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Perceived Relevance of Teaching Practice Exercise to the Teaching Profession: The Case of Teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

The need to produce quality professional teachers to drive the educational system of any nation cannot be overemphasized. This study was to assess the perceived relevance of the teaching practice exercise to the teacher training programme. Three research questions and five hypotheses were used to guide the study. The population of the study comprised all the professional teachers in the state, stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 250 respondents out of which 240 teachers filled the forms correctly. A questionnaire titled "Relevance of Teaching Practice Exercise Scale (TPSS)" was used for data collection and analysis was done using simple percentage, mean score, independent t- test and ANOVA. Results among others showed teachers have high perception of the relevance of teaching practice exercise. The teachers reported problems like large class size and low interest of students to learn among problem were not obvious during the teaching practice that they are encountering now. The teachers among others suggested that, proper supervision , period of teaching practice being extended and stipends being paid to the student teachers as some of the ways to improve the exercise .No significant difference was found on the perceived relevance of teaching practice based on gender , age , teaching experience and ownership of school during teaching practice . However, there was significance difference in the perceived relevance of teaching practice based on programme of study during teaching practicing. Recommendations were made based on the results.

Keywords: teaching practice, teacher training programme and relevance.

1. Introduction

No nation can develop sustainably beyond the quality and quantity of the teachers in its educational system. Any nation aiming to achieve any level of sustained development puts in a large chunk of her resources in the educational sector as this sector drives the economic, political and all other sectors; failure to invest in this system has and will always lead to poverty, quagmire, rancor, violence, anarchy etc. Teacher education or training in most countries, incorporate a period student teachers go out to the field to put what they have learnt in the classroom into practice. This period termed teaching practice or as Taneyain in Gujjar (2017) listed, student teaching field studies, infield experience, school based experience or internship, which is a very important aspect of teacher education.

Tracing the history of teacher education in Nigeria, Adewuji and Ogunwji in Ogunyinka, Okeke and Adedoyin (2015) noted that it dates back to the activities of the missionaries, between 1842-1860 with the first teachers institute established at Abeokuta in 1859 by the Church Missionary Society. Later there were other teacher training colleges established all over the county to produce high caliber teachers for the educational sector. Presently, teacher education is domiciled in Colleges of Education, National Teachers Institute and Education Faculties in various Universities: for all these institutions, the teaching practice exercise is a must for the award of the various certificates.

Teaching practice has been defined by various authors in different ways. Nwoke in Uriah (2014) saw it as a kind of apprenticeship stage during which the student teachers, go to school to acquire practical and professional experience by putting into practice all the educational principles and theories learned from their classrooms. Mentear in Nayimuli (2009) however had observed that there has been a shift in the literature from the concept of teaching practice emphasizing the apprenticeship model to the concept of field/school experience emphasizing an experiential model. Kinanee (2014) defined it as an exercise that provides the needed laboratory experiences for student teachers to develop the skills, attitudes and practical knowledges of what teaching entails and translating same into real classroom conditions. To Gujjar (2017), It is the process of getting student teachers ready for teaching by practical training, practical use of teaching methods, teaching strategies, teaching principles, teaching techniques, practical training and practical exercise of different activities of daily school life. Asuru (1999) saw it as a period of pre-certification teaching where the student puts the theories, principles, practice and skills he has acquired in an actual school setting. It is a period of exposing the student teachers to the field to turn the acquired knowledge of what teaching is to practically having a feel of what it is.

In line with this, Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) opined that, teaching practice provides for the authentic content with which students are exposed to experience the complexity and richness of the reality of being a teacher. Agina-Obu (2009) identified various ways the teaching practice exercise is programmed in various institutions, some he said use:-

- a. The two phases 12 weeks structure.
- b. The 12 weeks block duration
- c. The 12 weeks part time teaching practice
- d. The one academic year teaching practice

Gujjar (2017) however noted that in Pakistan, it takes a period of 4-8 weeks

The teaching practice exercise has many purposes including:

- Helping students to have a feel of what teaching is all about
- It gives the students the opportunity to see if they are in the right profession
- Through teaching practice, students teachers build some lasting relationships both with students they teach and other personnel in the school
- Students teachers benefit from being evaluated by both the supervisors and the permanent teachers in the school
- Students are helped to see the teaching methods and strategies that are effective.

Kinane and Okujaju (2014) added that

- -It helps students develop positive attitude towards the teaching profession
- -It enables student teachers to effectively plan and prepare lesson etc.

The student teachers also experience the responsibility of being a teacher, thereby seeing themselves as role models that can impact on the students as they are expected to participate in all school activities, conduct morning assembly or devotion, teach their classes, maintain discipline and get involved in extra-curricular activities.

