

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN PRACTICE TEACHING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT:

Teaching Practice is one of the main components of any teacher training programme that helps students to develop professionally. To be effective, professional development must provide student teachers with a way to directly apply in teaching practice what they learn from their teaching. In other way, teaching practice gives opportunity to the students to put their theories into practice. As teaching practice is an important component of teacher training program, considerable attention must be given to make it

more effective and fruitful. Though teaching practice is an important part in educating the student teachers, they are confronted with various issues and challenges during teaching practice. This paper mainly focuses on the problems faced by teacher trainees while integrating theory and practice and how they are able to overcome them during their Teaching Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice always occupies a special or key position in the teacher education programme. Furlong et al. (1988) says that "Teaching practice provides opportunity to beginning teachers to become socialised in the profession. It plays a central role in achieving the goals of teacher education". Teaching practice is an important constituent of becoming a teacher. It helps the student teachers to gain experience in the real life set-up. Kasanda (1995) said that "Teaching practice gives the opportunity to student to try the art of teaching before actually getting into real world of the teaching profession". Menter (1989) remarked that student teacher knows the value of teaching and they perceive it as "the crux of their preparation for the teaching profession since it provides for the 'real interface' between student hood and membership of profession". Teaching practice is moreover like integration of theory and practice. Wallac (1991) said "Teaching practice refers to the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve his/her professional practice in the context of the real classroom, usually under some form of guidance and supervision". Perry says, "Teaching practice refers to the period of time which a student teacher gains first-hand experience in working with a particular group of children". According to Salawu and Adeoye (2002), "Student Teaching Practice: is a practical teaching activity by which the student teachers are given an opportunity in actual school situation to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skill over a period

of time. Fagbulu (1984) pointed out that Student Teaching Practice is a kind of 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.

According to Adesina, Daramola and Taiabi (1989) teaching practice can be defined as a teacher education programme or activity which involves the student-teacher putting into 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 career in terms of its demands, challenges and excitements. It can also be seen as periods when student teachers are aided to put into practice the theories and principles of education which they have learnt in the classroom as they teach (Ogonor and Badmus, 2006).

The aim of the teaching practise exercise according to Ogonor and Badmus (2006) is:

- ★ To provide the teacher trainee some type of pre-service training which serves as an opportunity to be exposed to the realities of teaching and performance of professional activities.
- ★ It provides opportunities for students to test theories learnt and ideas in the classroom as they come in contact for the first time with real life situations.
- ★ It provides trainees the opportunity to utilize the various teaching methods in actual classrooms/school conditions under the constant supervision of competent and experienced teachers.
- ★ It exposes student teachers to professional activities, which are part of the teacher roles in schools

Professional development can be defined as teachers' ongoing learning to improve the way to teach, and it occurs both in formal and informal way. Professional development includes formal experiences (such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline, etc.). Guskey says, "Professional development is a systematic effort to bring about changes in the classroom practices of teachers in their attitudes and beliefs and in the learning outcome of students." Professional development of a teacher can already start during his/her training period if the teacher training programme is designed to provide "a broader approach in which developmental insights is learned alongside classroom teaching skills" (Head & Taylor, 1997). Gall and Renchler (1985) described professional development more specifically as "efforts to improve teachers' capacity to function as effective professionals by having them learn new knowledge, attitudes and skills."

TEACHING PRACTICE: IMPORTANCE

According to Brown and Brown the teaching practice period is one of the most important components of the teacher training programme. It gives opportunity to the trainees to integrate theory and practice. The importance of teaching practice is:

- 1. An opportunity to gain confidence:** The student teachers are exposed to the real life classroom in teaching practice where they can face the students in reality. In practice teaching the student teachers get the opportunity to be in contact with the students for almost more than a month and build a rapport. So, this helps them to construct or gain confidence when they are exposed to any teaching situation later in future.
- 2. Integrate theory and practice:** Teaching practice helps the trainees to put their theories into practice in the real life classroom situation. Whatever the student teachers learn in their theory is able to apply all the pedagogic skills in the real life set-up. They get opportunity to learn the skills of how to be an effective and competent teacher.
- 3. Knowledge of subject-matter is improved:** The student teachers seek the help of different resources like internet, books so that they can gain knowledge on various subject matters to address the class on different topics.
- 4. Helps in Self- Reflection:** The practice teaching helps the student teachers in self-appraisal. It helps them

to discover their strengths and weakness. They can self-reflect on themselves. This will help them to plan, monitor and evaluate their teaching. NCFTE 2009 also focuses on Reflective practices on the preparation of trainees.

5. Real life exposure to children: The student teachers in practice teaching not only read in theories about how to handle the children in class but they also are able to do that practically using their pedagogic skills. They also learn to use multiple strategies in their teaching-learning process in the teaching practice.

