

Findings and Recommendations Regarding Teaching Practice for Pre-service Teachers in Kenya

**Kenyatta University and Syracuse University*:
Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative Partnership**

Building Capacity Through Quality Teacher Preparation

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In teacher preparation, educational accrediting bodies identify specific standards by which teacher performance is evaluated (Ministry of Education, 2013; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2013). In Kenya, these standards are part of the quality assurance standards (<http://www.education.go.ke>). While most teacher education program focus on equipping the student teacher with standards, the degree of how well prepared the teacher candidates are upon graduation is unclear.

One of the required accrediting standards is for the student teacher to intern or practice. CAEP (2013) notes, “the provider ensures that effective partnerships and high-quality clinical practice are central to preparation ...” (http://caepnet.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/final_board_approved1.pdf, p. 6). Internship is an important component of any professional training since it provides the opportunity to translate theory into practice (Glickman & Bey, 1990; McIntyre, Byrd, & Fox, 1996). In teacher preparation, the internship is normally in the form of teaching practice (TP). During TP, the student teacher is obligated to prepare and teach lessons in a classroom setting. At this time, student teacher is observed and given feedback on lesson planning and teaching by a supervisor.

The student teacher’s effectiveness on these skills during the TP experience can be impacted by a variety of factors. According to Beck (2002) the quality of a student teacher’s performance in TP is

mostly affected by the quality of the preparation education courses take prior to the TP experience and the supervision and feedback that the student teacher receives. Other influencing factors may include (a) how the teaching practice process is managed (b) the structure of the teaching practice, and (c) the relationships that the student teacher develops with other school personnel (Beck, 2002; Wyss, Siebert & Dowling, 2012).

Problems

There are a myriad of challenges that affect the quality of TP, including ICT, large TP student teacher enrollments, quality of supervision and placement. Many African governments identify the ability to use ICT as being critical to the general society and in job markets. Little attention is paid on equipping student teachers with ICT skills since these resources are lacking or inadequate.

Beyond technological resources and skills, many African universities typically experience very large enrollments in teacher education programs. Thus the TP exercise is faced with many structural problems, mainly placement, financing of the TP exercise, and supervision. In Kenya for example, there has been massive expansion of varied local universities dealing with teacher education program with huge student enrolments, which exert pressures to both human and physical resources and are bound to lower the quality of teacher preparation.

According to a survey carried out by Kenyatta University in July 2012 as part of the baseline data for the *Capacity Building through Teacher Education Project* supported by the Higher Education for Development (HED) and USAID, the number of universities offering education degrees has increased from four national universities (Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Moi University and Egerton University) to thirty-six universities and constituent colleges (without counting private universities) in the last 10 years. An overwhelming 800% increase of student teachers with minimal increment in school placements and experienced supervisors to go around! The new universities and university colleges have to share supervisors who originally were very able to handle few student teachers in the four national universities. The current state of affairs shows that there are not enough supervisors with expertise and skills to carry out effective TP supervisory roles.

Research Study

As part of our partnership project, one of the collaborative research studies we undertook was to examine the pedagogical issues associated with the goal of identifying the areas that can be reformed to improve TPs' quality. In this research study, we used questionnaire and interview data to address the following research questions: (a) To what extent does the teacher preparation program equip student teachers for their teaching performance expectations?; (b) How adequately were the student teachers prepared to employ the learned abilities and skills when delivering content in the classroom?; (c) To what extent did student teachers value the feedback given to them by the mentor teachers, school administration and TP supervisors?; and (d) What were the challenges experienced during the TP exercise?

We collected data in June – August 2012 through questionnaires, and interviews: (a) questionnaires completed by 360 student teachers, (b) questionnaires completed by 240 cooperating teachers or heads of departments, (c) interviews with 60 Kenyan public secondary school principals, and (d) interviews with 10 area supervisors.

During the semester we collected data, the TP administrators had subdivided the entire school

placements into 30 TP zones. Each zone was assigned a faculty to serve as its area coordinator. Strategic sampling was used to identify the zones and schools for data collection. We selected one-third of the TP zones leading to 10 zonal areas for this study. In each area, six schools were selected. The distribution of the schools in each TP area was as follows – a national school; a provincial boys' school; a provincial girls' school; a district boys' school; a district girls' school and a private school. For each school six student teachers were selected. In addition, four cooperating teachers and/or Heads of Departments were selected; the school principal was interviewed, and the area supervisor for each area was also interviewed. Note that in this policy brief we are reporting only on the data collected through the questionnaires completed by the 360 student teachers.

A survey questionnaire was developed for collecting data from the student teachers. The first item dealt with biographic data about the participants including gender, teaching subject areas and type of school where the student teacher was placed. The second, third and fourth sections of the questionnaire focused on a self-evaluation of a range of pedagogical related aspects of teaching based on a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. For the same range of pedagogical aspects, the student teachers were asked to evaluate how well the teacher education program prepared them in acquiring these skills, the extent to which they were able to apply these skills during their student teaching practice and the extent to which the mentoring and evaluation feedback from their supervisors enhanced their ability to apply these skills in teaching.