Teaching Practice Exercise is seen by most as the climax of the Teacher Training Program as it not only provides the opportunity for students to merge theory and practice but also affords them the chance to try out teaching methods and techniques to find out what works for them. The students also come to learn that primary and secondary school environment are different from University environment as they will be expected to nurture the pupils and students placed in their care. Most student teachers approach the teaching practice exercise with some apprehension and anxiety considering the demands it makes on them, but experiences have shown that most turn out to enjoy the period and cherish the influence they had on the students.

Studies on students have shown teaching practice not to be a waste of time as Bolarfina (2010) noted, it inculcates in them professional qualities needed in real classroom and school situation. He recommended among others, that: stipends should be given to student teachers, the teaching practice period be extended and that students should be properly supervised. Jekayinfa et al (2012) in their study of 'Lectures Assessment of Teaching Practice Exercise in Nigeria Universities randomly selected Education Lecturers across six geo-political zones and found all of them rated teaching practice to be very relevant in preparing teachers. They found experience and job status had significant influence on the lecturer's assessment of the relevance of the teaching practice exercise while gender had none. Similarly, Olugbenga (2013) study on the Perception of Students Towards Participation in Teaching Practice Exercise in Ekiti State University, showed students having negative perception but found no significant difference in perception based on gender.

While Wambugu, Barman and Ng'enor (2013) studied Student Teachers Perception of Relevance of Teaching Practice in Egerton University Kenya and found students, teachers perceived it as very relevant. They found no significant difference based on area of specialization but there was significant difference in the perception of the students based on gender.

Ekundayo (2014) in his own study on Teaching Practice Exercise for Education Students in Nigeria Universities: Challenges and the Way Forward' listed problems of lack of finance and accommodation when posted far from their institutions, while Onyeso (2016) reported problems like no teaching aids, high work load and uncooperative attitude of some permanent teachers. Student teachers also complain of communication gap with their institutions especially when having problems with their supervisors. In Rivers State particularly, security issues have become problematic as school teachers are being kidnapped for ransom.

Though challenges abound, the teaching practice exercise is very vital in teacher education and is very useful in helping students teachers imbibe professional trait preparing them for the real classroom situation and as Onyeso (2016) added, it helps the students teachers on lesson preparation and delivery and also helps them build confidence. It is expected that lessons learned during teaching practice will help the teacher on the job. The problem of this study therefore is to find out the relevance of teaching practice exercise to what the teacher is doing in the classroom or school, considering all the efforts and resources put into the exercise by all concerned.

1.1. Research Questions

The following questions are asked to give directive to the study

1. Is the teaching practice exercise relevant in preparing the classroom teacher for the job?
2. Are there problems the classroom teachers are encountering that were not obvious during teaching practice?
3. How can the exercise be improved?

1.2. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were posed to guide the study

- Ho₁: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on gender.
- Ho₂: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on age

- Ho₃: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on teaching experience
- Ho₄: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on programme when on teaching practice
- Ho₅: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on school ownership during teaching practice

2. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design and all professional teachers in Rivers state comprised the population. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 250 teachers from public and private, primary and secondary schools.

Data was collected using a self- structured questionnaire titled "Relevance of Teaching Practice Exercise Scale (TPSS). The instrument had two sections 'A' and 'B' section 'A' was on biodata while section 'B' had 18 items on relevance of teaching practice exercise to the professional teacher. Mean scores and percentages were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test and One-way ANOVA were used to analyze the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

3. Result

Results are presented based on the research questions and hypotheses. Only 240 questionnaires were properly filled, returned and used in analysis.

- Research question 1: is the Teaching Practice Exercise Relevant in preparing the classroom teacher for the job

S/N	ITEMS	Total	Mean	Grand Mean	Decision
1	The Teaching practice programme is effective in preparing teachers for the teaching job	918	3.8	2.5	Relevant
2	Teaching practice has helped me to know the proper format in lesson note writing	916	3.8		Relevant
3	Teaching practice exercise helped to develop in me skills in lesson preparation and methods of lesson delivery	858	3.6		Relevant
4	From what I learnt in teaching practice, I can introduce my lesson effectively	840	3.5		Relevant
5	From what I learnt in teaching I can relate well with my students now	834	3.5		Relevant
6	Exposure to teaching practice has helped in improving my communication skills in the classroom	829	3.5		Relevant
7	I am still using the teaching method I used during my teaching practice period	761	3.2		Relevant
8	It has helped me to improve on my evaluation skills	820	3.4		Relevant
9	Because of the teaching practice exercise, I can state the objectives of every lesson in measurable terms	846	3.5		Relevant
10	It has helped me to prepare my lessons regularly before teaching	836	3.5		Relevant
11	From the teaching practice exercise, I now use aids whenever I am teaching	816	3.4		Relevant
12	It has helped me to improve in the mastery of my teaching subject	794	3.3		Relevant
13	Because of teaching practice, my questioning skills and students participation in classroom activity have improved	786	3.3		Relevant
14	I learnt how to encourage my students to participate in class activities because of my teaching practice experience	822	3.4		Relevant
15	It taught me how to control my class effectively	855	3.7		Relevant
16	The dress code for teaching practice has influenced my dressing as a teacher	819	3.4		Relevant
17	I dress corporately because of what I learnt during teaching practice	820	3.4		Relevant
18	I still practice the corrections my supervisors gave me during my teaching practice period.	737	3.1		Relevant

Table 1: Mean Score Presentation of Relevance of Teaching Practice Exercise.

