School Experience: Institutions' Expectations from Pre-service Teachers

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the expectation of the institution on the pre-teachers during teaching practice. It emphasises that becoming a teacher is a process that involves training through mentorship. The study also provides information on the imperative areas of mentoring in order to have an effective teaching and learning during school experience, these area includes preparation of lesson plan, presentation of the lesson, assessment of students outcome, classroom management, maintenance of discipline, understanding administrative procedure, developing professionalism, modelling, feedback to the students, pre-teachers and their subject mastery, involvement in extracurricular activities. The study concludes that the school experience exercise centered on the students is an important component of the teacher education curriculum because it prepares the pre-teacher to become not only a teacher but eventually becoming a mentor. It recommends that institutions should give proper and adequate attention to school experience so that institutions will rely on such experiences as the adequate criteria necessary to be certified as teacher in the chosen field or course of study.

INTRODUCTION

Becoming an effective teacher is a process that most importantly involved school experiences in order to be familiar and understand the use of some basic skills and strategies for effective teaching. Teaching practice plays a vital role in the teachers' education programme. It is a gradual process towards teacher preparation. Effective teaching is the bedrock of pupils' academic achievements and study results (Seidel and Shavelson 2007; Stronge et al. 2011), as well as teachers' expectation about school experiences (Korthagen and Vasalos 2005). School experience or teaching practice is the most essential and necessary part of teacher education for students to become effective teachers (Marais and Meier 2004). It prepares the pre-teachers with an experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Kiggundu and Nayimulli 2009). During school experience, a student teacher is given the opportunity to practice the art of teaching before properly involved in the real world of the teaching profession. It exposes the pre-teachers to a teaching environment wherein they will transform their theoretical knowledge gained in their institutions into practice during the school experience. It will also grant pre-teachers with an experience in the real teaching and learning environment (Kiggundu 2007).

Student school experience is an imperative stage in the professionalism of teachers' education. It prepares the pre-teachers to make use of the knowledge and theories acquired on campus to the real classroom. School experience has been called the most challenging, rewarding, and critical stage of teacher education (Goethals and Howard 2000). Whatever model of School Experience (SE) that may be adopted by the pre-teacher, the best place to learn to teach is in the classroom situation with real children just as the best place to learn to swim is in the swimming pool (Chiromo 2007).

According to Bourdillion (2010) as cited in Rosemary et al. (2013), school experience is not only knowing what to teach and knowing how to teach but the purpose of school experience is mainly on development of several competencies skills in the pre-teacher which include; interpersonal, pedagogical, intercultural and psychological competencies. It is the duties of institutions to send students for school experience and attach each pre teachers to competent qualified school based teachers with the assistance of school heads. Another very important part of school experience is pre teachers' supervision and assessment. The supervision is done through coordinated partnership between school personnel and institution lecturers.

Objectives

According to Akbar (2000) as cited by Gujjar et al. (2011: 303), the objectives of teaching practice are as follows:

1. To enable the pre-teachers to establish a cordial and mutual relationship with the teacher.
2. To give an enabling environment for evaluating the student achievement as a teacher towards teaching professionalism.
3. To create platforms for interpersonal relationship among other stakeholders in school such as heads of administration, classroom teachers, parents/guardian and students.
4. Equipping teacher in training with necessary method of control in accordance with lots of experience in school to reduce rate of indiscipline.
5. School experience enables the pre-teacher in providing atmosphere of turning theories into practice and to help in developing better understanding of principles of education as well as how to their learning implications.
6. To assist the pre-teachers in planning and preparation of lessons effectively.
7. Assisting the pre-teacher in developing better skills and techniques in teaching and learning.
8. Encouraging authentic interest in professionalism, attitudes and ideas related to teaching.
9. To help the pre-teachers to acquire desirable characteristics/traits of a teacher and to display appropriate behaviour.
10. To prepare the pre-teachers to have teaching understanding on the process of evaluation and to benefit from all forms of positive contributions.
11. It will also enable the pre-teacher in formative evaluation as well as adjusting where necessary.
12. To encourage methodological strategies in becoming an effective teachers in the future and understanding of the use of other teaching material.
13. To be familiar with school environment and the functioning role of a teacher with the community and its resources.
14. To provide for the exchange of opinion and methods between school based and teacher training institution, by teacher training institutions' staff and students, perceiving new ideas material and equipment in use in practicing schools and introducing new ideas, material and equipments into the school.

Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine an institution's expectation from pre-teachers during school experience as well as exploring the support the pre-teachers receive from the stakeholders in making the school experience more effective.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a desktop research that is based on theoretical review of school experience: institutions' expectations from pre-service teachers during the school experience which is called teaching practice.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Review

Student Teachers' Experiences of the School-based Practice

According to Marais and Meier (2008), the experiences of pre-teachers in schools are influenced by many factors and challenges that may occur. Wagenaar (2005) found out that practical experience could also be of great value in learning how to teach. An appropriate mix of challenge and support contributes to the students' positive experiences of practical education (Wagenaar 2005). Students with little or no knowledge of school experience do not relate the teachers' activities to the reality of the classroom (Leijen and Kullasepp 2013). According to Thomson et al. (2012), pre-teachers at the commencement of their teacher training programme form two categories; one category have a rough idea of effective teaching, whereas the other has beliefs that clearly include purposeful effective teaching and consideration for the students' needs.

School-based Experiences

The paramount aims of the school based learning experiences is to give opportunities to

pre- teachers in order to translate theory into practice, work collaboratively with and learn from the school based teachers. School-based relationships between student teachers, school staff, fellow students and learners form an important aspect of school experience (Marais and Meier 2008). Pre-teachers observe subject teachers during teaching in the classroom in order to emulate about teachers' skills, strategies, presentation and attainment of set goals and objectives. The pre- teachers during discussion with other colleagues after teaching provides opportunities for self – evaluation of their teaching experiences, through interaction with school based teachers and their lecturers. Similarly, study by Hobson et al. (2006) in England, revealed that student teachers felt positive about their school-based experiences, they felt that they could talk with their mentor or another colleague who was concerned with their wellbeing and progress. Statistics in the study revealed that 37 out of 79 case study trainees were given opportunity to engage in professional dialogues that enable them to think about their practice of becoming professional teachers.

School-based relationships between student teachers, school staff, fellow students and learners form an integral part of their experience (Marais and Meier 2008). Among these relationships, the most important is between the student teacher and their mentor teacher. This is because mentor teachers have the greatest influence on the student teacher's development, orientation, disposition and general classroom practice (Marais and Meier 2008). Wagenaar (2005) notes that the mentor teacher also plays a crucial role in the student's personal perception of the school experience. Wagenaar (2005) reported that a good relationship with the mentor teacher is essential during practice teaching, although there was some disagreement among the student teachers in the study as to exactly what constituted a "good" relationship. There was however some consensus that a good relationship with a host teacher would be one that is not threatening (Wagenaar 2005). A teacher-mentor relationship was reported by Marais and Meir (2010) in South Africa to be one where student teachers experienced the following as cited by Adu and Abongdia (2015: 214) School based staff 'welcomed the students posted to their school and accepted them to school'. 'They give them respect'. Based on this positive relation-

ship, pre-teachers reportedly "imitate the style of teaching from their school based teachers as mentor and pre-teachers stated that they 'enjoyed the various instruction styles and teaching methods of the teachers involved'. Respondents also confirmed that the supervisors 'set the best example'. Student viewed the assistance from mentor teachers as a tremendous support system'. Students viewed them as expert since they were 'dynamic and well organized'. According to the respondents, the mentor teachers invested considerable effort in the instruction of students and were promptly 'committed, dedicated and experienced'.

