

Challenges of Teaching Practicum Exercise among Students of National Open University, Nigeria Akure Study Centre

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Abstract

Teachers' preparation is positively correlated with teachers' quality. Teaching practicum is an integral part of teachers' preparation. Limitations to achieving the objectives of education as stated in the National Policy of Education (FGN, 2013) can be traced to the teachers. This study assessed the support system enjoyed by the postgraduate preservice teachers of National Open University, Nigeria Akure Study Centre. The challenges faced by the preservice teachers during teaching practicum were also identified. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. All the postgraduates of education at Akure Study Centre of NOUN were the population. Thirty-three preservice teachers were sample using convenient sampling technique. Practicum Exercise Questionnaire (PEQ) a 4-point Likert-type questionnaire adapted from Extended Practicum Learning Environment Inventory (EPLI) developed by Kennedy (2006) cited in Shah, Ahmad, and Raza (2020) was used for data gathering. Validation of the instrument was conducted ($\alpha = 1$ and $r = 0.78$) were obtained. Analysis of data showed that the preservice teachers excellently received personal support (median = 18.00; 75.00%), personnel support (median = 19.00; 79.16%) and environmental support (median = 18.00; 75.00%). Also, Financial issues (RSI = 75.76), developing administrative skills (RSI = 70.45%), planning teaching strategy, effective classroom interaction and syllabus completion (RSI = 68.94%), identity issue, cooperative teacher feedback, classroom management and lesson planning (RSI = 66.67%), discipling problematic pupils and time table challenge (RSI = 65.91%) among others are some of the challenges of teaching practicum encountered by the preservice teachers. The study concluded that the preservice teachers received enough supports during teaching practicum but financial issues constitute the major challenge.

Keywords: Challenges; Education; Practicum; Preservice; Teaching

Introduction

Education in Nigeria has not been performing its fundamental roles at all level of education in Nigeria. The four key objectives of education as stated in National Policy of Education (FGN, 2013) appear elusive. Education is seen as "scam" among the youths because it has not translated to means of poverty reduction not to talk of poverty alleviation. Nigeria is far from being egalitarian and the political consciousness and participation by the people is very low. It is very difficult for the citizens to identify the contributions of

education in economic emancipation and national development. The high rate of unemployment and the perception of employer on the employability of university graduates in the country serve as a source of discouragement to parents and students in investing in formal education. Socrates says “ignorance is evil and no one intentionally chooses evil” but it appears people are not really interested in formal education because of the perceived failure of school systems.

Teachers’ preparation in Nigeria is facing a lot of challenges which include poor remuneration of teacher education lecturers and other professionals, inadequate facilities, poor support system and high lecturer-students’ ratio which is having negative impact on students’ supervision during teaching practicum. All these are influencing the quality of the teachers produced by the higher institutions of learning.

Teaching Practicum is an essential aspect of teachers’ preparation all over the world. For anyone to be qualified as a professional teacher, participating in teaching practicum during preparation is mandatory. It is through practicum that the trainees have the opportunity to synthesize and apply all that has been taught in the classroom to real life situation in classrooms. Practicum enables preservice teachers to understand and synthesize the interrelationship among courses to make meaningful use of them. Practicum present the opportunity for teachers in training to be closely supervised and monitored while performing the roles of teachers in the schools. The confidence and self-efficacy of the preservice teachers are enhanced through effective practicum exercise.

Teaching practicum involves every experience of preservice teachers during the teaching practice exercise in their various assigned schools. Teaching practicum provides opportunities for student-teachers to have practical teaching experiences in schools. It is an essential aspect of preservice teachers’ preparation. It prepares them to identify and develop appropriate teaching skills and also to be equipped with strategies that can help students for optimum learning gain. Teaching practicum according to Miranda and Wahyudin (2023) is the “practical use of teaching methods, tactics, principles, techniques, practical training, and application of different activities of daily school life”.