Result on table 1 shows the teachers perceive all the items with mean scores ranging from 3.1 to 3.8 to be higher than the grand mean of 2.5. This means that they are all relevant in preparing the student teachers for the job

- Research question two: are there problems classroom teachers are encountering that were not obvious teaching practice.

	Problem	No	%
1	High class size	228	95
2	Format for lesson plan being difficult	218	91
3	Students low interest in learning	144	60

Table 2: Percentage Presentation of Problems Encountered Now That Were Not Obvious during Teaching Practice

Table two shows the major problems teachers said they are encountering now that were not obvious during the teaching practice period. The table shows 228 teachers representing 95% complain of high class size while 91% noted the format for lesson plan being different from what they were taught. Sixty percent also complained of students' low interest in learning

- Research question three: How do you suggest the exercise can be improved.

	Suggestion	No	%
1	Supervision should be made more effective	235	98%
2	Monthly allowance should be given to teaching practice students	230	96%
3	Students- teachers should be given other responsibilities like; marking of registers, being class teachers, games masters, conducting assembly etc.	216	90%
4	Teaching practice period should be extended	213	89%
5	The TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) method of writing lesson note should be taught in schools before students go for teaching practice	213	81%
6	Instructional materials should be provided for teaching practice students	168	70%

Table 3: Percentage Presentation of Suggestions by Teachers on how Teaching Practice can be improved

Table three shows suggestions made by classroom teachers on how the teaching practice exercise can be made more effective. While 98% suggested more effective supervision, 96% said monthly allowance should be given to teaching practice students, 90% said other responsibilities should be given to teaching practice students, 89% suggested extension of teaching practice period, 81% noted that the TKT method of writing lesson note should be taught in teacher training schools and 70% suggested instructional materials be provided to students.

- Hypothesis One: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on gender

Students t-test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Mean	60.37	61.63
Variance	39.67	54.59
Observations	90	150
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	238	
t Stat	-1.41	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.08	
t Critical one-tail	1.65	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.16	
t Critical two-tail	1.97	

Table 4: T-test Statistic of Gender and Perceived Relevance of Teaching Practice

Table 4 shows the t calculated value of -1.40 to be less than the critical t value of 1.97 at 95% probability level and at 238 degrees of freedom while the calculated P value of 0.16 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05 based on this result we do not reject the null hypothesis this implies that the perceived relevance of teaching practice to the classroom teachers does not differ significantly based on gender

- Hypothesis Two: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on age

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>St dev</i>	
Below 25 years	39	2384	61.13	36.43		
26-35 years	62	3775	60.89	58.56		
36-45 years	73	4447	60.92	70.49		
46-55years	66	3978	60.27	44.63		
ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	23.77	3	7.92	0.15	0.93	2.64
Within Groups	12933.17	236	54.8			
Total	12956.93	239				

Table 5: One-way ANOVA of Age and Perception of Classroom Teachers Towards Teaching Practice

Table 5 shows the calculated F value of 0.15 at 3 and 236 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance to be less than the F-Critical value of 2.64, hence we do not reject the null hypothesis, this implies that there is no significant difference in the perceived relevance of teaching practice based on age.

- Hypothesis Three: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on teaching experience

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Below 10 years	87	5503	63.25	60.03		
11-29 years	74	4562	61.65	34.09		
21-30 years	54	3245	60.09	32.09		
above 31 years	25	1531	61.24	71.11		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	350.26	3	116.75	2.49	0.06	2.64
Within Groups	11058.39	236	46.86			
Total	11408.66	239				

Table 6: one-way ANOVA of Teaching Experience and Perception of Classroom Teachers Towards Teaching Practice

Table 5 shows the calculated F value of 0.15 at 3 and 236 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance to be less than the F-Critical value of 2.64, hence we do not reject the null hypothesis, this implies that there is no significant difference in the perceived relevance of teaching practice based on teaching experience

- Hypothesis Four: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on programme when on teaching practice

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
NCE	77	4556	59.17	40.35		
B.ED	112	7020	62.68	75.66		
PGDE	51	3104	60.86	51.08		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	568.06	2	284.03	4.80	0.01	3.03
Within Groups	14019.27	237	59.15			
Total	14587.33	239				

Table 7: One-way ANOVA of Programme When on Teaching Practice and Perceived Relevance.