Institution's Expectations from the Host Teacher

A pre-teacher is expected to have a theoretical knowledge about teaching but needs practical experience mostly from the host teacher and his/her frequent activities in the classroom. A host teacher is expected to assist the student teacher's development in both, administrative and classroom-based activities (Pracana and Silva 2013). The knowledge, time, and involvement that is required to make this experience a valuable one for student teachers and the mentors is much appreciated by the university collaboration (Maphalala 2013). Given that student teachers universally regard the school experience as the most crucial component of the award for Bachelor of Education degree and the school based teacher as versatile to their success in that degree (Weis and Weis 2001; Kirk et al. 2006) school based teacher involvement in teacher education is very important (Keogh et al. 2006). They are most often experienced classroom tutors and expert trained to take a pre teacher under their mentoring within a given time to become a professional teacher.Indeed, there is little knowledge of the additional demands expected of a school based teachers; as regards their character and behavior as teachers and of the nature of their work as they undertake responsibilities associated with cooperating teaching. (Good Fellow 2000: 25)

Expectations from Supervisors

Pre-teachers are assigned to one or more supervisor during the School Experience depending on the pattern of distribution by the institu-

tion to check their lesson plans accordingly, comments on their observation should be in written and oral form, it is imperative to observe the pre teacher in the classroom throughout the period of teaching for their teaching activities, provide immediate constructive feedback and allow the pre teacher to ask question especially where they are confused, the supervisor also needs to give the pre teacher information about the institution since they are away and might not have the authentic information that can guide them is also expected of the supervisor by the institution that he/she is representing to be a good ambassador of the institution in the school based. The first point of contact is to meet the principal of the school who will direct accordingly, he/she also needs to find out about the behaviour of the pre teachers sent to their school; the supervisor will on behalf of the institution appreciate the principal and other members of the staff and school as a whole for their support.

A pre-teacher (PT) or student teachers (STs) will be assigned to a school by the institution for School Experience and will need to report to the head of the school for acceptance and guidance who will accordingly assign to host teachers (HTs). The first meeting between the HTs and the PTs is an orientation on the school context or a school induction. This is a very important meeting wherein the HT among others, aims to make the PT feel accepted at the school, and also to introduce him/her to the rest of the staff. The HT shows the PTs around the school. It is also expected that the HT introduces the PT to the policies that guide the school as a whole. These may include dress code, the use of cell phones, students discipline and the proper usage of school resources which includes the photocopier and computer lab. Also, the HT allocates the PT the lessons and the subject areas that the latter is going to teach during the specific period. Furthermore, this first meeting reveals the roles of the HT and those of PT, as well as explaining the philosophy of the mentor-mentee relationship. This may, however, not be a once-off activity as the PT may now and then seek clarifications to some of these issues. Adu and Abongdia (2015:215) however stated that on the other hand, the HT is expected to: Let his/her student aware that the pre teacher will be engaging them during teaching, their expectation, and do proper introduction of him/her to

the students on the first day; Let the pre-teacher understand the individual differences among the students in his or her class; Discuss classroom protocols for things such as handing in papers, grading papers and projects, recording grades and moving from one activity to the next; Every discussion on appropriate behaviours and mannerisms should be limited to the classroom and school premises; Ensure that the pre teacher is aware of classroom rules and regulations; Inform the pre teacher about the general goals and objectives school and its environment. Organize orientation for the pre teacher on the school building, regulations, materials and supplies and use of machines; Introduce the pre teacher to the school administrators, other teachers and media specialists; Be flexible with the pre teacher and assist him/her can to develop a personal teaching style and strategies for effective teaching; Creation of model professional expertise and ethical behaviour for the pre teacher at all times; There should be provision for frequent, honest and constructive feedback to the pre teacher; Make it a point of duty for the pre teacher to participate in school based meetings, parent-teacher conferences and other pertinent school functions. In case of absence of the mentor teacher, another school based teacher should always be called upon to supervise the activities of the pre-teacher.