From our data analysis, we have the following findings:

- ***Finding #1: Perceptions of How Education Program Prepared Student Teacher for TP***

The student teachers felt adequately prepared in 5 out of the 11 pedagogical areas surveyed. The areas where there was satisfaction on how well they are prepared include: creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation (66.7%); creating learning experiences that make the subject matter meaningful to students (59.1%);

fostering relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being (58.7%); using a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills (56.6%); and planning instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, and curriculum goals (56.0%).

The areas where the student teachers perception were low include: the ability to integrate ICT in teaching (15.4%); the use of formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of learners (44.0%); the creating of instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners (44.6%); the planning of learning opportunities that support students' intellectual, social, and personal development (45.8%); the use of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom (46.9%); being a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other stakeholders in the learning community) and one who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally (49.7%).

- ***Finding #2: Perceptions of How Student Teacher Applied Theory During TP***

On the self-rating of the ability to implement various teaching and learning strategies in their TP, the percentage of student teachers rating the preparation as "very good" was more than 52% for 10 out of 11 of the pedagogical areas. Student teachers ratings show that they were very able to apply all these skills during their teaching practice except in the area of ICT integration in teaching (20.9%).

- ***Finding #3: Perceptions of Effectiveness of Feedback from Cooperating Teachers/Heads of Departments***

Teacher candidates found the feedback from cooperating teachers or heads of departments to be useful in enhancing their abilities on all of the pedagogical aspects of teaching except

in three areas. One of the areas where the feedback was found not to be useful was the ability to be a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (i.e., students, parents, and other stakeholders in the learning community, and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally) (49.4%).

A second area of unhelpful feedback was in the use of formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of learners (46.6%). Student teachers found the feedback on ICT integration in teaching to be the least useful (17.0%).

- ***Finding #4: Perceptions of Effectiveness of Feedback from University Supervisor***

Student teachers ratings on the effectiveness of feedback from university supervisor are almost identical to the ratings for cooperating teachers or heads of departments. The same three areas of unhelpful feedback are noted with the university supervisor's data.

In addition to the surveys ratings data, the student teachers were asked open-ended questions about other aspects of TP that they would like to see improved. Data from these responses were categorized into the following themes: resources, teaching methods, ICT, supervision, feedback and overall TP exercise. Two of these themes, ICT and supervision, consistent with data from the questionnaires.

- ***Finding #5: Information Communication Technology (ICT)***

The student teachers consistently cited ICT as an area they would like to see improved in their teacher education program. They suggested that ICT be made a course requirement that must be taken before being cleared for the TP exercise. The student teachers also reported the need for ICT services to be open to all students and not just to a selected group of students (i.e., those participating on grant projects, students teaching math and science subjects). The student teachers called for opportunities to practice ICT skills.

- **Finding #6: Supervision**

The student teachers cited a number of challenges they experienced during TP that were connected to supervision. The first issue was the fact that supervisors are assigned by region of the country rather than by subject area. Student teachers point to the need to have supervisors who teach the subject areas they supervised. The second issue dealt with the frequency of the university supervisor's visits, with student teachers wanting to be observed more times than once or twice by the university supervisor. The third issue was about the need for better communication among the university supervisors, the student teachers and the school personnel.

Based on our research, we have the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation #1:** There is a need for pre-service teachers to be trained in implementing and integrating ICT in teaching and learning. This needs to be an integral part of the teacher preparation program. Additionally, teacher education faculty need to model current appropriate technologies in their own classrooms and offer hands-on tasks so that student teachers not only learn about technology integration but also experience it in their own learning.
- **Recommendation #2:** There is a need for curriculum mapping against the student teacher performance expectations. The student teachers feel they are not well prepared in more than half of the teaching performance expectation areas. The areas with low self-ratings are of significance. The areas with low rating on preparedness and ability to teach cut across a range of teaching performance aspects. Because these aspects are taught in general education courses, student teachers may be failing to see how they apply directly to their TP classroom during student teaching.

We recommend a curriculum mapping exercise in which all the student teacher performance expectations are mapped against the teacher education classes. Such reviews of the curricula beyond the pedagogy specific courses need to be carried out to evaluate how

well these courses align with the identified areas.

- **Recommendation #3:** Pre-service teachers need more preparation in working with students with diverse needs. It is important for student teachers to develop skills of supporting all learners in their classrooms, because they are often placed in schools where the host teacher does not provide the much needed guidance.
- **Recommendation #4:** Supervision from the university needs to be improved. Student teachers should be observed a minimum of two times per teaching subject. Currently, there are not enough supervisors to do this. Communication between and among the participants in the TP exercise ranging from the TP placement office, the area coordinators, the university supervisors, the school administrators and student teachers needs to be improved. Institutions offering teacher education should plan to have adequate staff in respective teaching areas to offer expertise feedback during TP.

The issue with supervision raised by student teachers about the need for subject area specific supervisors assessing them during teaching practice is a difficult one to overcome given the number of students going for TP at a given time and the vast area in which the postings occur. One possibility to ensure that the supervisors are versed with the subject content is to group them by the subject panel area.

Any specialist in the subject panel areas should supervise group of subjects (e.g., Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Mathematics). When these supervisors visit a school site, they should be allowed to assess any student at that site who is teaching within the subject panel of their specialty. Student teacher should keep a visitation log in which the supervisors sign in to show in which subject areas they have been assessed.

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