Another generic name for practicum is teaching practice. Shan, Ahmad and Raza (2020) citing Azeem (2011) and Gujjar et al (2011) concluded that terms such as “practice teaching”, “student teaching”, “teaching practice”, “field studies”, “in-field learning”, “school-based learning”, “internship” among others are also used for teaching practicum. Teaching Practice according to Chikezie (2017) cited in Aldabbus (2020) is a common feature of any teacher education program that ends up providing graduates with a recognized teaching certificate. Aldabbus (2020) described Teaching Practice

as “the practical use of teaching methods and strategies that the student-teacher learned in the college”. Teaching practice exercise exposed preservice teachers to different teaching strategies that can be effectively used in the classroom. Preservice teachers have the luxury of trying-out appropriate strategies before graduation and securing employment as a professional teacher. Aldabbus (2020) posited further that teaching practice helps in developing appropriate skills and competencies in the preservice teachers. These skills include pedagogical balance, reflective thinking, and technological integration among others.

Teacher education systems depend on how the teachers are developed professionally. This depends on the curriculum and training programmes adopted in the teacher training institutions such as colleges of education or faculty of education in the various universities for teachers’ preparation (Hicks, 2018). Shah et al (2020) argued that teacher training institutes are responsible for improving their level of teacher preparedness to meet the 21st century challenges. It is therefore necessary that student-teachers are adequately prepared before they are allowed to engage in teaching practicum. Shah et al (2020) asserted that

“Training preparation provided in the institutions has a significant impact on the preparedness of student teachers for real classroom teaching. Also, that teaching practicum plays a critical role in the transformation process of trainee teachers to a professionally qualified teacher”.

It is therefore mandatory that all teacher training programmes at every level should place very high premium on teaching practicum in their institutions.

Students learn better by what they do than what they observe others doing. Bichi and Musa (2017) concluded that allowing students to have practical experiences is better than just reading and listening to instructors. Skills can be better acquired through practice which involve doing. Hence a teacher cannot acquire the teaching skills until and unless such students engage in teaching practice or teaching practicum. Abdullah and Mirza (2020) claimed teaching practicum is the only avenue through which preservice teachers as opportunities for practical training on acquisition of basic teaching skills. Koross (2016) asserted that preservice teachers considered teaching practicum as the most rewarding and beneficial of all the programmes in their preparation. Particularly in acquiring skills for teaching, Koross (2016) affirmed further that teaching practicum also enhanced preservice teachers’ socialization into the teaching profession. Parrott (2018) argued that the quality of teaching is of great importance to teachers’ preparation across the globe and therefore, should be given all the attention it deserves. The issue of teaching practicum and its quality should therefore be critically appraised and

analyzed so that quality teachers will be constantly produced by teacher training institutions in the country.

Efficient teaching practicum is expected to promote production of effective and efficient teachers in any organization, community or nation. Since no nation can grow beyond her level of education, it is therefore necessary that all bottle-neck that may mitigate effective and efficient teaching practicum exercise be identified and recommendations on how it can be ameliorated be provided so that positive changes can be achieved through effective teaching activities.

The National Open University, Nigeria according to Onwuagboke, Nzeako, and Enwereuzoh (2022) was established in response to the ever-growing need for tertiary education in Nigeria. The University was established so as to achieve the objective of distance education as stated in the National Policy on Education that *“Maximum effort will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses, or open universities, or part time and work study”* (FRN, 2013, Section 40 (a)). The National Open University was established so as to provide opportunity for students who may not have the opportunity for full time education and also those who will only be available for part time study as a result of challenges of leaving their job to pursue higher education.

Students in the Faculty of Education at the University like in other conventional universities are mandated to participate in the six weeks teaching practicum. The exercise is to help the students in acquiring basic skills in methodologies of teaching, classroom management strategies and other basic skills for effective teaching. Whatever can serve as hinderance(s) to acquisition of the skills by the students should be appraised so that the skills of the students can be appropriately sharpened.

