TEACHING PRACTICE SUPERVISION AND ASSESSMENT AS A QUALITY ASSURANCE TOOL IN TEACHER TRAINING: PERCEPTIONS OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS AT MASVINGO TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice (T.P.) is a critical stage in the training of prospective teachers as it is a process of producing a master teacher. There are many mechanisms that are put in place to make T.P. a beneficial experience to trainee teachers and student supervision is a part of one of such mechanisms. Supervision and assessment of the trainee teachers is done by the college and mentors and members of the administration at the schools where students conduct their teaching practice. There are, however, some problems associated with supervision. For instance, supervisors give conflicting suggestions and sometimes supervision is ill-timed or delayed. A survey was conducted in Masvingo urban schools to determine views of prospective teachers and student teachers supervisors on the effectiveness of T.P supervision as a tool in quality assurance. By and large, participants regarded supervision and assessment as an indispensable tool in assuring quality in teacher training. Nevertheless, some variables were viewed as affecting the effectiveness of supervision. Among them were delays in supervision, supervision being far-spaced from each other, little or no dialogue and lack of consensus on the part of supervisors in dealing with similar issues. Among other things, the study recommended the running of workshops on T.P supervision by training colleges for Teaching Practice supervisors at all levels.

Key words: student teacher supervision, teaching practice, prospective teachers

INTRODUCTION

Student teaching practice is an important stage in the professional development of teachers. It provides an opportunity for pre-service teachers to apply the knowledge and theories learned on campus to the real classroom. Student teaching has been called the most challenging, rewarding, and critical stage of teacher education (Goethals & Howard, 2000) and it is generally agreed that the student teaching experience is the key for teacher preparation programs (Guyton & McIntyre,
Because it is so important, teaching practice should be conducted in such a way that student teachers can continuously learn new knowledge and skills and develop professionally. Supervision of students doing Teaching Practice (T.P.) if properly done can contribute to the quality of student teacher training.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Teaching Practice (T.P) is an essential component of the student’s professional training. Teaching Practice is a core course in teacher education in Zimbabwe. It is one of the four examined sections in the teacher education curriculum in Zimbabwe. T.P is internally and externally examined.

At the dawn of Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980 student teachers were treated as apprentices and they taught under the supervision of experienced teachers. Nonetheless, in 1982, because of the high demand for teachers in the country, student teachers taught as full time, fully qualified teachers with classes to themselves and this was the case with Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Training Course which is ZINTEC for short. As the teacher availability improved in the late 90’s student teachers were again placed under the guidance and mentorship of qualified and experienced professionals. The 2-5-2 teacher training model is used in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. The first two terms make up the first residential phase at the training college after which trainee teachers spend five school terms doing teaching practice. The last two school terms are then spent at college. Whatever model of T.P the student teacher may be doing, 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 as cited in Zindi, Nyota & Batidzirai (1996) teaching practice goes beyond just knowing what to teach and knowing how to teach and the purpose of teaching practice is to develop several competencies in the trainee teacher which include; interpersonal, pedagogical, intercultural and psychological competencies. Students are prepared for teaching practice through lectures, observations of competent qualified teachers teaching, micro and peer teaching.

