

First Year Student Teachers' Perception of Teaching Practice: A Case of Migori Teachers' Training College

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Abstract

Teaching Practice (TP) for teacher trainees is central to the achievement of the Dakar and Millennium Development Goals for universalising access to primary schooling and achieving gender equity. Education Act Cap. 211 see it as an integral part of teacher education curriculum in any learning institution. This programme has three sessions of three-week period for this. The programme may include initial periods of classroom observation in, micro-teaching with peers, demonstration lessons and may provide follow up seminars and discussions building on the TP experience. TP is often the most expensive part of the initial teacher training. These include costs of travel, subsistence, supervision and assessment. The study therefore wanted to find out the First Year student teachers' perception on preparation and actual teaching practice. Despite this we still have serious negative issues including beating learners despite having been taught about its ban; having a poor student teacher-regular teacher relationship; negativity towards the very pupils they are supposed to have good rapport with; and poor approach to teaching. The study made use of the „technical rationality“ model where theory and practice are taught and learned largely separately. Descriptive survey design was used and a structured questionnaire employed to collect data. This data was sieved and the relevant ones analyzed with descriptions of the results done and presented through figures and percentages. The importance of TP for professional teaching services cannot be over-emphasized contributors to which include the trainees, their teachers, the TP schools' regular teachers and administrators, as well as the college administrators. It is recommended that all these play their individual roles effectively to enable the pupil to benefit from the learning process during the teaching practice.

Key Words: Student Teachers, Group, Perception, Teaching Practice, Pre-Service Assessed Teaching, Teacher Education, Student Teachers' Education, PI.

INTRODUCTION

The Pre-service Education and Training (PRESET) of teachers is central to the achievement of the Dakar and Millennium development goals for universalising access to primary schooling and achieving gender equity (Lewin, 2004). Since 2007, I have been teaching in class, helping student teachers, and assessing the same during the actual teaching practice. For this period, I have realized that there are serious negative issues taking place during Teaching Practice (TP), a fairly universal feature of PRESET programmes, contrary to what has been passed to the learners in class. These include beating learners when they have been taught about the MOE ban; having a poor student teacher-regular teacher relationship; negativity towards the very pupils they are supposed to have good rapport with; and poor approach to teaching.

TP is an integral part of teacher education curriculum, seen by the Education Act Cap. 211 as all subjects taught and other activities provided at any learning institution (Nzomo, 2011). At one or more points during the training period trainees spend anything from a few days to several months working in schools as classroom teachers under supervision (Lewin, 2004). Primary Teacher Education programme in Kenyan Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) has three sessions of three-week period each for this. Linked to this College programmes may include initial periods of classroom observation in advance of TP, practice micro teaching with peers, and may provide follow up seminars and discussions building on the TP experience. TP is often the most expensive part of initial training because of the costs of travel, subsistence, supervision, and assessment.

Freire criticized the banking method that lessens the students' creativity. He proposed the use of a dialogue method in which neither teacher nor learners dominate the discussion; a method in which there is a shared and equal participation by all actors in the education system. When dialogue is used it makes learners more creative and confident, and, as a consequence, education becomes a liberation tool as well as a tool for meaningful development. He says that —without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education (Freire, 1970). It is therefore good to find out issues that make this possible as well as those that stand on the way. Trainees' acquisition of the

necessary skills depends on the college lecturers and administration (Nzomo, 2011). This brings about the need for effective supervision of the implementation of the curriculum by the management.

The Multi Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER) explored aspects of PRESET in five countries (Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Trinidad and Tobago and South Africa) over four years (Muster-Site Teacher Education Research Project, 2013). This study found that many tutors seem to have a ‘banking’ view of training which simply assumes that trainees need to acquire subject knowledge and standard methods of teaching which can then be applied fairly uniformly in schools (Stuart, Kunje & Lefoka, 2003). Onger (2011) notes that teacher resource is one of the most important input in the education system, and therefore efficient training, management and utilization of teachers is critical to the quality of learning outcomes and internal efficiencies. Teachers undoubtedly have a forceful influence on learners’ values, attitudes and behaviour.

