

Educators' Perceptions of Teaching Practice in Bahir Dar University

Mulugeta Teka*

Introduction

Prospective teachers have to do some form of practical teaching which is the central component of training, be it in universities, colleges or institutions (Richards and Nunan, 1990; Brown and Nacino – Brown, 1990). Teaching practice (henceforth, TP) has been the focus of a number of research undertakings (Freeman, 1990).

Prior to TP all students should participate in a course in methods of teaching which often tends to be theoretical. TP gives the practical down-to-earth advice that is needed to deal with day-to-day problems (Brown and Nacino-Brown, 1990). Stressing the importance of TP, Freeman (1990) argues that it is during the practicum that trainees are encouraged to develop, practice and refine their competence as teachers. Various authors have provided a rationale for the TP experience. For example, Sund and Trowbridge cited in Brown and Nacino – Brown (1990:3) state:

The practice teaching experience is assigned to smooth transition from the role of student to that of teacher. At the same time, the practice teaching assignment will give the training institution an opportunity to evaluate the students teaching capability.

Brown and Nacino-Brown (1990) discuss different reasons for TP, such as i) to gain confidence, ii) to put theories into practice, iii) to learn the skills and attitudes of a competent and effective teacher, iv) to learn about children in real life, v) to improve knowledge of subject matter, vi) to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism, vii) to self-evaluate and to discover strengths and weakness, and viii) for the teaching institute, to evaluate itself.

* Lecturer, Education Faculty, Bahir Dar University.

Educators' Perceptions of Teaching Practice in Bahir Dar University

Mulugeta Teka*

Introduction

Prospective teachers have to do some form of practical teaching which is the central component of training, be it in universities, colleges or institutions (Richards and Nunan, 1990; Brown and Nacino – Brown, 1990). Teaching practice (henceforth, TP) has been the focus of a number of research undertakings (Freeman, 1990).

Prior to TP all students should participate in a course in methods of teaching which often tends to be theoretical. TP gives the practical down-to-earth advice that is needed to deal with day-to-day problems (Brown and Nacino-Brown, 1990). Stressing the importance of TP, Freeman (1990) argues that it is during the practicum that trainees are encouraged to develop, practice and refine their competence as teachers. Various authors have provided a rationale for the TP experience. For example, Sund and Trowbridge cited in Brown and Nacino – Brown (1990:3) state:

The practice teaching experience is assigned to smooth transition from the role of student to that of teacher. At the same time, the practice teaching assignment will give the training institution an opportunity to evaluate the students teaching capability.

Brown and Nacino-Brown (1990) discuss different reasons for TP, such as i) to gain confidence, ii) to put theories into practice, iii) to learn the skills and attitudes of a competent and effective teacher, iv) to learn about children in real life, v) to improve knowledge of subject matter, vi) to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism, vii) to self-evaluate and to discover strengths and weakness, and viii) for the teaching institute, to evaluate itself.

* Lecturer, Education Faculty, Bahir Dar University.

Although both student teachers and teacher educators consider TP the most valuable aspect of pre-service preparation, it is also widely regarded as a problematic area, associated with its duration, timing, requirements, connection to university courses and seminars and the type and intensity of supervision (Cochran-Smith, 1991). The supervisor's timetable may not allow sufficient time for evaluating students on TP. Sometimes young inexperienced staff members who have recently completed higher degrees may not be aware of what is expected of them as supervisors. The advice they give to student teacher may later be contradicted (Brown and Nacino-Brown, 1990). On the other hand, for the student teacher the visits for supervisors are often unannounced, out-of-the-blue, and at awkward time.

should usually give a lot of support and help initially, both with actual teaching points and with techniques and materials to use. In most institutions the supervisor's role is to help with lesson preparation, to observe critically and to give helpful feedback (Gower and Walters, 1983).

TP is an integral part of the courses in Education Faculty of Bahir Dar University. Here TP used to be a four weeks' duration in the middle of the second semester of the students' final year until 1990/2000 academic year. Last year, however, its duration was reduced to two weeks because of some administrative reasons. In the first week, the trainees were made to observe the regular teachers in order to become familiar with the new teaching environment, and in the other week they were formally evaluated on their performance in the lesson they taught. For the sake of fair evaluation, two different supervisors assessed each trainee at two different times. No supervisor had the chance to observe the same trainee for a second time. In the supervision process all staff members took equal part regardless of his/her teaching experience. This means even graduate assistants who did not have any prior teaching experience were-made to shoulder the responsibility of supervising the trains. Therefore, the effectiveness of the TP looked a bit suspect. Thus the purpose of this

study is to investigate the effectiveness of the current teaching practice in Education Faculty of Bahir Dar University.

