnerships between schools and teacher education institutions" echoes others in promoting the need for reform. Indeed, the forging and fostering of school-university partnerships has been identified as one of the critical components in creating more powerful and more effective teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Louden & Rohl, 2006). Partnership arrangements that meet certain criteria, including a genuine engagement in the learning process, have been shown to deliver the most positive results to pre-service teachers (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2009; Darling Hammond, 2010).

In her study of seven highly successful and long-standing United States teacher education programs, Darling-Hammond (2006) argued that programs including well-constructed, collaborative and effectively-coordinated field experiences contribute significantly to equipping trainee teachers with requisite knowledge and skills to serve diverse learners well and to learn continuously from their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Central to the success of such programs are: coherence, based on a common, clear vision of good teaching grounded in an understanding of learning; a strong core curriculum, taught in the context of practice; extensive, connected clinical experiences that support the ideas and practices presented in coursework; an inquiry approach that connects theory and practice; school-university partnerships that develop common knowledge and shared beliefs among school and university-based faculty; and assessment based on professional standards that evaluates teaching through demonstrations of critical skills and abilities (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

However, there are a number of identified barriers associated with establishing models of this kind that depend on meaningful and sustained collaborations between schools and universities. Bloomfield (2009), for example, points to the range of time and resource constraints experienced by staff in both sectors, which can intrude on the creation of effective partnerships. This can result in a lack of reciprocity between academics and school teachers in acknowledging the differences between their cultures, histories and workplace responsibilities (Sachs, 1999). An associated concern is the lack of clarity surrounding the expectations and responsibilities of those involved in supervising the pre-service teacher practicum (Allen & Peach, 2007; Allen & Wright, in press; Cherian, 2007; Trent & Lim, 2010), which can result in very different stakeholder interpretations of what practicum entails (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Hayes, Capel, Katene, & Cook, 2008) and a less than optimum experience for the pre-service teachers involved (Allen & Wright, in press). In Australia, a 2007 federal government report into the nation's teacher education programs highlighted problems associated with the practicum and advocated the need for "major reform" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007). Focus of the paper is the beliefs and experiences of school and university supervising staff members regarding the efficacy of the practicum in enabling students to enact theory in practice.

Methodology

Concurrent mixed methods design was used in this study. The most common and well-known approach to mixed methods is the Triangulation Design (Creswell, Plano Clark, et al., 2003). The purpose of this design is to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic to best understand the research problem. The intent in using this design is to bring together the differing strengths and non- overlapping weaknesses of quantitative methods (large sample size, trends, generalization) with those of qualitative methods (small N , details, in depth) (Patton, 1990). This design is normally used when a researcher wants to directly compare and contrast quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings or to validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative data.

Research Instruments

Data was collected from Principals' of high schools and University Supervisors by means of a semi-structured face-to-face audiotape interview. The questions asked were related to interviewees' articulating their own observations and beliefs in relation to good practice in terms of supervision of student teachers. Questionnaires were administered to the student teachers and their cooperating teachers. The questionnaires covered areas of interest, which is supervision and assessment of Teaching Practice. The researcher carried out spot-checks to make observations on the goings-on using a well prepared observation schedule. The researcher studied documents found at the Faculty offices touching on

Teaching Practice supervision and assessment and was able to come up with an analysis of the supervision and assessment reports done by the department.

Interviews for principals were conducted in their offices while that for the university supervisors was done at the faculty offices at the request of the researcher. Questionnaires were prepared for student teachers and their cooperating teachers. After obtaining permission from the school principal, the researcher met the student teachers and their cooperating teachers separately and explained to them the procedure of filling the questionnaires.

An observation check-list to be used by the researcher was prepared and the items included observing the working relationship of the student teacher and the cooperating teacher, the behaviour of the student teacher before and after assessment, the reaction of the students towards the student teacher, among other items. The researcher visited faculty offices of the TP coordinator to study and analyse documents such as student TP files, TP guidelines, supervisor's reports and the comments made by school principals.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The study was conducted in schools located in Western Kenya where students from four leading private universities were undertaking their Teaching Practice. The periods of Teaching Practice lasted three months from January to early April, 2015. The researcher conducted the study on twelve (12) students from UEAB, twenty (20) students from Africa Nazarene University Eldoret campus, fifteen (15) students from Mount Kenya University (MKU), and eleven (11) students from Great Lakes University (Kapsabet campus). The total number of respondents was sixty (60) student teachers and sixty two (62) cooperating teachers. Together with the four universities mentioned above, Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA-Eldoret campus) provided two supervisors who were interviewed to make a total of ten (10) interviewees who were TP supervisors. The researcher was provided access to documents used by these universities for

supervision and assessment of TP. The researcher took time to study and analyse the documents and they will form part of the findings obtained. The researcher prepared an observation schedule which he used to study the behaviour of student teachers and their environment during TP. During this period, interviews were conducted on twenty six school Principals present at the time of administering questionnaires.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive analysis of data was done for questionnaires. The data collected was encoded and analyzed using the Predictive Analytics Software (PASW). Content analysis was used to analyse data obtained from interviews and documentary analysis.