It is the responsibility of training institutions to deploy students for teaching practice and all effort is made to attach students to competent qualified teachers by closely liaising with school heads. An integral part of teaching practice is student teacher supervision and assessment. The supervision is done through coordinated partnership between school personnel and college lecturers. Initial visits are meant to be supervisory especially in the case of Zimbabwe where college teacher trainees do Teaching Practice for five consecutive terms. Each college has its own assessment instrument but training institutions are generally guided by the Department of Teacher Education (D.T.E) criteria of assessment of Practical Teaching as far as commenting and scoring are concerned. Supervision of student teachers is the task of teacher training institutions as well as host school. However, there seem to be some problems in doing this noble task which ultimately may affect the quality of supervision of prospective teachers. For instance, Zindi, Nyota & Batidzirai (1996) observed that while all teacher training institutions were engaged in the assessment of teaching practice, the method they used were open to questions as no systematic or standardized techniques were followed. In educational supervision the primary
problem according to Kadushin (1990) is worker ignorance and/or ineptitude regarding the knowledge, attitude and skills required to do the job. It was against this background that the study was conducted.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Supervised teaching practice is practical supervision of teaching under the tutelage of an established teacher and teachers should be adequately trained and supported. However it seems there are some problems associated with the supervision and assessment of student teachers while they are doing teaching practice. For example it seems as if students are not supervised frequently and timeously. Such problems can easily affect the overall quality of Teaching practice supervision and assessment. The purpose of this study was to determine views of prospective teachers on the effectiveness of T.P supervision as a tool in quality assurance in Masvingo urban schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following questions:
• In what ways is the supervision of student teachers doing teaching practice beneficial to trainees?
• What good qualities characterize the supervision and assessment of student teachers doing T.P.?
• What are the perceived weaknesses of the supervision and assessment of student teachers doing T.P.?
• What impediments are there to effective supervision of student teachers doing T.P.?
• What improvements are necessary to make supervision and assessment of student teaching practice more beneficial?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It was hoped that the enriched understanding of student teacher experiences of supervision and assessment while doing Teaching Practice would make significant contribution to knowledge within teacher education in Masvingo by providing useful information about actual practice towards the training of students. It was hoped that teacher trainers could use the study as a platform to reflect on their practices and strategies in supervising and assessing students doing teaching practice. The unveiling T.P. supervision-linked challenges could be a basis for addressing them through efforts of teacher training colleges. Researchers also hoped that insights gained through the study could stimulate further study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

The qualitative design was employed to conduct the study. The focus of qualitative research is the nature or essence of things (Gall & Borg, 2007). Urban schools in Masvingo where teaching practice supervisions and assessments were done were identified for a situational case study.
Sample

Twenty students training at three primary teacher training colleges in Masvingo province who were doing Teaching Practice at schools in Masvingo urban were chosen by convenience sampling.

Instruments

The researchers used questionnaires which were self administered to student teachers. The questionnaire had a section with statements on quality aspects of student supervision and participants were requested to indicate YES or NO to the stated statements. The students also responded to some open-ended questions on what they viewed as strengths and weaknesses of the way they were supervised by the college and host schools’ staff.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were presented qualitatively using thick descriptions. Some tables and figures were used to aid researchers to present data.

Limitations

Since this study is specific to Masvingo province, it is highly likely that it will only indicate something about trainee teachers in this province. As the study just involved participants from Masvingo urban schools and teacher training colleges, findings may not be generalised to other colleges and schools elsewhere. Notwithstanding, the picture maybe a replica of what obtains in the minds of student teachers elsewhere in teacher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In his contribution titled ‘ Teachers in Anglophone Africa: Issues in Teacher Supply, Training and Management’, Mulkeen (2010) found out that in Zambia student teachers were deliberately sent to remote rural schools. While this may assist in teacher distribution, it increased the logistical difficulties of supervision and in effect reduced the frequency of external supervision and supervision of student teachers by tutors from the training institution was limited. In Malawi, for example, tutors were expected to visit each student six times during the year of T.P. However, this was prevented by difficulties of transportation and the unavailability of resources. The study further established that the impact of T.P. was diminished by the limited role it played in the final assessment of student teachers. In some cases, performance in T.P. had no impact at all on the final grade of the student. In Zambia, for example, there was no assessment of T.P. in the student overall grade.

In her study Bhargava (2009) established that comments of supervising teachers remained limited to the use of skills like chalkboard writing, introducing lessons, class discipline and media use and less emphasis was given on the gradual development of student teachers, new approaches adopted and stimulus variation, whether they were being effectively used in class or
not. The study also established that supervision of student teachers did not include aspects of trainee as a member of the wider community.