To this end, the specific question entertained in this study is: Do Bahir Dar University instructors, particularly those in Education Faculty, consider the current teaching practice effective?

This study is delimited to the investigation of the effectiveness of the practicum in terms of its duration and administration. The type of the supervision is not the concern of this study due to constraints in the gathering of information.

A limitation of this study is that the subjects who are supposed to respond to the items of the questionnaire are only a few instructors in Bahir Dar University.

Method

Subjects

A total of 8 Bahir Dar University instructors (participants in this training workshop on teaching and learning in higher education, graduate students who took part in supervisions in the previous year, other instructors who were on work visit here) were taken as study subjects. Among these 2 were junior staff members (graduate assistants) and 6 were experienced staff members (lecturers and assistant professors).

Method of Data Collection

To collect the necessary data from respondents, the writer of this paper prepared a questionnaire consisting of 16 items based on the available literature. The questionnaire items focused on reflecting the respondent's general perception of the current teaching practice trend in the university. Thirteen of the items were positively coded and 3 of them were negatively coded. Responses were coded on a three point scale including: *Agree*, *Undecided* and *Disagree*.

The purpose of this research was to investigate instructors' perception of the process of TP. For this purpose, percentage analysis was employed to examine the data.

Results and Discussion

The data collected from the respondents are reported in Table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Instructors' Perception of the Current TP

Item	Responses		
	Agreement	Undecided	Disagreement
The length of time assigned for TP is enough	0%	0%	100%
Supervisors visit the student teacher as many times as they should	12.5%	25%	62.5%
A good deal of attention has been given to the TP by the faculty	37.5%	12.5%	50%
A good deal of attention has been given to the TP by the cooperating schools	37.5%	25%	37.5%
The time table allows sufficient time for supervisors to do all what is expected of them in the teaching practice	0%	0%	100%
Supervisors assume the role of an assessor rather than the role of a guide	62.5%	12.5%	25%
Student-teachers assume the supervisor an assessor rather than a guide	100%	0%	0%
The TP is more a matter of evaluation for the course than a matter of real practice	75%	0%	25%
Both inexperienced young staff members (graduate assistants) and experienced staff members (lectures and assistant professors) are equally competent enough for the supervision of TP	12.5%	12.5%	75%
The inexperienced young staff members would not have to take part as supervisors if there were sufficient experienced staff numbers	75%	0%	25%
The TP is of the appropriate duration for student teachers to gain confidence	37%	12.5%	50%
The TP is of the appropriate duration for student teachers to learn the skills and attitudes of a competent and effective teacher	37.5%	12.5%	50%
The TP is of the appropriate duration for student teachers to self-evaluate and discover strengths and weaknesses	37.5%	25%	37.5%
The TP is of the appropriate type for the faculty to evaluate itself through the teaching practice	25%	0%	75%
The practice of the current TP should continue in the same way	12.5%	0%	87.5%
The practice of the current TP should be improved in some ways to overcome certain problems	87.5%	0%	12.5%

Results shown in Table 1 revealed that all respondents (100%) believed that the length of time assigned for TP not enough. Moreover, the minority of the respondents (25%) believed they visited

student teachers as many times as they should. With regard to the amount of attention paid by faculty to the TP, half of the respondents (50%) accepted that little of attention had been paid whereas 37.5% of them were undecided and 12.5% of them accepted that enough attention had been paid. In the same way, 37.5% of the respondents accepted that the co-operating schools had paid enough attention to the TP while 37.5% did not accept this view and 25% neither agreed nor disagreed with the view.

Similarly, all of the respondent (100%) believed that the timetable had not allowed sufficient time for them to do all what was expected of them in the TP. 62.5% of these respondents assumed the role of assessors rather than that of guides but 25% of them assumed the role of guides and 12.5% of them did not express either their agreement or their disagreement. Despite this little difference in assumption of role as supervisors among the instructors, all of the respondents (100%) believed that their supervisees considered them as assessors rather than guides. Along with these perceptions, the majority of the respondents (75%) felt that the current TP was more a matter of evaluation for the course but the rest (25%) felt that the current TP was more a matter of real practice. With regard to the participation of inexperienced young staff members as supervisors in the TP process, the majority of the respondents (75%) admitted that these inexperienced graduate assistants could not shoulder the responsibility for supervising trainees and that they should not take part if there were sufficient experienced staff members.