Findings and Discussion

In the table 1 below, the cooperating teachers agreed that they provided a room for the student teacher to work from and prepare for lessons with a mean of 3.76 which shows that a majority of them played this role effectively. This shows that it will be easier for the cooperating teacher to monitor and assist the student teacher. The cooperating teachers were asked in Table 1 whether they made provisions for teaching resources for the student teacher in which case they responded affirmatively with a mean of 3.61. Student teachers were in agreement that they were provided with teaching resources as revealed by their relatively high mean of 3.45 as shown in Table 2 below. When asked whether the collaborating teachers were of great help, they responded positively with a mean of 3.43 recorded in Table 1. This shows that the cooperating teachers take their supervisory work seriously by providing support to student teachers. Principals interviewed feel that universities should provide part of these resources because in their view the student teachers seem to entirely depend on school resources including writing materials, charts and files.

Table1: Cooperating Teachers' Response

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I provide the student teacher with a place to work and prepare lesson	62	1	4	3.76	.534
I model effective teaching practices and ask student teachers to observe for certain practices	62	1	4	3.63	.607
I helped the student teacher understand and respect each student's individuality	62	1	4	3.68	.594
I help the student teacher collect necessary materials for teaching, including teachers' editions, school bulletins, schedules, class rolls, school handbook, and courses of study.	62	1	4	3.61	.610
I explain methods of record keeping, reporting to parents, extracurricular activities, and school policies and procedures for evaluating and grading students	61	1	4	3.33	.851
I encourage the student teacher to be creative and to implement methods learned in university course work.	62	1	4	3.65	.630
I work with the University supervisor and the student teacher to plan a well-balanced program of learning activities that will allow the student teacher to actively participate, observe, and evaluate his or her performance	62	1	4	3.11	1.057
I work with the student teacher and the University supervisor to develop a plan for the student teacher to assume responsibility in the classroom, and allow the student teacher to assume more responsibilities as he or she exhibits the readiness to do so	62	1	4	3.19	.920
I involve student teachers in non-instructional activities, such as staff meetings, professional meetings, school organizations, school club work, and community activities	62	1	4	3.45	.843
I alert the student teacher to the advantages presented by including parents as partners in the education process.	62	2	4	3.27	.772
I assist the student teacher in establishing a positive working relationship with the teaching assistant and develop a plan for student teacher to work with the teaching assistant during weeks of full-time teaching.	62	1	4	3.45	.986
I provide student teachers with strategies for informing parents about their children's school experiences and achievement	62	2	4	3.53	.593
I encourage the student teacher to be active in parent-school activities such as PTA meetings. I recognized the student teacher at such activities as a professional co-worker.	62	1	4	3.37	.814
I encourage the student teacher to recognize that all parents are concerned about their child's progress in school, imploring him/her to accentuate the student's positive performance	62	1	4	3.47	.824

I develop an overall supervision plan involving observations, criteria for evaluation, and supervisory strategies, all of which we discuss with the student teacher and the University supervisor	62	1	4	3.06	1.084
We hold weekly conferences during which I, the cooperating teacher, and the student teacher could plan, share information, evaluate, and make decisions	62	1	4	2.71	1.165
I plan weekly observations and follow-up conferences that help the student analyze lessons taught, with an emphasis on continuous growth, encouraging the student teacher to evaluate his or her personal and professional progress.	62	1	4	3.00	.992
I provide clear formative feedback through post-observation conferences about teaching practices.	62	1	4	3.35	.907
I encourage the student teacher to be creative and to implement methods learned in university course work.	61	3	4	3.77	.424
I encourage the student teacher to respect all parents regardless of sex, race, religion, or social class.	61	2	4	3.80	.542
Supervision	62	2.25	3.95	3.4099	.36914
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Cooperating teachers revealed that they work with the University supervisor and the student teacher to plan a well-balanced program of learning activities that will allow the student teacher to actively participate, observe, and evaluate his or her performance. This is demonstrated by the moderately high mean of 3.11 as shown in Table 1 above. During my observation schedules, I found this to be true especially with regard to student teachers of Africa Nazarene University who had made arrangements with their university supervisor and cooperating teacher to ensure that the cooperating teacher attended some of the lessons to observe their delivery and thereafter make their comments.