The study therefore wanted to find out the First Year student teacher’s perception on preparation and actual teaching practice. This is necessary given the already noted twisted outcome of the preparation and actual TP when compared with the lecturers’ input before and in the process of actual TP. It also wanted to find out their gender, age brackets, preferred professions before joining TTC, and whatever employment they had been engaged in before becoming teacher trainees.

According to MUSTER low enrolment countries, especially in SSA, generally have more men than women as primary teachers. Gender inequity in enrolments at primary is correlated with gender imbalance in the teaching force (Colclough, Samarrai, Rose, & Tembon, 2003). First, in two of the countries (Lesotho and Malawi), the median age of entrants to PRESET is relatively high (26 years). In Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago entrants averaged 21-22 years old. Thus in all these cases most entrants are young adults who have had a gap since leaving school, many have family experience and responsibilities, and large proportions have some experience of teaching. Their training needs are likely to be different to those entering straight from school. There is evidence that those applying are not similar to those who entered primary school teaching in the past when College training systems were established. Many are several years beyond school leaving, have some experience of teaching, many are drawn from families with limited cultural capital, many have minimum academic qualifications and limited fluency in the medium of instruction, and substantial proportions see primary teaching as a career choice of last resort or as a transitional phase in a quest for opportunities for further study. MUSTER data suggests that prior experience is rarely recognised explicitly in training curricula or in College transactions (Lewin, 2004).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study made use of the ‘technical rationality’ model (Schon 1983, Calderhead & Shorrock 1997, Tabulawa, 1997) where theory and practice are taught and learned largely separately. The assumption is that trainees will go into the schools and apply theory. Often, however, trainees are faced with many confusing situations which they do not know how to deal with, and they have access to very limited support to help them solve problems. Learning to teach effectively requires that trainees integrate the insights and concepts derived from the public propositional knowledge available in colleges, with the contextual and situated knowledge of specific classrooms and pupils. This implies that the theoretical and practical elements of the curriculum should be intertwined and presented in a dialogic relationship, rather than as discrete elements. Too frequently this is not so in content, timing or structure.

A sample of 65 (11.7%) out of 557 (100%) target population of 1st. Year student teachers was used. It made use of descriptive survey design and employing ‘hostage questionnaire’ to collect data: structured questionnaire tool. The data so collected was sieved and the relevant ones analyzed and some descriptions of the results done and presented through figures and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the student teachers were females 33 (50.8%) while the males accounted for 32 (49.2%) as seen in Fig. 1.

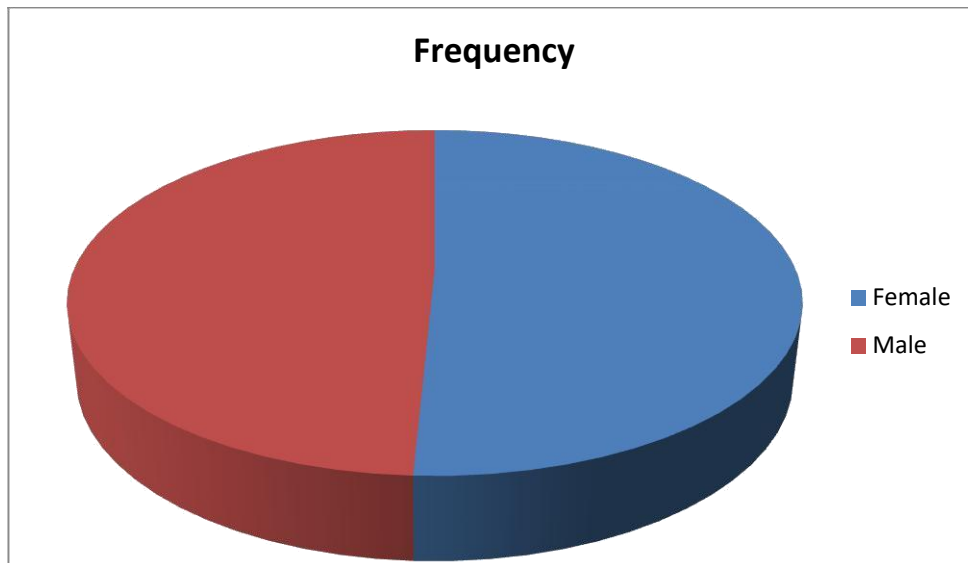


Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents

Age brackets had the leading at 21 – 23 at 32 (49.2%), followed by 18 – 20 at 16 (24.6%), 24 – 26 at 11 (16.9%), and lastly 30 + at 6 (9.2%).