TEACHING PRACTICE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teaching practice, as we know is one of the central mechanisms of teaching programme. It helps the trainees for best preparation and helps to accentuate on the subject matter to gain mastery over it as it assist the student teachers to spend time in real life classrooms under the supervision of an experienced mentor. The teaching practice of course helps in professional development of the student teachers because it applies them to apply their learning of theory in the context of teaching in real life classroom. There are many ways in teaching practice which helps in the professional development of the trainees. They are:

1. They are exposed to the real life classroom where they have to prepare themselves to face the students for teaching. To teach the students they need to get exposure to various learning resources like internet, books, and journals. So reading extensively in various areas to address the class is helping them to develop professionally.
2. Practice teaching also helps the trainees in doing Reflective practices. It helps the student teacher to understand his/her strengths and weaknesses so that they will be able to rectify their mistakes and plan it in a different way.
3. Student teachers are encouraged to make an effort for developing relationship within the school when they go for practice teaching. This can be useful not only during the practicum itself as staff can help a great deal about the school and its policies, but connections made with staff during a practicum can often be helpful later in one's career so it helps in professional development.
4. In teaching practice student teachers are also encouraged to observe teaching of several different subjects of teachers to gain an idea of the variety of teaching styles and possibilities for classroom management. This also leads to professional development.
5. Student in practice teaching are always encouraged by mentors to attend seminars, conferences and workshops for their betterment to gain ideas about different views and areas. This type of exposure always leads to professional development.

NCFTE (2009) in their report mentioned "Teaching is a profession and teacher education is a process of professional preparation of teachers. Preparing one for a profession is an arduous task and it involves action from multiple fronts and perspectives. A profession is characterized by a sufficiently long period of academic training, an organized body of knowledge on which the undertaking is based, an appropriate duration of formal and rigorous professional training in tandem with practical experience in the field and a code of professional ethics that binds its members into a fraternity". NCFTE also has laid down certain curriculum and evaluation procedures for professional development of the teachers at initial stages.

They are:

- * Conformity with the values enshrined in the Constitution.
- * All round development of the child.
- * Building up child's knowledge, potentiality and talent.
- * Development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent.
- * Learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly and child-centred manner.
- * Medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue.
- * Making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely.

★ Comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child understands of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same.

According to NCF (2005), the teachers can help the trainees by sharing the underlying educational philosophy and possess the needed understanding and professional competencies to develop such teachers. This would imply a corresponding change in the professional development of teacher educators who can:

★ Engage would-be teachers with the larger socio-political context in which education and learners are situated, engage them with children in real contexts than teach them about children through theories, focus on the developmental aspects of children with constant reference to their socio-economic and cultural contexts.

★ Bring into the teacher education curriculum and discourse trainees 'own assumptions about children and beliefs about knowledge and processes of learning, help teachers to reflect upon their own positions in society - gender, caste, class, poverty, linguistic and regional variation, community, equity and justice.

★ Engage with theory along with field experiences to help trainees to view knowledge not as external to the learner but as something that is actively constructed during learning; integrate academic knowledge and professional learning into a meaningful whole.

★ Provide opportunity for trainees for reflection and independent study without packing the training schedule with teacher directed activities; provide opportunities to the student teacher to critically examine curriculum, syllabi and textbooks.

★ View knowledge not as an external reality embedded in textbooks but as constructed in the shared context of teaching-learning and personal experience, change perception of child as a receiver of knowledge and encourage its capacity to construct knowledge, view learning as a search for meaning out of personal experiences and knowledge generation as a continuously evolving process of reflective learning.

CURRENT CONCERNS OF TEACHER EDUCATION BY NCF (2005)

The NCF has described the current concerns of teacher education which acts as distinct pointers for addressing issues. They are on the different aspects of teacher education curriculum reform:

★ Experiences in the practice of teacher education indicate that knowledge is treated as 'given', embedded in the curriculum and accepted without question; there is no engagement with the curriculum. Curriculum, syllabi and textbooks are never critically examined by the student teacher or the regular teacher.

★ Language proficiency of the teacher needs to be enhanced, but existing programmes do not recognize the centrality of language in the curriculum.

★ Teacher education programmes provide little scope for student teachers to reflect on their experiences.

★ Disciplinary knowledge is viewed as independent of professional training in pedagogy.

★ Repeated 'practice' in the teaching of a specified number of isolated lessons is considered a sufficient condition for professional development.

★ It is assumed that links between learning theories and models and teaching methods are automatically formed in the understanding developed by student teachers.

★ There is no opportunity for teachers to examine their own biases and beliefs and reflect on their own experiences as part of classroom discourse and enquiry.

★ Theory courses have no clear link with practical work and ground realities.

★ The evaluation system followed in teacher education programmes is too information-oriented, excessively quantitative and lacks comprehensiveness.

★ Apart from conceptual and pedagogical aspects, existing programmes need to develop certain attitudes, dispositions, habits and interests in a teacher. The present evaluation protocol has no place for

evaluating these aspects.