Treatments pair	Tukey HSD Q statistic	Tukey HSD p-value	Tukey HSD inference
NCE vs B.ED	4.3594	0.0064699	** p<0.01
NCE vs PGDE	1.7252	0.4444365	Insignificant
B.ED vs PGDE	1.9765	0.3445476	Insignificant

Table 8: Tukey-Kramer Analysis for Significance of When on teaching Practice

Table 7 shows F value of 4.80 at 2 and 239 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance to be higher than the F-Critical value of 3.03, hence we reject the null hypothesis which implies that there is a significant difference in the perceived relevance of teaching practice based on programme when on teaching practice. The Tukey-Kramer HSD shown in table 8 shows that NCE and B.ED have means which are more similar.

- Hypothesis Five: The perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise to the classroom teacher does not differ significantly based on school ownership during teaching practice

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>
Mean	60.89	58.95
Variance	71.89	53.26
Observations	154	86
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	238	
t Stat	1.86	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.03	
t Critical one-tail	1.65	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.06	
t Critical two-tail	1.97	

Table 9: T-test Statistic of School Ownership when on Teaching Practice and Perceived Relevance of Teaching Practice

Table 4 shows the t calculated value of 1.86 to be less than the critical t value of 1.97 at 95% probability level and at 238 degrees of freedom while the calculated P value of 0.16 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05 based on this result we do not reject the null hypothesis implying no significant difference in perceived relevance of teaching practice based on school ownership during the exercise.

4. Discussion

Result on table one shows all the items relevant as their scores are all above the grand mean indicating that the teachers see the teaching practice exercise as relevant in preparing the student teachers for the teaching profession. This result agrees with the findings of Jekayinfa et al (2012) who found all the lecturers in his study to assess the exercise to be relevant. The teaching practice exercise is the hall mark of teacher training education as it gives the student teachers the opportunity to put the theories they learnt into practice thereby having a feel of what the teaching profession is all about.

On problems the teachers are encountering now that were not obvious during teaching practice, 95% of the teachers complained of the high class size, 91% of the format for writing lesson note which is different from what they were taught during teaching practice while 60% complained on students' low interest in learning. The problem of high class size agrees with the findings of Onyeso (2016) who reported that even during the teaching practice exercise schools had very high class sizes.

Table 3 shows results on what teachers suggested to improve the exercise. Effective supervision was high on the list (98%), 96% suggested stipend for the student teachers, 90% said students should be given other responsibilities, 89% said the time for the exercise should be extended, 86% recommend schools teaching the TKT method of writing lesson note be taught and used during teaching practice while 70% said instructional materials should be provided. Some of these are in line with the findings of Bolarinwa and based on his findings recommended stipend be given to students, the teaching practice period be extended and that students should be properly supervised.

Result on hypothesis one shows no significant difference in perceived relevance of teaching practice exercise based on gender of teachers. This results agrees with the findings of Jekayinfa et al (2012) who found no significant gender difference in their study but in disagreement with Wambugu, Barman and Ng'enor (2014) who found gender to make significant on perception of students towards teaching practice. This result could be because all professional teachers believe the teaching practice exercise is a huge part of the teacher training program. The same result of no significant difference was found among teachers who did their teaching practice in public or private schools, probably because all the teachers trained together so their experiences should be same though observation has shown that some private schools have very different ways of running their schools.

No significant different in relevance of teaching practice was found based on teachers' age and teaching experience (hypothesis 4&3). This however disagrees with the findings of Jekayinfa et al (2012) who found teaching experience and job status to significantly influence lecturer's assessment of relevance of teaching practice

Result on hypothesis 5 on a program during teaching practice and perceived relevance of the exercise however showed a significant difference on how teachers on different programs perceived the relevance of teaching practice. On administering the Turkey test, it was seen that NCE and B. ED have means which are more similar

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The teaching practice exercise is very necessary in the teacher training programme. The study assessed the relevance of the exercise in preparing the teacher for the profession and concludes that the exercise is very relevant. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:-

1. Student teachers on teaching practice should be posted to schools not too far from the teacher training institutions unless accommodation will be provided for them by the teaching practice schools.
2. The training institution should liaise with the Federal Ministry of Education to know the method of writing lesson notes approved by the ministry and teach it to the students
3. Teaching practice allowance should be provided by the Federal Government to ease financial burden teaching practice creates for students
4. Student teachers should be made to do the duties of form teachers, sport masters etc. while on teaching practice

5. Permanent teachers should be made to also supervise and score student teachers, this will form a good comparison to the scores given by supervisors.
6. Effective supervision should be done by lecturers from the training institutions

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