Teaching practicum is an essential ingredient in teachers' preparation all over the world. This exercise in Nigeria has not been able to deliver on its objectives as stated in the National Policy on Education. These challenges equally have direct consequences on the quality of teachers produced by the teacher training institutes. The actual practice of teaching depends much on infield experiences. There is a need therefore to find solutions to the challenges prospective teachers face during teaching practicum. This will help students transition from preservice teacher to in-service teacher. This study therefore assessed the challenges encountered by preservice teachers of National Open University, Nigeria so as to suggest ways of ameliorating the identified challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on Kolb Experiential Learning (KEL) promulgated in 1984. Healey and Jenkins (2000) explained Kolb's theory as a

four-stage model. According to Healey et al (2000), KEL is a simple description of the learning cycle which shows how experience is translated through reflection into concepts and which in turn are used as guides for active experimentation and the choice of new experiences. The four stages are concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC) and active experimentation (AE). The stages are in a cycle and it may be entered at any point. The stages should be followed in sequence. The learning cycle thus provides feedback, which is the basis for new action and evaluation of the consequences of that action. Learners are expected to go through the cycle several times.

Race (1993) in Healey et al (2000) refers to the stages as: wanting, doing, feedback and digesting. The 'experiential learning theory' emphasized activity-based method of learning which include practical works and hands-on in acquisition of skills. Teachers are expected through learning by doing to methodically take the learners through each of the stages of the cycle. According to Meyer and Seaman (2021), KEL provides understandable criticism of programmes that jettison practical work for 'theoretical' and 'bookish' based trainings. KEL emphasized adequate preparations in terms of providing needed experience before students are exposed to experiential activities such as certain field courses, simulations and games. Opportunities for students to reflect upon the experience and relate it to their wider reading or the more explicitly theoretical aspects of the course should be provided for.

Race (1993) in Healey et al (2000) emphasized wanting as the foundation of learning. Students should be motivated to desire to learn by making them imbibe the right attitude to learning. Challenges are usually unwanted situation that brings discouragement. Inadequate support systems can inhibit the "wanting" as stated in Race (1993) in Healey et al (2000). This will serve as hindrances to having the needed experiences for learning. This will definitely affect the learning outcomes of the students. It can therefore be hypothesized that unwanted teaching practicum experience will lead to poor acquisition of relevant teaching skills by the students.

Objectives of the study:

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (i) Assess the support systems received by the students during teaching practicum in National Open University in Nigeria.
- (ii) Identify the challenges faced by the students during teaching practicum.

Research Questions

1. What are the support systems received by the students at the National Open University during teaching practicum?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the students during teaching practicum exercise?

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population consisted all the postgraduate students of the faculty of education who are running Master degree programme at the National Open University, Nigeria, Akure Study Centre. Thirty-three students who participated in the teaching practicum in the 2022/2023 academic session were sampled using convenient sampling technique. Practicum Exercise Questionnaire (PEQ) a 4-point Likert-type questionnaire adapted from Extended Practicum Learning Environment Inventory (EPLEI) developed by Kennedy (2006) cited in Shah et al (2020) was used for data gathering. The questionnaire gathered information on preservice teachers' support and also on challenges faced by the preservice teachers during the teaching practicum. Eighteen items gathered information on the preservice teachers support under three classifications: personal support, personnel support and environmental support. Items 1 – 6 gathered information on personal support, items 7 – 12 gathered information on personnel support while items 13 – 18 gathered information on environmental support. Eighteen items also elicited information on the different challenges that may be encountered by the preservice teachers. The questionnaire was on four scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was designed on Google form and administered through the WhatsApp group platform created by the students for information dissemination. The instrument was submitted to lecturers in Educational Management Department as well as lecturers who are test experts in the Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. The lecturers appraised the suitability of the instrument in terms of content, clarity and suitability of the items in the questionnaire to measure what it was intended to measure. The content validity Ratio of the instrument was determined using Lawshe's test and $\alpha = 1$ was obtained. Twenty copies of the final draft of the instrument were administered on 20 postgraduate students from the Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. These students were not part of the study. Cronbach-alpha was adopted in determining the reliability of the instrument and $r = 0.78$ was obtained. The instrument was posted on all the WhatsApp group created for students who are pursuing Master degree in Education at National Open University in Nigeria, Akure Study Centre. The researcher explained the purposes of the study and why responses should be voluntary. The data were retrieved from the back end of the google form, cleaned, scored and collated for analysis. Data were analysed using frequency count, percentage, relative significant index, median and standard deviation.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: *what are the support systems received by the students at the National Open University, Akure Study Centre during teaching practicum?*