In relation to the duration of the TP, the responses collected revealed that the duration of TP was too inadequate to meet its objectives. 50% of the respondents believed that its duration was too short for student teachers to gain confidence; 50% believed that it was too short for student teachers to learn the skills and attitudes of a competent and effective teacher, 37.5% believed that it was too short for student teachers to self evaluate and discover strengths and weaknesses; and 75% believed that it was too short for the institution to evaluate itself through the trainees' teaching. In contrast, some of

the respondents believed that the TP duration was appropriate or long enough for the trainees to develop the desired qualities. For example, 37.5% believed that it was good enough for the student teachers to gain confidence, to learn the skills and attitudes of a competent and effective teacher, and to self evaluate and discover strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, 25% believed that it was good enough for the institution to evaluate itself.

The central purpose of the present study was to investigate the perceptions of Bahir Dar University instructors about the current TP. The results in the present study revealed that there was almost a complete agreement among the instructors that the duration of the TP was short and that it should be extended more.

Even though the results showed different perceptions of the respondents about the amount of attention given to the TP both by the faculty and by the cooperating schools, this tends to imply that still more attention and emphasis should be paid to it.

The fact that the majority of the respondents assumed the role of assessors rather than guides and the fact that all of the respondents believed their supervisees considered them as assessors rather than guides seemed to stem out from the basic facts that each supervisor had to observe the trainees only once and that the duration TP was short. Similarly, due to these conditions it may not sound surprising to report that 75% the respondents felt that the current TP was more a matter of evaluation for the course as the practicum is usually the requirement of the course.

The present study also indicated that the inexperienced young graduate assistants with little or no prior teaching experience took part in the supervision process because of shortage of experienced staff members. This seems to suggest that they should not participate in the TP process until they gained enough genuine teaching experiences.

Most important of all, the study indicated that there was a felt need for lengthening the duration the TP in order to meet its objectives.

Finally, the present findings have the following practical implications to help student teachers gain real practice from the TP process as intended by the course designers and educators.

- The University in general and the Education Faculty in particular should pay more attention to the TP especially in terms of its duration;
- All department staff members should give more attention to the TP so that student teachers may benefit a lot from genuine supervision;
- The study on instructors' perceptions of the TP process has covered only a limited number of subjects. Thus, it is very important to conduct a detailed study that will cover a large number of instructors, student-teachers and administrators;

References

- Brown, D. R. and R. Nacino-Brown (1990). **Effective Teaching Practice**. Leckhampton: Stanley Thomes Ltd.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (1991). *Reinventing Student Teaching*. **Journal of Teacher Education**. Vol. 42:12. pp.104-118.
- Freeman, D. (1990). *Intervening in Practice Teaching*. In Richards and Nunan (eds.) **Second Language Teacher Education**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gower, R. and S. Walters, (1983). **Teaching Practice Handbook: A Reference Book for EFL Teachers in Training**. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Richards, J. and D. Nunan (eds.) (1990). **Second Language Teacher Education**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix

Dear Respondents:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the current teaching practice in Education Faculty of Bahir Dar University for a small research undertaking. You are kindly requested to cooperate in giving genuine answers to the following items.

Thank you in advance

I. Background Information

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Academic Rank | <input type="checkbox"/> | Graduate Assistant |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | Assistant Lecturer |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lecturer |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | Assistant Professor or beyond |
| Teaching Experience | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 - 7 year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | More than 7 years |

- II. All the items in this questionnaire refer to your experience and perception of the recent teaching practice in the course PdSc. 452 in our university. Read each statement and decide whether you agree, disagree or neither agree nor disagree by marking "X" in the corresponding box.

Item	Responses		
	I agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree
The length of time assigned for the current teaching practice is enough			
I believe I visit the student teacher as many times as necessary			
A good deal of attention has been given to the teaching practice by the faculty			
A good total of attention has been given to the teaching practice by the co-operating schools			
I think the timetable allows sufficient time for me to do all what is expected of me in the teaching practice			
I assume the role of assessor rather than the role of guide during observation			
I think student teachers assume I am an assessor rather than a guide			
I feel the teaching practice is more a matter of evaluation for the course than a matter of real practice			
I think both in experienced young staff members (graduate assistants and as lecturers) and experienced staff members (lectures and assistant professors) are equally competent enough for the supervision of teaching practice			
I think the in experienced young staff members would not have to take part as supervisors if there were sufficient experienced staff members			
I think the teaching practice is of the appropriate duration for student teachers to gain confidence.			
I think teaching practice is of the appropriate duration for student teacher to learn the skills and attitudes of a competent and effective teacher.			
I think the teaching practice is of the appropriate duration for student teacher to self-evaluate and discover strengths and weaknesses.			
I think the teaching practice is of the appropriate type for the faculty of evaluate itself through the teaching practice.			
I think the practice of current teaching practice should continue in the same way			
I think the practice of the current teaching practice should be improved in some ways to overcome certain problems.			