

TEACHING PRACTICE IN THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Teacher education 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. Teacher education is often divided into: initial teacher training / education (a pre-service course before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher); induction – teaching-practice (the process of providing training and support during the first few years of teaching); teacher development or continuing professional development (in-service process for practicing teachers). The process of mentoring in supervision is relevant. There is a longstanding and ongoing debate about the most appropriate term to describe these activities. The term 'teacher training' (which may give the impression that the activity involves training staff to undertake relatively routine tasks) seems to be losing ground to 'teacher education' with its connotation of preparing staff for a professional role as a reflective practitioner.

For the last 50 years, educators have devoted a great deal of energy to the debate over whether teaching can be considered a profession. Unfortunately, this turns out to have been the wrong question, and so led us to the wrong sort of answers. For example, there was a very heated debate in the 1960s and 1970s over whether teachers could organize strikes and still claim that they were members of a professional association, rather than a union. This controversy only makes sense, however, if one accepts that professions are fundamentally different from other types of occupations, and by the mid-1970s, social scientists were beginning to realize that this was not the case. They argued that the professions had changed so much over the past 100 years that there is now little left to distinguish professionals from other workers; this ought not to be so. The need to professionalise teaching in Nigeria can never be over-emphasised. As earlier stated in the preceding paragraph, a cursory appraisal of the features of a profession will pass teaching for a profession; after all the population of trained teachers in Nigeria in recent times is in the increase with the establishment of Colleges of Education and University Faculties of Education in the country. However, on a critical consideration of the concept of profession vis-à-vis the status of teaching and the image of teachers in the Nigerian society, their conditions of service and a host of other factors militating against the upliftment of teaching to a prestigious status, it would be an act of fallacy to completely pass teaching for a profession (Ereh and Ina, 2007).

Professionalizing teaching in Nigeria has been the fight of those seriously involved in the business of teaching. Teaching practice is an important component of teacher preparation effectiveness of the ladder of professionalizing teacher education. This is because as education plays a fundamental role in national development so does teacher education in the success of any education system. The teacher is a critical resource for effective implementation and realization of educational policies and objectives at the practical level of the classroom. It is the teacher who ultimately interprets and implements the policy as represented in school curriculum, which is designed to actualize educational goals. The obvious implication of this situation is the fact that the quality of a nation's education can only be as high as the quality of its teachers (Omojuwa, 2007). Also Omojuwa (2007) expressed that considering the sensitive and enormous responsibility of the teacher; teacher education of the 21st century definitely requires better repositioning and proper focusing if education is to play its fundamental role successfully as an instrument of government for realizing some part of its national goals in the 21st century world. Teacher education of this century must make a clear difference by producing teachers who are sound academically and professionally; able and committed to appropriately equip the 21st century pupils/students for a holistic development intellectually, socially, spiritually, morally and emotionally so as to enable them to face the challenges of this time as well-informed, creative and productive citizens.

Teacher education in Nigeria is directed towards the attainment of the following five goals:

1. Production of highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational systems;
2. Encouraging further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
3. Helping teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;
4. Providing teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations;
5. Enhancing teachers' commitment to the teaching profession (National policy in Education, 2004; 39).

Teaching has been viewed differently by scholars over the years. Traditionally; teaching is seen as a process of making impression on passive learners, hammering in fact into an empty/blank heads, the impartation of knowledge, skills and values. Today, this view is frowned at because it portrays teaching in the sense of "*mug and jug theory*" which sees the students as the receptacle, and the reservoir of knowledge, unless the knowledge comes from the teacher (Keziah, 2003). The role of the teacher is thus to fill the empty heads with facts whether relevant or not. It delivers to student what is required and they have no reason to question but receive what is offered to them. The idea here is that the teacher does and gives all to the student who only receives, in fact the teacher has the monopoly of knowledge required to be imparted. In modern times, teaching is taking in different dimensions. Teaching is the attempt to help someone acquire a change of attitude, knowledge, idea, skill or appreciation (Clark, 2003). It is a process of helping someone to acquire problem solving skill and the ability to think for themselves. It is helping the individual learn, so that he/she not only knows how and where to obtain needed information, but to develop the habit of enquiry and be a lifelong learner.