The respondents' responses were scored such that strongly agree was score 4, agree was 3, disagree was 2 and strongly disagree was 1. Items not responded to were score 0. The total score on each of the classifications (Personal, Personnel and Environmental) were determined by adding the score obtained in each of the classes together. The maximum score obtainable on each of the classes was 24. Thus, the maximum score obtainable for Personal support is 24, for Personnel support is 24 and likewise for Environmental is also 24. The median of the total score on each of the classes is expressed as percentage. Median was used in the analysis of data because of the skewness of the data. As a rule of thumb,

Scores between 0% and 39% is considered inadequate,

Scores between 40% and 54% is considered fair,

Scores between 55% and 64% is considered good,

Scores between 65% and 74% is considered very good, while

Scores between 75% and 100% is considered excellent.

Table 1: Preservice teachers at NOUN, Akure Study Centre support systems during teaching practicum

N = 33

Support Systems	Median	Skewness	Std. Deviation	%	Remarks
Personal	18.00	-1.33	3.16	75.00	Excellent
Personnel	19.00	-0.46	3.01	79.16	Excellent
Environmental	18.00	0.12	2.72	75.00	Excellent

Analysis of data as shown in Table 1 showed that Personal support had median of 18.00, the skewness is -1.33. Expressing the median as percentage showed personnel support system = 75.00% which corresponds to excellent. Personnel support with median equals 19.00 and of skewness equals - 0.46 which corresponds to 79.16% when expressed as percentage, while Environmental supports had median of 18.00, skewness 0.12 and when the median is expressed as percentage equals 75.00%. it can therefore be inferred base on the rule of thumbs that the preservice teachers had excellent personal support, personnel support and environmental support. The preservice teachers of National Open University, Akure Study Centre received adequate supports in terms of personal support, personnel support and environmental support. The students have reasons to enjoy the teaching practicum. This could be as a result of the place where they are having the teaching practicum exercise. The students are allowed to pick a place that is convenient for them. The students are not mandated to pick schools but they have the opportunity

to select any school they feel is convenient for them for the exercise. The support received could be as a result of the fact that the place of assignment is a familiar terrain to the students. This is not in agreement with Osiesi et al (2023) who posited that preservice teachers are often weigh-down by elements of stress that appear are usually encountered by students during teaching practicum. Stress encountered according to Osiesi et al (2023) could be associated with the ‘school setting’, ‘classroom discipline challenges’, ‘poor recognition of teachers in the society’, ‘excess workload’, ‘lack of support and school bureaucracy’, and ‘absence of incentives.