Expectation from Host Teacher (HT) as a Mentor Teacher (MT)

School-based teacher display an important role as the pre-teacher's mentor and counsellor that has great influence over the pre teacher's school experience. Pre-teachers tend to learn from the idea and practices of their school based teachers, sometimes without any argument, with the assumption that they cannot complain. Pre-teachers receive all round training from the school based teacher both in academic and practical aspects of teaching during school experience this is the period that the pre teachers will be under the supervision of a school based teacher acting as a mentor. Towards providing effective mentoring at the period of school experience, mentor needs to specify the key areas of mentoring in developing teaching capabilities. A mentor as defined by Singh et al. (2002: 391) happens to be an individual that possess cognate knowledge and understanding and com-

mitted to the provision of advancement of his/her mentee. Smith et al. (2005:33), ascertained that a mentor is any individual that is superior in one way or the other and possess an interest in developing someone career.

Areas of Mentoring for the Pre-teachers

Preparation of Lesson Plan

Lesson presentation starts from preparation, therefore in order to ensure an effective teaching, the pre-teacher undergo various stages of presenting the lesson properly following the appropriate steps and format suitable for the lesson based on the relevance topic generated from the curricular for the appointed time. The pre-teacher then needs to formulate objectives to be attained at the end of the lesson in order to add to the value of the students and as well as meeting their expected needs. Another very important aspect that is germane in the preparation of lesson plan is the previous knowledge of learners, the specific teaching methods adopted for the lesson, the resources to be used, the mastery of subject matter that needs to be transferred/import to students, rating of students achievement, the use of time, logical lesson process. School-based institutional guidelines produced by the school or committees on school experience needs to be put into consideration as they give authentic information in assisting the pre-teacher in preparation of lesson plan.

It is mandatory for the pre-teacher to first submit their lesson plan after preparation to the school based teacher as mentor for proper correction or assistance who will endorse it before it is allowed to be taking to the classroom for use. Lesson plan preparation should be systematic as it determines the outcome of the lesson, enough time should be given for lesson preparation. In preparation of a lesson plan, the teacher consider the needs of the students, what is the specification of the curriculum for the particular time, what is the specific objectives, what methods is required for the achievement of the set goals and objectives, what new innovation is expected by learners and what is the rating procedure that will be adopted to ascertain whether the knowledge has been attained by the students, what are the learners activities involvement pattern and what are the available resources. During the preparation of these lessons, the pre-teacher will need to be monitored by the mentor. The lesson must follow the speculated format of both the school and the institution to meet the needs of a selected category of students. The mentor, who is already familiar with this group of learners, understands their individual differences, this assist him/her to help the pre teacher in preparing the lesson plan that focuses the immediate needs of the students.

Presentation of the Lesson

This is a step out of many desirable steps to prepare a good lesson plan but it is not automatic that every prepared lesson plan gives a desired result of the achievement of the set goals and objectives of the lesson. There is need for proper presentation of the lesson. In the presentation of a good lesson, the teacher adopts some teaching strategy. A teaching strategy, according to Heeralal (2015: 513) is a systematic teaching plan that entails all the tools of instructional-learning procedure like, subject matter, classification, principles and aids.' Presentation of lesson, the teacher needs to give careful consideration to the following: giving details on the relevance of the lesson and how it is related to the previous lesson. Generating ideas in the lesson can be acquired through variety of resources and active participation of the students during lesson. The mentor will observe the students lessons taught by the pre teacher and provide feedback to improve lesson presentation (Heeralal 2015: 513).

