

Maintaining Quality by Student Teachers in Teaching Practice

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Abstract

Teaching practice is a vital component of teacher education programmes, providing student teachers with opportunities to apply pedagogical knowledge, develop professional skills, and demonstrate teaching competency in real classroom settings. Maintaining quality during this practicum involves effective lesson planning, appropriate instructional strategies, classroom management, reflective practice, and adherence to professional ethics. This article examines the key dimensions that influence the quality of teaching practice, including mentorship, institutional support, peer collaboration, and continuous evaluation. Findings suggest that student teachers who engage in reflective teaching, utilise diverse instructional methods, and respond to learner diversity are better equipped to deliver high-quality lessons. The article concludes that sustained supervision, constructive feedback, and a supportive learning environment are essential for enhancing the quality of teaching practice and shaping competent future educators.

Key Words: challenges, learning, pedagogical, planning, practice, quality, teaching, training

Introduction

School experience or teaching practice is an important component of becoming a teacher. This is the case because it exposes student teachers' experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. During teaching practice, a student teacher is given the opportunity to try the art of teaching before actually getting into the real world of the teaching profession. Student teachers also know the value of teaching practice. In view of this, Menter (1989: 461) remarks that student teachers perceive it as "the crux of their preparation for the real interface" between their lives as students and membership of the teaching profession. As a result, teaching practice creates a mixture of anticipation anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the student teachers as they commence their teaching practice.

In view of this, student teachers need to be able to express their personal educational philosophies, theories and understandings. Based on this, the paper seeks to investigate the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers in teaching during their teaching practice. School experience provides them with the satisfaction of their teacher career. In this way, student teachers have to question their beliefs and assumptions in developing pedagogical knowledge during teaching practice to avoid practices that are not founded on pedagogical knowledge and theories since in the profession of teaching, the theoretical facts are embedded in and inseparable from practice.

Despite the enriching experiences during teaching practice, student teachers also experience challenges which in a way can hamper their ability to derive maximum benefit from the exercise. An understanding of the student teachers experiences can be able to facilitate the teacher training faculties, schools and colleges of their awareness of the challenges faced during the school experience which could induce a negative attitude on the part of the student teachers towards the profession. In this regard, it is needful for teacher-training programs to

reconsider and review ways of overcoming these challenges so as to enable these novice teachers to achieve their desired outcomes.

Key Elements of Quality Teaching Practice

1. Effective Lesson Planning

Quality teaching begins with comprehensive lesson planning. Student teachers must prepare clear learning objectives, instructional activities, time management strategies, and assessment tools. Well-structured lesson plans help maintain logical sequencing, promote learner engagement, and ensure curriculum alignment.

2. Classroom Management

Maintaining discipline, organizing learning spaces, and establishing positive teacher–student relationships are essential components of quality classroom management. Student teachers must employ preventive strategies, use reinforcement techniques, and create an environment conducive to learning.

3. Instructional Strategies

Using diverse teaching methods - such as group work, demonstrations, multimedia integration, and inquiry-based learning-enhances lesson quality. Student teachers who adapt strategies to learners' needs improve comprehension and participation.

4. Assessment and Feedback

Ongoing assessment allows student teachers to track learner progress and adjust teaching accordingly. Integrating formative assessments, quizzes, and reflective questions helps maintain instructional quality.

Reasons for Lacking Integration of Theory with Practice

- Hidden curriculum – learning takes place although it is not formally planned.
- Lack of careful curriculum development – the theory does not compliment the practice.
- Lack of emphasis given to practical skills in the classroom.
- The under-utilization of different effective teaching and learning strategies.
- Lack of role models in the practical setting.
- Increased workload.
- Conflict between educators and management.
- Theory is too idealistic and impractical.
- Lack of formal feedback on formative evaluation.
- Lack of planned support for students.

Possible methods to enhance theory–practice integration are:

- **Problem based learning:** Assignments that involve complex classroom scenarios.
- Student learning organized around self-directed work. This reflects to making students responsible for their learning regarding a particular problem.
- **Concept maps:** A concept map helps to integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge by creating a knowledge graphs that depicts networks of concepts.
- **Reflective practice:** A kind of practice that develops through personal reflection on one's own practice, as well as guided reflection, where peers and others share in the reflection process.
- **Group discussion:** This enhances skill acquisition in decision making and problem solving, critical and creative thinking processes as well as thoughtful application.
- **Support and demonstrations by role models:** This will help learners to apply various skills to a diversity of problems, use different educational strategies and provide meaningful learning experiences in which learners can correlate theory and practice.