Research Question 2: *what are the identified challenges encountered by the students during teaching practicum exercise?*

Table 2: Challenges encountered by the students during teaching practicum exercise

N = 33

S/N	Constructs	S.A. (%)	A (%)	D (%)	S.D. (%)	RSI	Rank
1	Financial issue	9 (28.1)	18 (56.3)	5 (15.6)		75.76	1st
2	Teaching anxiety	3 (9.1)	15 (45.5)	13 (39.4)	2 (6.1)	64.39	13th
3	Developing administrative skills	6 (18.2)	18 (54.5)	6 (18.2)	3 (9.1)	70.45	2nd
4	Identity issue	3 (9.1)	17 (51.5)	12 (36.4)	1 (3.0)	66.67	6th
5	Planning teaching strategies	6 (18.2)	15 (45.5)	10 (30.3)	2 (6.1)	68.94	3rd
6	Length of practicum	4 (12.1)	14 (42.4)	13 (39.4)	2 (6.1)	65.15	12th
7	Behaviour problems	3 (9.4)	14 (43.8)	14 (43.8)	1 (3.1)	62.88	16th
8	Disciplining problematic pupils	2 (6.1)	19 (57.6)	10 (30.3)	2 (6.1)	65.91	10th
9	Cooperative teacher feedback	2 (6.1)	20 (60.6)	9 (27.3)	2 (6.1)	66.67	6th
10	Placement in school		18 (54.5)	13 (39.4)	2 (6.1)	62.12	18th
11	Engaged in relief teaching by school teachers		21 (63.6)	10 (30.3)	2 (6.1)	64.39	13th
12	Parental involvement	1 (3.0)	19 (57.6)	9 (27.3)	4 (12.1)	62.88	16th
13	Classroom management	4 (12.1)	17 (51.5)	9 (27.3)	3 (9.1)	66.67	6th
14	Effective classroom interaction	6 (18.2)	15 (45.5)	10 (30.3)	2 (6.1)	68.94	3rd

15	Methods of teaching	3 (9.1)	16	11	3 (9.1)		
			(48.5)	(33.3)		64.39	13th
16	Syllabus completion	3 (9.1)	20	9	1 (3.0)		
			(60.6)	(27.3)		68.94	3rd
17	Time table challenges	4	14	14	1 (3.0)		
		(12.1)	(42.4)	(42.4)		65.91	10th
18	Lesson planning	4	16	11	2 (6.1)		
		(12.1)	(48.5)	(33.3)		66.67	6th

Table 2 presents the challenges encountered by the students of National Open University, Akure Study Centre during teaching practicum. The rule of thumb is that items with RSI less than 60% is considered as less significant while items with RSI of 60% and above are considered predominant among the students. Financial issues (RSI = 75.76%) ranked 1st among the challenges; developing administrative skills and identity issue (RSI = 70.45%) ranked 2nd; planning teaching strategy, effective classroom interaction and syllabus completion (RSI = 68.94%) ranked 3rd; identity issue, cooperative teacher feedback, classroom management and lesson planning ranked 6th (RSI = 66.67%); discipling problematic pupils and time table challenge ranked 10th (RSI = 65.91%), length of practicum ranked 12th (RSI = 65.15); teaching anxiety, engaged in relief teaching by school teachers and methods of teaching ranked 13th (RSI = 64.39%); behaviour problems and parental involvement ranked 16th (RSI = 62.88%) while placement in school ranked 18th (RSI = 62.12). Financial issue is the major challenge encountered by the postgraduate students undergoing teaching practicum at the Open University. Others include developing administrative skills, identity issue, syllabus completion, effective classroom interaction, time table challenges, cooperative teacher feedback, classroom management, engaged in relief teaching by school teachers among others. This is in agreement with Bichi and Musa (2017), Aldabbus (2020) and Osiesi et al (2023).

Conclusion:

The study concluded that the preservice teachers received adequate support during teaching practicum despite the challenges encountered. The least of their challenges is placement for teaching practicum.

Recommendations:

- i. Adequate supports should be provided to the preservice teachers during teaching practicum exercise as this will make the exercise enjoyable and the length of time spent during the exercise will be appreciated

- ii. Financial support should be provided for students who are participating in teaching practicum just like it is done for those who goes for SIWES in other faculties.
- iii. Other challenges identified should be critically appraised and necessary steps taken to ameliorate them.

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