Those who had engaged in employment before joining the TTC were 28 (43.1%) while those who had not were 37 (56.9%).

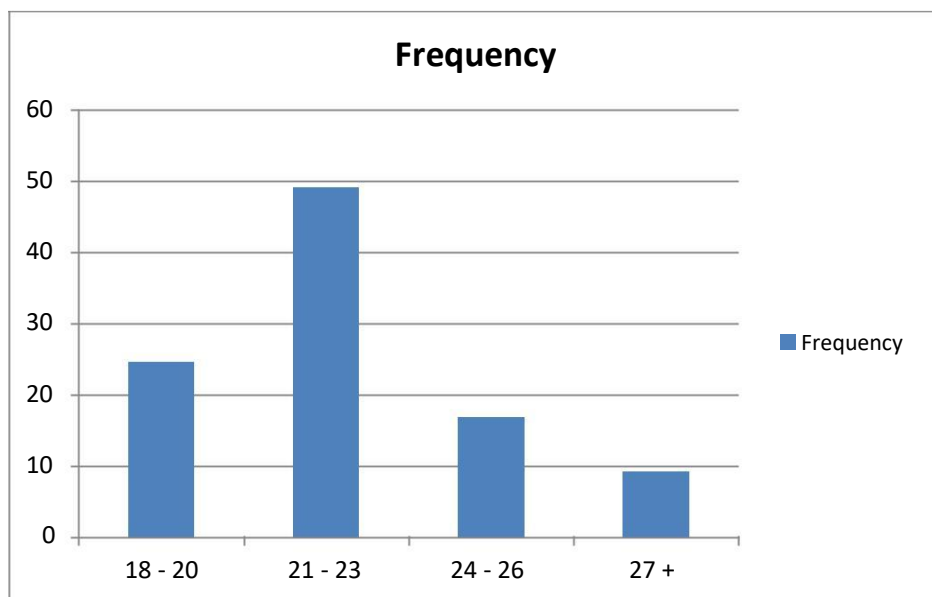


Figure 2. Respondents' age brackets

The different jobs quoted a major collective group for teaching at 12 (42.9%), and the remaining 16 (57.1%). This means therefore that most of the student teachers that we have need a lot of guidance in order to fit in their possible future profession because of the fact that they are having practical teaching for the first time. Most of the student teachers either feel that the TP preparations are tiring or very tiring at 28 (43.1%) and 22 (33.9%) respectively: a total of 50 (76.9%) of the 65 (100%), leaving only 15 (23.1) saying it is normal. Several reasons were advanced for these perceptions mainly included hectic approvals 10 (16.7%); squeezed time 8 (13.3%); errors in preparations 7 (10.6%); and 4 (6.7%).