Assessment of Students Outcome

Assessment of students' achievement is a very important responsibility of teachers. School-based assessment in schools generally is tedious and requires lot of time. Assessment follows a speculated pattern of the school and some other bodies assigned with the responsibility. A pre-teacher needs to assess students' performance according to the formulated pattern. In some cases, the requirements for assessment varies, hence, it becomes a challenge even for experienced teachers to adhere to the current requirements. The challenges became multiple for the pre-teacher who is just coming up to understand the whole process assessment; however, the pre-teacher is expected to be monitored closely in this aspect more than in any of the other areas. The experienced mentor can enlight-

en on the new ideas regarding assessment with the pre-teacher. Interpretation and practical implementation of assessment policies happens in the classroom. Mentor provides the platform for adequate understanding by the pre-teacher on student assessment. Even the experienced teachers that were in the system are not finding it easy to easily understand the consistent changing and procedure for learners' assessment. Hence, it becomes a serious problem for the pre-service teacher, therefore, they will need guidance and assistance in the area of learners' assessment (Heeralal 2015: 514).

Classroom Management

Teaching and learning mostly takes place in a classroom setting especially during school experience. Managing a classroom is a difficult task for a pre-teacher. For proper management of classroom during teaching, the pre-teacher will need orientation concerning the new process. During practice teaching, the pre-teacher, will need the assistance of the teacher in the classroom to supervise how he/she is performing with the activities of the classroom and the process of developing confidence, the teacher tends to leave the pre-teacher in the classroom depending on his/her discretion to allow the pre teacher to manage the classroom on his/her own while he finds out about what happens during the lesson from the pre-teacher and provides guidance measure where necessary to avoid crisis in case of similar occurrence. The management of the classroom involves several things such as classroom spacing, classroom relationship, class arrangement, display of control, students discipline, rules and regulations procedures, classroom safety. Efficient classroom management requires devotion, attention and display of energy. According to Heeralal (2015: 514), the duty of the mentor, in management of classroom is overwhelming in increasing the pre-teachers' skills.

Maintenance of Discipline

Maintaining discipline among students is germane in teaching and learning. Students underrate the pre-teacher because they are not a school based teacher and thus seem not to expect the student to give the same respect being given to their own teacher. Hence, pre teachers find it difficult to maintain discipline among students (Heeralal 2015). Teachers therefore expected to orientate their students on the need of giving the pre teacher the same measure of cooperation that they give to their regular teacher otherwise they will not be able to achieve greatly as expected. Pre teachers also need to understand their own level of assertiveness in maintaining discipline among students in the classroom and know their limitation.

Understanding Administrative Procedure

Teaching without administration is like river that stops flowing. The duty of an administrator is to keep records. Teachers are required to monitor the students through administrative procedure by keeping some vital records of the students ranging from attendance, assessment etc. Therefore, the teacher needs to be responsible in administrative matters. An educator engages in the keeping of appropriate records pertaining to their learners (Joubert and Prinsloo 2009: 198). These available records must be maintained as part of their specific job descriptions. The mentor provide avenue for the pre teacher to develop administrative skills of require to perform administrative tasks involved in administration to be acquitted with administrative competence.

Developing Professionalism

Professional development is defined as the extent to which a pre teacher received adequate training that enables him/her to develop the new skills and expertise for his/her profession beyond own learning area. Some of the areas that require development in professionalism include educational thinking, administrative skills, classroom management, and skill acquisition. According to Heeralal (2015: 514), the experienced teacher is expected to provide opportunities for the pre teacher to become familiar with new developments, thinking and fresh ideas in education. This can be achieved through conferences and seminar attendance organised by the concerned department. This will encourage and empower pre teacher to get involved in professional development.

Modelling

According to Schmidt (2008) as cited by Smolik (2010) suggests increased self-confidence

in mentees during their observation of the mentors' School Experiences. Since mentors are known to be experts, modelling technical aspects of teaching gives guidance for the pre- teacher which promotes self-assurance. Displaying enthusiasm during lesson planning and presentation as well as in a rapport with students is other ingredients to modelling. This includes the discourse used by the mentor when modelling lesson planning since this needs to be consistent with current science education in order to assist in the template of a mentee's professional development. However, as mentoring is a critical constructivist process, pre-teachers are not expected to be their mentors' duplicate (Schmidt 2008).