In their responses, the cooperating teachers reveal in Table 1 that they provide clear formative feedback to student teachers through post-observation conferences about teaching practices with a moderate mean of 3.35. Observations made by the researcher revealed that this formal feedback was restricted to items like the schemes of work, lesson notes and exam setting and marking.

The other forms of feedback were mainly informally done through discussions during meals or in their offices especially since most of them shared the same rooms with their cooperating teachers. These other forms of feedback revolved around discussions on student conduct in class, handling of certain challenging topics and co-curricular activities.

Cooperating teachers encouraged student teachers to be creative and to work with all parties concerned including parents as shown by their relatively high scores of means of 3.77 and 3.80 respectively as seen in Table 1. Creativity was observed in items like charts and in practical lessons involving the science subjects. Student teachers found themselves in a position where they had to face parents to explain their children's performances. In this case they requested for guidance from their cooperating teachers. Parents are particularly keen to know who is handling their children and how they are responding to them.

Table 2: Student Teachers' Response

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The number of visits by my supervisors is adequate.	60	1	4	3.42	.766
The feedback I got from the supervisor was helpful during teaching practice.	60	3	4	3.92	.279
The interaction with the supervisor(s) during his/her visit was friendly.	60	1	4	3.68	.676
All supervisors came from my department.	60	1	4	3.02	1.157
An external supervisor came to assist me during my teaching practice.	60	1	4	1.83	1.152
*I was not visited by a supervisor during my entire teaching practice.	60	1	4	1.12	.490
The supervisor was always in time for my lessons.	60	1	4	3.37	1.104
*The supervisor often left before the lesson was over.	60	1	4	1.10	.477
*The supervisor made undue demands that were not related to his/her work.	60	1	3	1.12	.372
I was assisted by my collaborating teacher to obtain teaching resources.	60	1	4	3.45	.910
My collaborating teacher attended all of the lessons that I taught.	60	1	4	1.98	1.097
I was given an orientation tour of the school by my collaborating teacher.	60	1	4	2.92	1.306
My collaborating teacher checks my lesson notes before I gave the students.	60	1	4	2.72	1.290
The principal of the school saw me more than once to discuss my progress during teaching practice.	60	1	4	2.92	1.197
I found the collaborating teacher to be very helpful during my teaching practice.	60	1	4	3.43	.998
Valid N (listwise)	60				

*Negative statement – recoded in the computation of the mean

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Supervision	60	2.27	3.87	3.2211	.41288
Valid N (listwise)	60				

One of the ways of implementing supervision was by the university supervisors visiting their students on TP. When asked whether they were satisfied with the number of visits by their supervisors, the student teachers responded in the affirmative with a moderately high mean of 3.42 as shown in Table 1. This reveals that most of the students were happy with the number of visits but there is still room for improvement in this area. Observations by the researcher revealed that there were glaring disparities in the number of visits. The researcher found out that in one school with two student teachers, one student had been seen twice while her colleague had been seen six times. The researcher could not fully establish the reason for this disparity except the fact that the student teachers came from the same university but were teaching different subjects.

Despite the fact that the number of visits by the university supervisors was satisfactory, the researcher found out that the student teachers were very happy with the quality of the supervision. When asked whether they were happy with the feedback they got from the supervisor and if it was helpful during teaching practice, they responded positively with an very high mean of 3.92 as shown in Table 2. The researcher was

particularly impressed by UEAB supervision strategy of having two supervisors observe one student in the same class during their visits. There was a feeling that a more balanced judgement would be reached rather than that of one supervisor. Student teachers also observed that the university supervisors were friendly with a relatively high mean of 3.62 as shown in Table 1 above. These, in the observation of the researcher, added to the quality of the supervision by enabling the student teachers express themselves freely during their post-observation conferences. When asked whether their supervisors arrived for their lessons in good time, student teachers responded with a moderately high mean of 3.37 as shown in Table 2. They were happy with the fact that their supervisors were mostly in time and stayed throughout the duration of the lesson.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Student teachers and cooperating teachers agree that the implementation of supervision and assessment of Teaching Practice was well done as evidenced by their positive response concerning its adequacy and effect on the student teachers improved performance. However,

there is poor coordination between schools and universities concerning supervision and assessment of student teachers. There is very little shared by the two except during placement and the conclusion of the exercise. Universities and schools need to work closely to close the gaps revealed in the study that includes placement of student teachers, role of cooperating teachers and harmonising of professional records.

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