The teaching practice curriculum should therefore include every possible requirement to enhance professional and personal growth of student teachers in becoming motivated, enthusiastic and independent teachers. Theory- practice integration can be facilitated if joint planning is implemented regarding curricula, teaching methods, assessment criteria, and the different roles of educators and student teachers should be clarified.

Challenges in Teaching Practice

A teacher is required to plan sensitivity and consciously in a classroom. Most countries are applying the "no child left behind" policy which means that all learners are to be included in the teaching- learning process embracing their diversities into the socio-cultural environment of the school and the school community. This presents a teaching and learning challenge for the teacher as diverse forms of learning and intelligence program.

If the student teachers challenges and strategies adopted during teaching practice can be understood more clearly, teacher educators would be able to guide the student teachers in a more meaningful and effective manner, where the educators could specify which strategies are more appropriate in which conditions. The student teachers have to figure out what strategies can be useful and convincing enough for their lectures.

Improving teaching quality and learning process in the classroom

1. Set clear learning goals

Teachers should always have instructional objectives for each lesson and each chapter. These instructional objectives lead to effective learning for children. Instructional objectives are statements of observable and measurable actions that students should be able to perform after learning the content.

As an example:

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to solve two-digit multiplications.

From the given content or skills, students should be able to solve, estimate, evaluate, interpret, and predict.

To improve teaching quality and ensure effective instruction, it is very important to consistently assess student learning. Teachers can further enhance their instructional planning by using observation tools, tests, and other assessment tools. They can also apply Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, et al., 1956), which consists of six levels of the cognitive domain: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This is a great tool for setting clear and measurable learning goals.

Therefore, understanding the precise learning objectives allows teachers to plan lessons, assign appropriate tasks, and conduct classroom activities smoothly. This approach is beneficial as it provides a proper framework to link the instructional activities to the desired student outcomes, thus enhancing student performance.

2. Encourage active learning

A classroom research study found that immediately after a lecture, students recalled 70 percent of the information presented in the first 10 minutes of the lecture and only 20 percent from the last 10 minutes (McKeachie 1999).

Teachers need to incorporate active learning strategies to improve teaching quality and ensure that students are interested in the lesson. For example, one effective technique is using small groups. In this approach, students work together in groups to solve a problem or achieve a specific goal. This method enhances group cooperation, communication, and thinking skills. This activity can be followed by individual or group presentations to help students retain what they have learned.

3. Implement cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is a highly effective approach to learning in which students work together to achieve specific learning outcomes. This approach is not only limited to putting students in groups; it also includes structure with expectations, rules of the group, and specific academic goals for each student.

When students are engaged in group activities, they are able to learn important skills for the 21st century. This allows students to develop excellent communication skills, conflict-solving skills and good interpersonal relations. Cooperative learning enhances students' leadership and problem-solving skills, and boosts confidence when they are involved in groups and attempting to achieve common goals.

Cooperative classroom learning not only creates an atmosphere for learning and improved academic performance, but also helps students to be more motivated to learn from each other.

4. Integrate technology wisely

In modern education, technology plays an important role in teaching and student learning outcomes. After the pandemic, most teachers have used technology in their classrooms. This does not mean that high investment is needed in every school. Teachers can use free online resources, digital tools, videos, audio, and online games that can be implemented in classes. Young students are tech-savvy and they learn better and faster when technology is integrated into the classroom.

5. Involve parents

The best teachers always include parents in the process and keep them informed. One of the best ways to involve parents is through the school's ERP system that shares student updates and grades with parents. Teachers and school leaders can also use school management apps to bring parents into the education system and increase parental involvement in the school and classroom.

6. Conduct regular assessment and evaluation

Most schools only use student surveys to assess the teaching quality, but an important evaluation of teaching should be based on the assessment of learning outcomes. Assessing and evaluating teaching quality should be based on students' development, content knowledge, skills performance, exhibitions, project reports, learning blogs, journals, and so on.

There are a few other simple guidelines for improving teaching quality:

Be clear about what you expect

Make eye contact with students and call them by name

Hands-on activities should be used to supplement lectures

Recognize students' accomplishments and respond to their concerns appropriately

Make connections between course content and its application in the real world

7. Support positive behaviour and smooth transitions

A well-functioning classroom environment relies on the teacher's abilities that set a positive example while managing the transition effectively, creating harmony in learning.