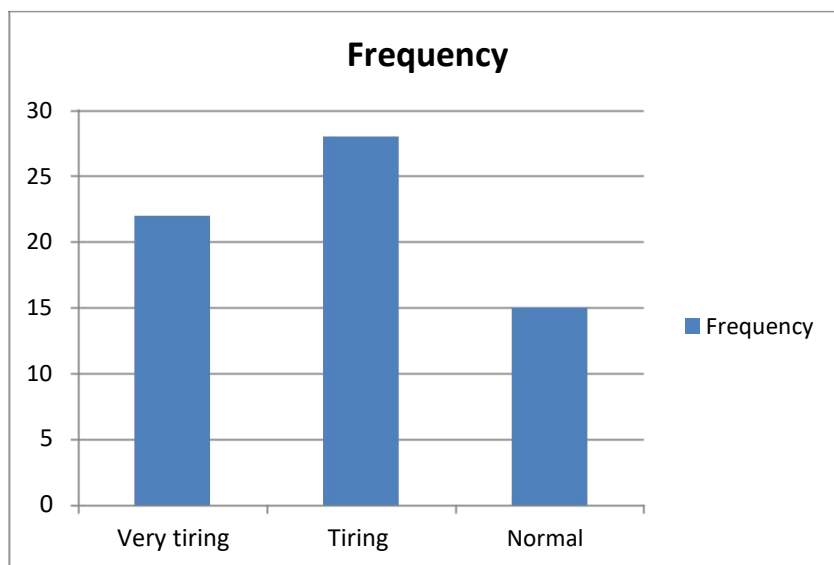


Figure 3. Student teachers' perception of their teaching practice preparations

On making it better, they had such responses as need for more time 11 (23.4%); blanks 6 (12.8%); need for early preparations and need for some lecturers to be polite and not harass student teachers 5 (10.6%). On the actual TP, 16 (24.6%) were very excited, 29 (44.6%) were excited while the remaining 20 (30.8%) find it normal. Reasons for these responses included opportunity to apply knowledge and skills learned in class in the field, gain courage and confidence of being a teacher. Some felt it is a P1 course 5 (8.9%) and there was ability to interact with pupils for the first time and encouraging good teaching and one enjoys it as a teacher. Others responses were that other students have successfully done it why not us, it leads to new discoveries, having dealt with pupils before there is no difference, good preparations, tedious and laborious, almost getting over with it, and very encouraging assessors making me feel easy.

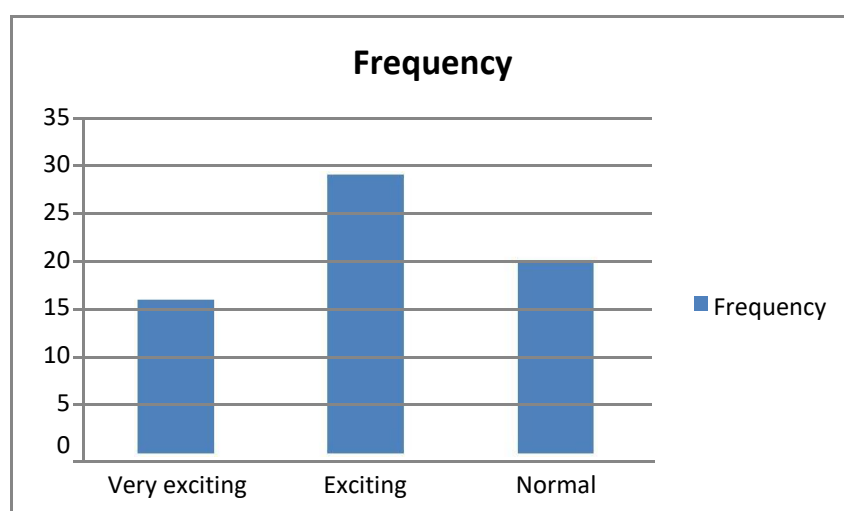


Figure 4. Perception of actual TP

About making it better, 12 (22.2%) indicated being given more time for school preparations before the preceding holiday to enhance TP output. Six (11.1%) noted need for adequate resources for student teachers. Three (5.6%) felt that there is need to have proper teaching and learning resources, improving means of approving work for better output in the field, 6 (9.2%) and TP assessors not being too harsh to student teachers had 10 (15.4%). Need to strengthen the demonstration lessons and micro-teaching came up at 15 (23.1%). There is need for more preparation time given to those student teachers' personal experiences and expectations for this period had 9 (13.9%) respondents.