Inadequate Class Control and Management and the Student-Teacher

Successful classroom management is essential for effective instruction and a teacher's belief in his or her ability to positively facilitate student learning may affect classroom management behavior (Henson, 2001 cited in Yilmaz and Cavas, 2008). Although classroom management and effective instruction are interrelated with each other, many studies indicated that both pre-service and in-service elementary teachers perceive a lack of connection between the information provided in teacher preparation programs and the real classroom environment (Laut, 1999 cited in Yilmaz and Cavas, 2008). Moreover, teachers thought that they were inadequately prepared in handling classroom management and it is a distinctive factor in causing stress. Classroom management could be viewed to mean the way teachers organise certain non-academic classroom activities which are necessary in an orderly manner for effective teaching and learning to take place. According to Greaves (2007), it is the process of organising and coordinating the willing efforts of children to achieve their own educational objectives. The classroom teacher establishes and maintains conditions which will enable pupils to apply all their energies to the challenges of classroom activities rather than expending such energy on disruptive activities. Classroom management entails planning, organising, directing and controlling human and non-human resources in an orderly manner to achieve pre-determined classroom objective. It is the arrangement and utilisation of human and non-human resources in classroom setting to effect desired change (Regina-Obu, 2005).

Effective classroom management is the bed rock for the attainment of success in classroom activities. It involves the integration and effective utilisation of the three (3) basic qualities every teacher should possess in order to achieve success in the classroom and they are; good knowledge of subject matter, the teachers in-depth knowledge of variety of methods of instruction and good knowledge of the pupils in his/her classroom. Good classroom management does not just happen; it requires considerable thought, good judgment and making careful planning before the class begins which is needed in order to have a group of students act in an orderly manner and to ensure a successful learning. As a student-teacher, your responsibility is to provide stimulating, attractive

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classroom environment which serves as enabling condition necessary for the realisation of classroom efficiency. Unfortunately, classroom management is one area the student-teachers find problems with during teaching practice. Okorie (1986) see classroom management as a careful planning which is needed in order to have a group of students act in an orderly manner to accomplish the tasks that have been established to guarantee enjoyable satisfying and worthwhile experience. Eneye and Asuru (2002) defined it as the provision and procedure necessary to establish and main an environment in which meaningful learning and instruction occur. To Ifeagwu (2000), it is the harnessing of all resources (human facilities, equipment, material, and funds) in an effective and efficient way so as to achieve educational goals. The combined effect of the above definitions points to the fact that a poorly managed, undirected and uncontrolled classroom leads to disorder and disreputable behaviour during classroom teaching and that affects learning as it cannot be promoted under such condition. Classroom management and control involves not only supervision and control of students' behaviours but everything that takes place in the class. Discipline is one essential factor that supports classroom management. According to Greaves (2002), discipline is "*training especially of the mind and character, to produce self-control, habits of obedience etc.*" Greaves maintain that discipline refers to the maintenance of general conditions of order without which nothing can be effectively done or learnt. In the view of Adesina (1980) discipline is the readiness or ability to respect authority and observe conventional or established laws of the society or any other organisation. Therefore, the student-teacher as a manager plays the role of an organiser of human (students) behaviours and attitudes, a leader whose leadership qualities guide and challenges learners to do expected activities designed for their overall development.