In a study titled ‘Problems of Prospective teachers during T.P.’ Azeem (2011) found out that 20% of the participants did not have their lessons being checked regularly by concerned supervisors while 80% were of the mind that their lessons were being checked regularly. In addition, 23% of the participants expressed the view that the class teachers were often present in their classes during teaching practice while the other 77% opined that class teachers or mentors were often not present in their classes during the teaching practice of the prospective teachers.

Hu and Wong (2006) in a study titled ‘Video Conferencing by Student Teachers: Does it make any difference?’ examined patterns of student teachers’ talk during T.P. The findings suggested that cooperating teachers were the ones with whom student teachers had most conversations during T.P. Student teachers spent the least time talking to their college or University supervisors and school principals. While findings of these researchers are related to the objectives of the study, the studies did not focus on conceptions of prospective teachers and views of student teacher supervisors on the effectiveness of T.P supervision as a tool in quality assurance in Masvingo urban schools.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS
Bio data of respondents

According to Yegidis and Weinbach as cited in Aguti (2003), background information on the sample could be important but there is no rule that bio data should always be included in every instrument. In this study the questionnaire for students had questions on the sex and the duration for which each participant had been doing Teaching practice. In this regard, six male and 14 female students took part in the study. Ten of the students were doing their final terms, three in their forth term, two in their second and five were in their third terms of doing T.P.

Questionnaire/Student data

Q. Is student T.P supervision useful to you? All the twenty students expressed the view point that Teaching Practice was of use to them and none indicated otherwise. Student responses to a question requiring them to give reasons why they thought T.P. was helpful or of no help to them were as presented in figure 1 below.
Basing on student opinions in figure 1 above, 44% of the students viewed T.P. supervision as useful in giving them guidance on critical aspects of teaching, 22% were of the mind that supervision motivates the prospective students, 18% were of the view that T.P. supervision boosts the confidence of the student teacher, 11% were of the opinion that T.P. supervision accorded students to watch apt lesson demonstrations given by mentors and 4% opined that was useful in affording close monitoring of student teachers.

Several questions requiring ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses were asked and student responses were as is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Student teacher Responses to given Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is T.P. assessment and supervision by college done frequently?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is T.P. assessment and supervision by school administration frequent?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is T.P. assessment and supervision by mentors frequent?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is T.P. assessment and supervision well-spaced by host school?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you get constructive feedback from your college supervisors?</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you get constructive feedback from your host school supervisors?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are your supervisors fair?</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Is there consistence in supervisor’ assessments?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Are you involved in goal setting with college supervisors?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Are you involved in goal setting with mentors?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Are you involved in goal setting with school administration?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Are useful discussions held between you and your T.P. supervisors?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the twenty students were of the view that their supervision and assessment by their mentors was frequent, that feedback by host school was constructive and that useful discussions were held between them and their T.P. supervisors. Spacing of assessment and supervision was considered moderate or good by 18/20 students but 9/20 expressed the view that assessments and supervision by training colleges were ill-spaced. Fifteen students viewed assessments as fair. Opinions were divided on whether students were in goal setting with college supervisors and school administrators, however 18/20 students were of the view that they were involved in goal setting with their mentors.

**Question: State what you consider to be good qualities of your T.P. supervision**

Six out of twenty students were of the view that their T.P. was informative and 4/20 stated that it was educative. T.P. was considered as effective in pointing out both weaknesses and strengths by five students. Three students were of the opinion that thorough checking of documents rendered it of good quality. Ten students pointed out frequent and daily supervisions by college and mentors as a good quality of their supervision. Fairness by supervisors was viewed as a good quality of their T.P. by five students. Three students were of the opinion that good lesson demonstration by mentors was a good aspect of T.P. supervision.

**Question: State problems that you have faced that might have compromised the quality of T.P. supervision by college and school-based supervisors**

Responses to this question are represented in Table 2 below but six students expressed the mind that they did not face any problems with their supervision.