Feedback to the Students

Adu and Abongdia (2015) indicated that all learning requires effective feedback that is accurate, diagnostic and constructive. Also, feedback opens opportunities for reflection and possibilities. Helping new or pre-teachers "get engage in the practical and intellectual requirement of teaching" may sometimes focus the feedback with "reflective conversations", on the other hand, the feedback may comprise of a direct telling and asking (Smolik 2010). In this regard, feedback meetings between the mentor teacher and the pre-teacher should be direct, open, frank and constructive. Maphalala (2013) as cited by Adu and Abongdia (2015: 216) notes that: Feedback should not be only about the weaknesses of the student teachers, but also about their strengths; Feedback to the pre-teachers about their teaching performance should be provided; Feedback to the pre-teachers should also entail adequate communication skills; In providing feedback, the student teacher should also be afforded an opportunity to reflect on their teaching.

Pre-teachers and their Subject Mastery

Mentor teachers are mostly concerned about content knowledge that pre-teachers have on arrival to commence school experience. They comment that this is the area that sometimes makes them feel frustrated about what they regard as the gap between what the universities teach the students and the expectations the schools have. Linked to this is the change in curriculum, which sometimes results in miscommunication and frustration. What the university expects from the student teacher's lesson and lesson plan sometimes does not match with what the host school expects. It is under such circumstances when some MTs, during the post-lesson conference even decide to teach the ST the content knowledge expected as well as question their roles as mentors. Butler and Cuenca (2012) observe this dilemma and note that there is a lack of a definitive role for host teachers/ mentors. Wilson (2006) also observes a lack of an explicit curriculum during student teaching experience. Regarding the MTs' frustration is valid when the ST does not meet the curriculum expectations with regards to content knowledge. In some very unfortunate instances where the ST is not providing the learners with proper content knowledge, some MTs take over the class in the middle of the lesson. This is because it is usually very difficult to correct wrong models already given to the learners.

Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Literature indicates that STs should be involved in all curricular and non-curricular activities of the school (Marais 2011). The co-curricular activities include sports, music lessons and choir practicing, public speaking and debating, fundraising, school nutrition programs, redecorating the classroom and the library, and others. With regards to the STs' participation, mentor teachers have diverse experiences. For instance, there are those who feel that STs are very helpful especially in sports such as rugby, cricket and soccer. Some STs are reported to continue working with their host schools even after the SE block session. Similarly, there are STs who are reluctant to participate in co-curricular activities in the host schools. Sometimes it is due to the restrictions placed on them by schools. However in some cases, students reportedly do not participate for the following reasons: Sports activities taking place after school hours; Co-curricular activities considered less essential to academic activities; the school-based assessment (assignment) does not include participation in co-curricular activities.

CONCLUSION

The school experience exercise is centred on the students is an important component of the teacher education curriculum. This is an important component because it prepares the pre-teacher to become not only a teacher but eventually becoming a mentor. The process of turning theory to practical in a real life situation ex-

pose the pre teacher to many situations that preparation/planning, presentation, methodology, administration, assessment that leads to evaluation of stated objectives. In the context of diversity, student teachers question themselves whether they are ready to face diversity issues in the classroom, large classes and the lack of resources and materials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore very imperative for any would be teacher undergoing training in any institution with the intention of becoming teacher and later turn to a mentor should learns about student teachers' experiences so that institutions will rely on such experiences as the adequate criteria necessary to be certified as teacher in the chosen field or course of study. Such experiences also assist in the reviewing of the curriculum so that issues that need changes or introduction of new innovations will be addressed and conceptualized in the program. The host teachers also need to assist each the pre-teachers to solve some of their immediate problems that can hinder the set goals and objectives.

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