

TEACHING PRACTICE POLICY FOR NCE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME: A CRITIQUE

Augusta C. Assimonye

Abstract

The Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) is the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria. NCE-Awarding institutions mainly the Colleges of Education are controlled by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) that is charged with the setting of the minimum standards as well as maintenance of standards and evaluation. The new Minimum Standards (2012) actually broadened the provisions on teaching practice. The paper considered these provisions such as orientation of public schools by state ministry of education (SMOE), external supervision by cooperating teachers and assisting teachers to become mentors by the training institutions. The implications of these were discussed and recommendations made among which are that the NCCE and NCE-Awarding institutions should design a mentor training programme for cooperating teachers and that there should be a proper liaison between the NCCE, Ministries of Education (MOEs) for the management of teaching practice.

Teacher Education is the professional training given to teachers entering or already in teaching profession. The minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria is the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) which aims at producing “teachers with high personal and professional discipline and integrity, teachers who are dedicated with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes that would facilitate easy achievement of the national goals” (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2012).

There are two major components of teacher education- the theoretical and practical- the former comprises subject matter content and general studies in education courses while the latter comprises teaching practice. Teaching practice is the teaching done by teacher- trainees in a real school setting under the guidance of an experienced teacher. It is aimed at providing student-teachers (STs) opportunity to put into practice their theoretical knowledge in a school-life situation. The objectives of TP are outlined thus:-

1. To expose STs to real life classroom experiences under the supervision of professional teachers.
2. To provide the forum for STs to translate educational theories and principles into practice.
3. To enable STs discover their own strengths and weaknesses in classroom teaching and provide opportunities to enable them overcome their weaknesses and consolidate on their strengths.
4. To familiarize STs with the school environment as their future work place.
5. To provide STs with an opportunity for further acquisition of professional skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experience for full-time teaching after graduation.
6. To help STs develop a positive attitude towards the teaching profession.
7. To serve as a means of assessing the professional competence of STs. (FGN, 2012)

Teaching Practice Policy

1. **Posting:** According to the Minimum Standards students are to be assigned to nursery (Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE), institutions, primary schools, junior secondary schools and adult/non formal settings. This is to make sure that all levels of basic education are covered, though the policy is silent on the standard of these education centers. Nursery education, for instance, is an all comer affair mostly in private hands and of various standards. There is also no

stipulation as to the kind of non-formal settings. The guideline ought to streamline the basic requirement of these cooperating settings to ensure uniformity and seriousness.

2. **Orientation of Cooperating Schools:** The policy stipulates that state Ministry of Education should orientate public schools to cooperate by accepting students on teaching practice in their schools. The question is ‘why public schools only?’ From the experience of the writer, private schools are increasingly co-operating with training institutions. The Early Childhood Care Centers are almost entirely private. Is it to be implied that private schools are not to serve as cooperating schools?

The aim of the orientation is to get the schools to cooperate by accepting students on teaching practice in their schools. ‘Does it need to end in accepting student –teachers?’ The orientation should be a kind of workshop aimed at familiarizing the schools with the demands of cooperating with the training institution in the production of future Nigerian teachers. The following should form the points of such orientation.

1. The duties of the student-teachers toward the cooperating school/teacher.
2. The duties of the cooperating school/teacher towards the student teacher/training institution
3. The strategies to be adopted by the cooperating teacher
4. The relationship between the school and the training institution
5. The advantages of partnering with the training institution in teaching practice programme.

Another implication of this provision is that the ministry must also orientate the schools on suitability, not only to see that they accept, but that they are fit to accept student teachers. The Policy ought to streamline the characteristics of a good practice school for the ministry to ensure that schools are qualified, and the schools to accept students knowing full well the responsibilities and advantage of such.

School Surveys

The Policy equally provides for surveying and contacting of cooperating schools before posting of student teachers.

This is an ideal situation as institutions must assure themselves of the possibility of STs gaining professionally from cooperating schools. The implication is that every teaching practice unit must have a functional vehicle and purse for this purpose as outlined in the implementation guidelines. To ensure compliance, the reports of school surveys before each TP exercise must be sited by every NCCE monitoring them.

Student-Teacher Supervision

According to the Minimum Standards “Nce –awarding institutions must assign supervisors to STs based on their areas of specialization such as ECCE, PES etc. to ensure that such supervision is focused, well informed and based on the supervisor’s practical professional skills and knowledge”.

ECCE and PES especially mentioned are relatively new and are still lacking in sufficient manpower. To make sure that this requirement is met more lecturers on these areas need to be recruited or sponsored for further degrees.

The Implementation Guideline further elaborates that ‘residential supervisor (cooperating teacher) should play a vital role in the overall supervision, provide continued guidance to student teachers and forward effective assessment of ST to training college’. The method of forwarding is left to the parties involved. From experience, sending reports through STs are fraught with difficulties such as tampering, lateness in submission, loss, threat by schools to seize reports etc. The ideal is for the training institution to collect the reports directly from the schools. For objectivity and uniformity

of assessment by residential supervisors, the Policy ought to provide a standard format just as they provided the teaching practice assessment form.