TEACHING PRACTICE: ISSUES

In practice teaching the teacher trainees are faced with lots of problems. The student teachers though they come up with various issues in teaching practice can be broadly classified under 7 categories:

1. Problems with self: The teacher trainee's main concern in practice teaching is mostly about their self-confidence, commitment, health and personality. The trainees doubt their ability to change the students' discipline and attitude towards learning when they are unaware of their theoretical knowledge they lose self-confidence while teaching. The poor result of the students shows lack of commitment of the trainees. Moreover, when they are sick, health becomes one of the obstacles in teaching and thus jeopardising the self-commitment of a teacher.

2. Problem with students: The other issues faced by trainees are that they are encountered with diverse students they had to teach in different classes in various subjects. They also face students who are fast learners, slow learners and also students who don't feel to complete their task and some having no capacity to complete their learning tasks. Some students are also found to be in disciplined as the trainee teachers are new to them and not permanent.

3. Problem with Teaching: The teacher trainees in teaching practice are usually concerned about whether the lessons went on smoothly or interrupted as these would affect the learning and teaching objectives of the lesson. The teacher trainees often face problems in selecting or teaching approaches to deliver the curriculum to the students. The lack of this knowledge often leads to problem in teaching practice.

4. Problem with School: The trainees when they go for teaching practice, experiences a lot of problems while working with other teachers in schools. These create uneasiness in the minds of the trainees whether they are really welcomed in the schools. Therefore, the abilities to mingle with others and making oneself available to school's need are problematic.

5. Problem with Supervision: In teaching practice the trainees are supervised to improve the teaching learning process. But the trainees are identified with many problems but they are probe to know more about their weakness and want to discuss more about how to overcome them. But, it is found that they are not treated fairly in giving marks and mainly in times of observation which are often to be too rigid.

6. Problem with Learning: The trainees when go for teaching practice mainly thinks that they are only on the verge of teaching practice and so before planning a lesson they don't even think of how to think and how to present in front of the students for better learning. They are in hurry just to complete their practice period soon. Therefore, their inappropriate ways of teaching sometimes results in poor learning of the students which in turn affects their achievement. The trainees learning in school are also sometimes problematic as they are new and the senior teachers are reluctant to share their experiences sometimes.

7. Problem with Preparation: The teacher trainees have to face a lot of problems in getting ready to teach because in practice teaching students need to focus on time-tables so that they can finish their classes on time. But, it is always found that the time-table clashes with another teacher. So, in the preparation stage they have to focus on finding texts as well as reference books which add up more to their existing problems.

TEACHING PRACTICE: CHALLENGES

When the trainees go for actual school setting for teaching practice the expectations placed on them are very high by their mentors, instructors and facilitators. After entering the school, they find themselves in an unknown situation which pushes them to face various challenges such as:

1. Stress of interacting with students: No matter how many Pedagogical Content classes a student teacher takes regarding classroom management and child/adolescent development, actually being around students is an overwhelming feeling. Student teachers feel pressure to behave in a professional manner

while developing a good rapport with the students. They can also find themselves exhausted after such a long day of interaction, especially having come from a much more individualized university setting.

2. Mentor teacher relationship: Students teachers also feel a great deal of stress around the relationship that will develop between them and their mentor teachers. This relationship is extremely important for the length of the practice and often sets the tone for a student teacher's experience.

3. Planning and teaching: Having to plan their own lessons is a challenging experience for many student teachers, especially taking into accounts that they are being constantly evaluated by their mentor teachers. Student teachers must learn to create diverse and engaging lessons; they must then learn how to put those into action, something which is easier said than done.

4. New environment: Student teachers can also feel challenged and out of their element simply by being in this new school environment. It is difficult to get to know the staff or the practices as quick as one would like. Until this is accomplished, student teachers can feel very out of their element which adds to their stress.

5. Time table is short: The time table given to the student teachers during teaching practice is very less and they have a lot of tasks to complete in a short period of time along with taking so many classes. The trainees have to complete lessons plans and fill up proformas like - lesson note, details of the schools, observation schedule of other trainees, Action research note and many others which really becomes a challenge for them.

6. Lack of Instructional Materials: The trainees always don't get schools where all resources are available. So, sometimes they have to teach without teaching aids as there is no provision for it. The lack of instructional materials like Technology, White board, Internet. Even libraries have shortage of books and other resources in many schools. This creates a challenge for the trainees during teaching practice.

7. Lack of accommodation during the teaching practice programme: The trainees during the teaching practice mainly face hurdles with accommodation as they don't get any allowance during the teaching practice programme. If they are accommodated in some place they have to pay for staying and also for food. So, this also becomes a challenge for many trainees during teaching practice.

8. Evaluation: Student teachers also feel a great deal of pressure to perform well in front of their mentor teachers as they are very aware that the evaluation from their MTs will be very influential in their future job searches.

CONCLUSION

Teaching practice is the most important part of teaching programme. It is to assess Teacher trainees in programmes such as B.Ed. and M.Ed. for their professional development. It is an opportunity for trainees to put their theoretical studies into practice. It helps them to get prepared for future to face challenges through acquisition of various teaching skills. The teaching practice is thus helping the trainees to develop professionally for future but still there are many issues which are not being addressed properly.

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