Student-teacher is a disciplinarian who applied appropriate reinforcement to make a student achieve set objectives. Keziah (2003) evaluated that for the purpose of effective classroom control, teachers at times have to employ military discipline and accept the teacher as a help to maintain the tone of the school or helping to transmit culture. Ifeagwu (2000) posited that classroom management control has two qualities. These are "*authority*" and "*efficiency*". In authority, student-teacher should maintain his/her dignity and self-respect avoid trying to be popular with his/her students. Once this is flouted through corruption or otherwise, he/her loses his/her authority or power over the students. Also, consistent truth and logic is necessary for trust. Be firm but fair, do not be strict with discipline today and lag tomorrow, firmness and fairness bring respect and sense of justice and fair play for equity. Re-enforce positively and negatively, wisely, and as when appropriate. Give adequate recognition and respect for learners as individuals and as partners in the teaching learning process. Appraise yourself, self-criticism, shows that you are in charge always. In efficiency, the student-teachers should be methodical, diligent, punctual, and industrious, knowing his or her job very well that is having a good mastery of his or her subject matter and the students, read wisely, is prepared, enthusiastic and show interest and life in his or her teaching. Regina-Obu (2005) noted that, the years when Nigerian children were assumed and regarded as well brought up, that they could not defy the authority of the teacher are gone. Recent developments in different levels of education in Nigeria indicate that this confidence has indeed been eroded. Pathetically, teachers now find themselves in classes filled with miscreants, who are disposed to violence at any time. They not only vent their wickedness at their fellow students but also at their teachers. They involve themselves in activities that could result to bodily harm to others including their teachers. In a bid to control such phenomenon, effective class control is essential, to achieve effective classroom management by the student-teacher he /she according to Koko (2002) must exhibit acceptable control through his/her;

1. Personality
2. Professional competence
3. Effective communication skills
4. Interpersonal relationship

On teacher personality, Ifeagwu (2000) posited that effective class management is dependent on the teacher's personality. It is believed that positive personality traits will lead to effectiveness in controlling the class. Personality should not be misconstrued to mean the person's physical look or

build but rather that of his or her projection of his social self such social self should reflect charisma, firmness of principles and mature behaviour. The teacher's educational qualification does not connote professional competence. The teacher must have a good grip of the subject of instruction if he/she is to engage his/her students' interest to participate in learning.

Effective communication does not occur unless the receiver of the information understands what is said and applies it to achieve goals. The level of students' understanding should be of paramount value to the student-teacher since teaching involves the art of human communication or interaction, concerted efforts must be made to adopt adequate communication network system in classroom management. For instance, in the management of the class, the teacher establishes rules and regulations to guide the conduct of the students while in class. Greaves (2007) found that one way of reducing disruptive classroom behaviour is to develop a healthy relationship with your students. A teacher can develop an effective teacher-student relationship by maintaining an honest interaction with students, sharing some of his/her personal and professional feelings with them and allowing the students to share their feelings with him/her. Ifeagwu (2000) pointed out some essential points to be taken into consideration by a student-teacher in order to achieve proper class management. Some of them are; be positive, have faith in one's self and reduce rules, give enough work to keep students usefully engaged to avoid noise and segregation. Talk naturally in a related atmosphere, it encourages learning, avoid alarms, harshness, bitter expressions, incitements loudness etc. your lesson must be well organised, interesting and meaningful, this will go a long way towards preventing mischievous behaviour. Always consider individual differences. All students cannot behave the same way. Give each ample opportunity to participate and praise effort put in each piece of work.

Individual Difference of Pupils and the Student-Teacher

Learners are not the same in the way they learn, behave, perform skills or develop physically or mentally. All children are different and have different needs and aspirations. An important factor which has a bearing upon the number of pupils that may be successfully instructed by a teacher in his class is the differences in rate of learning to a greater or lesser degree. Some individuals can learn a given skill or given amount of knowledge more rapidly and with greater apparent ease than others. Thus in a classroom situation, the teacher is confronted with a number of learners who can be considered exactly or even approximately identical with respect to their response to his teaching methods. Even though they are all in the same class, perhaps having passed the same subjects before being assigned to the class, yet there is bound to be a wide range of learning differences in the class. Chibueze (1981) noted that, there is bound to be differences among the students and this shows that children cannot be the same and they never do anything at the same pace, learning inclusive. Afe (1995) in agreement with Chibueze, admitted that every pupil in the classroom is unique as some pupils may be of high ability while others may have a low perception of themselves. Individual differences among pupils have no limit. Thus in planning and classroom delivery of learning activities, individual differences among pupils should be taken into consideration. A teacher who ignores this all important aspect of his pupils will face many difficulties in his task of imparting knowledge to them. It is therefore a wrong notion for a teacher especially a trainee teacher to assume that all he needs to know is how to teach his subject. A good teacher should know him/herself, know the subject matter well and above all know the child he/she is going to teach. He/she should not wrongly assume that a class of students will learn at the same rate. Okah and Uzoechi (2005) indicated that a teacher should realise that there are individual differences in the understanding abilities of pupil and there is divided range of abilities. At one end there will be slow learners who will need extra bit of help from the teacher and will always make additional demands on his patience and time. At the other end there will be very bright boys and girls who are quick to pick-up new ideas, concepts and there may be some pupils who are more intelligent and more gifted than their teachers. The student-teachers shall therefore take into cognisance the individual difference in students in his lesson plan. However, to ensure that intelligent and gifted children are given enough work to do. Okorie (1986) listed some of the methods and techniques a teacher can use to individualise his instruction;