**Table 2: Problems that might have compromised the quality of T.P. supervision by college and school-based supervisors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stated problem</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College not visiting us frequently</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administration not supervising</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers supervising/assessing just a part of the lesson delivery</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors writing marks and comments before discussion with trainee</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers supervising student in the absence of the mentor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal issues not considered during supervision</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors not friendly or distanced from learner</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor bias in awarding scores</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors’ assessment reports illegible</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of consensus on the part supervisors in dealing with similar issues.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor demotivation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information in Table 2 depicts that college visits were considered infrequent, that there was supervisor bias in giving assessment scores and that there was lack of supervisor consensus in dealing with similar issues by five students in each case. Assessment of just a part of a lesson, failure to consider student personal issues during T.P. supervision, and mentor demotivation
were all viewed as issues comprising the quality of T.P. supervision by four students in each case. Awarding of marks before the postmortem of the lesson, unfriendliness of supervisors and illegibility of some supervisors’ reports were each stated thrice as problems faced by students that could compromise on the quality of T.P. supervision. Lack of T.P. supervision by the school administration was stated twice as a factor that could compromise on the quality of T.P. supervision.

Suggestions by trainees

Two students suggested constant supervision by college and another two suggested supervision by members of the school administration. One student suggested that supervisors should be friendly and should not make students fear them. Three student teachers proposed that scoring by supervisors should be done after some oral discussion with the supervisee.

DISCUSSION

In what ways is the supervision of student teachers doing teaching practice beneficial to trainees?

All the twenty prospective teachers viewed their supervision while on T.P as beneficial in several ways. For instance it was viewed as critical in affording close monitoring of student teachers, giving guidance on critical aspects of teaching boosting trainee confidence, motivating the trainee and providing apt lesson demonstration by mentors. Views given by the participants on the benefits student teachers could get from T.P support (Nwaogu, 1980) who says student teacher supervision involves helping, motivating, supporting, advising and stimulating growth in the prospective teacher.

What are the good qualities of your T.P. supervision and assessment?

The prospective teachers pointed out that their T.P was effective in pointing out strengths and weakness of trainees. Thorough checking of documents rendered T.P supervision of good quality. Fairness was also viewed as a good quality of T.P by 5/20 students. Frequent or daily supervisions by college and mentors was also stated as a good quality of T.P by 5/20 students. Employment of good lesson demos by mentors was perceived as a good aspect of T. P supervision by the students. White & Stepheson (2000) say effective supervision is usually planned with an agreed agenda and demonstrations as a follow up to some noted weakness or just to showcase a critical skill.

Ways in which the quality of student T.P supervision is compromised

Some of the stated problems by trainee were that; the college supervisors did not visit students timeously and frequently and supervisors awarded scores before discussion with the student. Some students also were of the mind that T.P. supervisors were unfriendly and supervisors’ reports were illegible and so were of little help to students. Some students pointed out that supervisor bias compromised on the quality of T.P supervision and that there was lack of consensus on the part of supervisors in dealing with similar issues. In addition mentor
demotivation was stated as an impediment to effective T.P supervision. These views given by prospective teachers concur with Eya and Chukwu (2012) who say some impediments to effective supervision include favouritism, lack of professional qualities, and lack of motivation. In Zimbabwe lack of mentor motivation could be attributed to lack of mentor incentive or allowance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

By and large, participants regarded supervision and assessment as an indispensable tool in assuring quality in teacher training. Nevertheless, some variables were viewed as affecting the effectiveness of supervision. Among them were delays in supervision, supervisions being far-spaced from each other, little or no dialogue between supervisors and supervisees and lack of consensus on the part of supervisors in dealing with similar issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommended:

1. Running of workshops on T.P supervision by training colleges with T.P. supervisors at all levels so that critical issues are clarified especially on issues that directly affect the quality of T.P. supervision such as proper interpretation of T.P. supervision instruments so that there is supervisor consensus in dealing with similar student issues and that supervisor bias is checked. Such workshops should emphasize goal setting by supervisor and trainee to facilitate purposeful progress.

2. Some incentives should be provided by the Ministry of Education to encourage mentors who by virtue of their position as class teachers supervise student teachers doing T.P. more frequently than other supervisors at other levels.

REFERENCES