Lead with actions, not just words: Teachers who consistently exhibit respect, patience, and kindness encourage students to emulate similar behaviours. Recognizing even small positive actions reinforces a culture of mutual respect and good conduct.

Ensure seamless activity shifts: Notify students in advance about upcoming transitions and establish simple routines, such as using visual cues, timers, or familiar sound signals, to guide movement between tasks.

Encourage purposeful endings: Wrapping up activities with short discussions or reflections helps students mentally reset, smoothing the transition to their next focus area.

When educators model positive actions and thoughtfully manage transitions, they cultivate an orderly, respectful, and dynamic classroom environment where students feel supported.

8. Redirect focus with simple, non-verbal strategies

Effective classroom management doesn't always require spoken intervention. Non-verbal communication can quietly redirect behaviour, keeping lessons uninterrupted and productive.

Utilize body language effectively: A quick glance, a gentle movement closer to a student, or subtle hand gestures can encourage students to refocus without drawing attention.

Encourage engagement through posture and gestures: Teachers can maintain attentiveness by adopting open and welcoming body language, helping students stay tuned to the lesson.

Signal transitions with subtle actions: Shifts between tasks can be guided seamlessly using calm pauses, soft gestures, or visual aids, ensuring students remain oriented and on task.

This approach enables teachers to maintain order discreetly while nurturing a classroom atmosphere that prioritizes focus and minimizes disruptions.

Student suggestions for teacher improvement

- a) Students share some important tips that all teachers should know about. They emphasize:
- b) The importance of clear communication and engaging lessons for teacher improvement.
- c) A friendly and encouraging atmosphere is highly valued.
- d) Real-world examples in teaching are appreciated.
- e) Timely feedback and a balanced workload are considered essential for effective learning.
- f) Passionate teaching that stimulates a passion for learning is highly valued.
- g) Collaborative interactive teaching style that addresses diverse learning needs is important.

Supervising The Internship

As an internal supervisor, you use all the skills necessary in any effective supervisory relationship:

- Providing leadership
- Motivating
- Delegating
- Communicating
- Developing and training
- Evaluating

Additionally, the students will look to the supervisor as a mentor who will assist their transition from the classroom to the work environment. Since the internship is an extension of the learning process.

Quality Career Development Internship

A career development internship is a structured real-life work experience in an actual work environment. Interns are treated as young employees who are distinguished from the rest of the staff, with a structured introduction to the workplace and its accompanying professional expectations, skills and etiquette.

They have the additional benefit of working alongside a caring adult member who helps them to initiate their career journey on sure footing. Interns are paid, given school credit, or otherwise compensated in recognition of their contribution to the organization.

A strong internship has clear learning objectives, continual adult supervision and a work plan. It is created by interns and mentors, outlining a designated series of challenging work and/or projects integral to the organization.

The internship also provides a broad understanding of the organization and related occupational areas. It designates time and shares methods to reflect, allowing interns to think deeply and internalize their realizations and learning in order to enrich their experience.

An essential component of a solid internship is a carefully planned and embedded evaluation based on sound methods of gathering data, analyzing and interpreting results, and using findings to refine the program.

A successful internship program requires careful and thoughtful planning, and a program coordinator who provides ongoing contact and support to both the mentor and interns.

Conclusion

It is suggested that there should be an exposure of the student teachers to a learning environment in which they can contextualize the theoretical knowledge they gathered during the training. The environment further provides student teachers an opportunity to find out whether they are in the right career path. In this regard, it can therefore be said that teaching practice prepares student teachers for the class room. In as much as there are challenges that come with the teaching profession; there are quite a good number of challenges that also come with pre-service training. In view of this, the researchers think that the placement of student teachers in schools at the end of the year is not such a good idea because this is a critical time for the host teachers and their learners. Student teachers should go for their pre-service more than once but not at the crucial time of studies like the end of the year. Secondly, the university needs to work hand in glove with the schools to ascertain that student teachers are mentored and supported by the host institutions. Maintaining quality in teaching practice is essential for preparing competent, reflective, and adaptable future educators. Through effective planning, reflective engagement, supportive mentorship, and strong institutional collaboration, student teachers can develop the professional skills required for successful teaching careers. Ensuring quality in the practicum phase ultimately strengthens the overall education system by shaping teachers who are committed to continuous improvement and learner-centered instruction.

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