1. Use techniques in class according to the abilities, interest and goals of the pupils

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2. If possible, convert some of the classes as a classroom laboratories
3. Make use of small group instruction
4. Make a differentiation between class work and homework/assignments
5. Give individual pupils or groups specific assignments
6. Make use of individual or group projects
7. Help the pupil to see the need for independent study
8. Render help to the pupils as the need arises
9. Encourage the use of a variety of textbooks and other materials
10. Help the pupils use self-instructional materials such as self-connecting assignments e.g. correspondence course.

Supervision and the Student-Teacher

One of the cardinal purposes of teaching practice is to provide opportunity for the student-teachers to demonstrate the competence in his special subject area. Also, it is to know the extent of mastery of subject content and therefore an opportunity to apply the various theoretical, psychological, sociological, administrative and pedagogical principles to which he/she has been exposed to in the course of training in the classroom. The only way however to ascertain this fact is through supervision. Notably, the place of the supervisor in a teaching practice exercise is of utmost importance as his functions are likened to those of a site engineer in a building project. According to Okujagu (1988) the role of the supervisor in a teaching practice exercise includes;

1. Visiting and supervising practice teachers in the process of teaching in the classroom.
2. To make supervision and assessment of student effective, supervisors shall watch lessons as much as possible from the beginning to the end to enable them offer detailed assessment and comprehensive criticism of the lesson so observed
3. Supervisors should always find time to discuss their constructive criticism of the students' teaching with the student-teacher preferably immediately after the lesson has been supervised.
4. Supervisors should check, correct, make comments, sign and date students – teacher's lesson plans especially those they supervise.
5. Supervisors should commend innovation techniques, improvement on the past and resourcefulness on the part of student-teachers.

Regrettably enough, the activities of most supervisors during teaching practice exercise tilt towards the opposite direction. Experience show that supervisors engage in shabby deals such as not watching student-teachers teach in classroom, collection of much gratification from students, giving scores to students indiscriminately even when such students do not go to the school to which they were posted for the teaching practice exercise. The implication of this attitude of supervisors is numerous. First, the essence of the teaching exercise is defeated. Moreover, it tends to discourage serious minded student-teachers from having confidence on the meaningfulness of the whole exercise. If the essence for which the teaching practice exercise was initiated as part of teacher education is to be achieved, supervisors must rise up to the challenges of their professional calling be more focused and show commitment to duty in order to save the system from total collapse.

Conclusion

Teaching practice in the professionalization of teacher education in Nigeria is a necessity in an effort to improve upon the dwindling quality of the Nigerian education profession. This is because it will bring about improved standards, strong code of ethics in principle and practice to check the conduct and quality of those who want to engage in teaching and the teaching itself. Effectiveness teacher preparation program which teaching practice is an integral part is critical for education to meet the challenges of the 21st century in a developing country such as Nigeria.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that programs of our teacher training should be balanced in terms of coverage and depth of treatment of both academic and method components. Candidates for training should be of high standard. To ensure excellence in teaching practice which will translate to professional practice must be guided by both technical and ethical standards as mandated by the profession.

Ones' ability as a professional teacher to excel in performance and productivity is a function of the aggregate of professional orientation in practice. Such aggregate of professionalism in teaching are that:

1. The teaching technique should be suited to the readiness and maturity level of the students using it;
2. The method of presentation should be guided by the objectives of the subject matter and the purposes of the learning;
3. Adequate equipment / facilities should be available to ensure effective implementation of lesson plan;
4. The procedure should provide for sequential growth and development through a planned progression of learning activities and concepts;
5. There should be adequate planning and preparation on the use of any instructional approach.

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