Table 1. Student teachers' suggestions for making TP better

Suggestions for making TP better	Frequency	%
More time for preparations	12	22.2
Having proper teaching/learning resources	6	11.1
Adequate resources for student teachers	3	5.6
Friendlier TP assessors	10	15.4
Strengthening demonstration and micro-teaching lessons	15	23.1
More time for preparations	9	13.9
Improving means of approvals	12	9.2

From the foregoing, recommendations include putting more effort on the guidance and counseling services of both the lecturers and student teachers during the preparation and actual TP period; looking into the possibility of ameliorating the student teachers financial being either by providing some token to them which can be factored in their subsidies; having them choose where to carry out their TP, residential one, and or having longer TP periods; justifying the number of subjects to be offered as some like Physical Education (PE) and Creative Arts are not examined hence not taught by regular teachers; giving early information on TP schools and subject groups; having some relaxed College routine for the student teachers in order to give them ample time for TP preparations, lesson preparations during TP, and also for their relaxation or leisure to avoid early burn-out usually experienced during this period; need to rethink the timing and duration of TP for more effectiveness; initiating mentorship programmes of newly employed lecturers to facilitate faster acquisition of the necessary skills and attitudes; mandatory induction of tutors posted to colleges; emphasizing interactive methods of teaching and learning.

We could do with a residential TP as is the case in Lesotho and Malawi (Lefoka, Jobo & Moeti, 2001). This may allow for the students' self regulation to be able to organize themselves when it comes to when to go to school, leave school, and prepare their lesson plans without having to attend to college routine as well the way it is today for first years.

The key issues raised here are that who becomes a primary teacher is a question that needs answering carefully on the basis of evidence rather than supposition. After the MUSTER research started Ghana shifted to an In-In-Out system of two years in College and one year in school based training. There is need for timing the duration of TP as this carries implications for its effectiveness. Short periods give little insight into children's development or the durability of learning that may take place. They also limit opportunities for new teachers to settle in to responsibilities for a class and establish relationships with class groups. Longer periods raise difficult problems of support and mentorship.

In most cases grades were based on one short visit by a single tutor, raising doubts about validity and reliability. Ratings can vary greatly between observers, reports from school observations are not always collected and collated, and it is often unclear how TP assessments are incorporated into a final grade. None of the assessment systems studied gave insight into whether trainees were organising effective learning for pupils, or were learning from their mistakes and developing their practice. Very few trainees fail TP. Marks on TP rarely make much difference to final achievement grades despite the cost and effort put in to obtaining ratings.

There should be mandatory induction of tutors newly posted to colleges. This allows for their more effective output in terms of preparations of the student teachers and even assessment during the actual TP. Mentorship programmes of newly employed lecturers should be put in place to facilitate faster acquisition of the necessary skills and attitudes.

Emphasis should be placed on interactive methods of teaching/learning. This ties up with what some educators have mentioned on teaching methodology (Nzomo, 2011).

This study concentrated on the student teachers and we know that there are a number of stakeholders with varied perceptions on this same issue like their lecturers, the government, professionals – like educational psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists and so on – who can also provide some valuable knowledge.

These can be sought out as well. The college administration, as the holder of the college purse, also needs to give their input about this. There might be need to survey into the publishing of some TP booklet that can deviate from the general and what looks like mostly theoretical presentation than a practical guide to student teachers' TP practice.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. Teachers who have had undergone PRESET with the right perception would end up with the right qualification to take care of our pupils' academic foundation. Its importance for teacher trainees cannot be over-emphasized. Contributors to this include the trainees, their teachers, the TP schools' regular teachers and administrators, as well as the college administrators. These need a concerted effort for quality education and its sustenance in primary schools. Students have pertinent issues that can impede their teaching and therefore disadvantage learners. There are also very positive responses to TP from the students who appreciate the input it has in their professional development. What is needed is to harness student teachers' potentials as they have the ability to help the pupils academically. This can be done through the introduction of some fee to take care of the students as stipend during the TP sessions; have more time for preparation by giving them their classes, schools and required materials from College during the holidays preceding their TP periods.

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BIO-DATA

Tom K. Omondi Onyango is a teacher at Migori Teachers' Training College since 2007, and graduated with an M.Phil in Educational Psychology from Moi University in 2010. He got a Bachelor degree from

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