Teacher Mentors

The policy provides for the keeping of journals by STs. 'Such journals should be regularly handed in to teachers. Teachers must provide comments to aid STs identify strengths and weaknesses in their professional skills. NCE-Awarding institution.....to assist teachers in these schools to become mentors'.

It is to be noted that mentoring job is not easy. The Policy identified some of them -provision of continuous guidance to STs, mark STs Journals, and provide comments to aid them in their professional skills. It also provides for training schools 'to operate a school-based teacher professional development programme to assist teachers to enhance their profession and also to become effective mentors.' There is no description of the nature of assistance and what it entails. But it is no less than mentor training. How many teachers are to be assisted in each school? This is not specified. What about the training institution, do they have the competent manpower for that? Or can the training start with the trainer? In any case such training should be based on the following

1. Qualities of a good mentor
2. Strategies of mentorship

Rowley (2010) identified six qualities of a good mentor. A good mentor is committed, non judgmental of the mentee, skilled in providing instructional support, good at interpersonal relations, a model of continuous learner and communicates hope and optimism. To help mentors acquire the above skills Rowley (2010) and Bio (2009) described the contents of the training.

To ensure commitment of mentors, their training must provide specific descriptions of the roles and responsibilities as well as benefits of mentor teachers. It is only with full knowledge can commitment be made. For the development of empathy for STs, works on helping relationship can be read and discussed. For examples works of Carl Rogers. Theories of adult development can also be read. The training exercises will also involve teachers to thoughtfully revisit their early years of teaching in order to help engender a more accepting disposition towards teacher trainees regardless of age and prior life experiences. To provide instructional support, the training must help teachers to learn

1. subject-specific issues in curriculum and instructional practices
2. Basic professional skills such as effective communication, student teachers' evaluation, and writing progress report.

The training must equip them to develop multiple methods of classroom observation, communication and feedback skills. Mentor teachers must be ones that have not lost their positive outlook. The training must help them to get involved in their professional association, attend professional conferences, and participate in the training school's workshops and conferences. Mentoring strategies include sharing experiences, working/planning together, questioning, observation, modeling, listening to STs fear/problems, prompting him/her on his plans and difficulties (Wikipedia 2003). The training will involve describing ideas on these strategies.

Teacher mentors are very crucial to the realization of teaching practice objectives. For according to Young and Edward (2006) cooperating teachers are primary significant others in modeling student-teachers emergent professional lives as they are inducted into the teaching profession. For cooperating teachers to become mentors there must be a form of monetary or otherwise compensation either from the training institution, ministry of education, NCCE or service school. Mentors will need to be released from regular classroom duties for observations, demonstration lessons, evaluation exercises and meetings with STs. There cannot be effective

mentoring where the teacher mentor is over loaded with routine school work. The introduction of mentoring calls for the selection of enthusiastic teachers who will be trained for the role and enabled administratively to carry out the function.

Conclusion

The Minimum Standards provide a guideline that will make teaching practice ‘a valuable experience for student teachers to develop and apply professional skills’. As the pivot of the exercise the NCE-awarding institutions, NCCE, MOEs and cooperating schools must come to an understanding, united in a common front. Their activities must be harnessed, complementary and reinforcing. For the provisions to be effectively implemented these stake holders need to liase together on the fronts highlighted by this paper.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made towards ensuring professional expertise through teaching practice.

1. Needs assessment made of NCE-Awarding institutions should be implemented to cater for infrastructure lack that impede effective implementation of the policy on teaching practice.
2. Standards of ECCE, primary schools and non-formal education centers that should serve for teaching practice must be specified.
3. There should be a proper liaison between the NCCE and MOEs (State and Federal) for proper management of teaching practice in cooperating schools especially as regards the support to be provided by school teachers, their obligations and remuneration, cooperating schools’ orientation, assessment and approval.
4. NCCE and NCE-Awarding institutions should come up with mentor training programme for school teachers.

References

- Boi, B. (2010) Taking a Student Teacher [hHp://www2.education.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/Best of bilash.html](http://www2.education.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/Best_of_bilash.html). Retrieved Jan12 2013.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2012). *Nigeria NCE Minimum Standards for General Education*. NCCE Abuja: Tet Fund Project
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012) *Curriculum Implementation Framework for NCE*: NCCE Abuja: Tet Fund Project
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) *National Policy on Education*. Abuja: NERDC
- Rowley, J.P. (2012) Educational Leadership (EL) [hHp://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may99/vol. 56](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may99/vol.56). Retrieved 7th October 2012.
- Young & Edwards, M.C. (2006) A Comparison of Student Teachers’ Perception of Important Elements of the Student Teaching Practice Experience Before and After *Journal of Agricultural Education* 43 (3).
- Wikipedia (2013) Mentoring Techniques. Retrieved 7th May 2013. [hHp://en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).