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Teaching Practice in Cameroon: The Effectiveness of the University of Buea Model and Implications for Pre-service Teacher Education

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Abstract: The paper aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the teaching practice model in the University of Buea, which is different from that of other teacher education institutions in Cameroon. Teaching Practice is an important component of a teacher education programme and the quality of supervision and duration are key in achieving effectiveness. The study incorporated a descriptive survey that made use of a 22-item closed ended questionnaire with indicators of effectiveness as competencies acquired, supervision and duration of teaching practice. These factors were obtained from a review of literature and the questionnaire was validated by 15 students who did not constitute part of the sample. Participants were 140 randomly selected second and third year students. Findings reveal that generally, the teaching practice exercise in the University of Buea is effective but supervision and duration need to be improved upon and implications for pre-service education are discussed.

Introduction

Teacher education is an important foundation of any educational system. It is through teacher education that the basis for good schools can be created because no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teaching Practice or practicum is a key component of a teacher training program. It should be the central pivot of the professional training (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa, 2010). If the literature and folklore of teacher education agree on one point, it is that the student teaching experience or practicum is important (Farrel, 2001). There is no teacher education program that can be said to be complete without an effective student teaching practice program (National Open University of Nigeria, (NOUN) 2008). Rigden (1994) argues that real world experiences beat any textbook explanation of the classroom. So, one is not yet a teacher until they are induced into the teaching profession through teaching practice. Hall (1990) supports this assertion when he states that with regard to practicum, there are no alternatives relative to its priority amongst other components of a teacher education course. From interviews and follow-up studies of beginning teachers, Griffin (as cited in Everston, (1960) reports that student teaching is usually identified by new teachers as the most rewarding and useful aspect of their pre-service professional programmes. It is a culminating experience in teacher preparation. It provides an opportunity to beginning teachers to become socialized into the profession (Furlong et.al, 1988).

The concept of Teaching Practice is deeply rooted in the drive towards the education and training of quality or competent and professional teachers and so it should be seen as the central part of teacher education courses and given priority in scheduling on the timetable. Even though there are other factors that measure quality in education (Huber & Hutchings, 2005), teaching practice is also a vital factor for the training of any competent teacher (Nancy, 2007). That may

explain why, currently, there is a debate that among education stake holders about the quality of teaching practicum throughout the world and suggest that the teaching practicum should be a universal concern by all the stakeholders of education (Nelson, 2007).

Background

Student teaching practice is a kind of apprenticeship stage during which the students are sent out to schools to gain practical and professional experience by translating all the educational theories they have acquired or learnt during training into practice (Fagbulu, 1984). It is a practical teaching activity by which the student -teachers are given an opportunity in actual school situations to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skill over a period of time (Salawu and Adeoye, in NOUN, 2008). The term practice teaching has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies (Stones and Morris, 1977).

Whatever definition is given to Teaching Practice, the most important fact is that it is a professional exercise which is focused on helping the student-teacher to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education and develop competence as well. In the process of bridging the gap between educational theories and practice, the student-teacher, through a program of cooperative and interactive guidance, acquires valuable skills in teaching and the management of teaching from experienced teachers thus improving their quality.

Contextual Background

The goals of teaching practice are similar in most teacher training institutions. That makes teaching practice is a compulsory course in all the teacher training institutions in Cameroon. In three other state universities which have schools of education - Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) for the training of secondary school teachers (in Yaounde, Bamenda and Maroua), a period of three months is blocked for teaching practice and it is done only once until the student graduates. During this time classes are not held so that student teachers and their supervisors can concentrate on teaching practice. The block period for teaching practice is used by most universities in the world and therefore it seems to be the standard model for teaching practice even though, within this model, there are discrepancies especially with regard to the duration.

The Bachelor's degree program of the Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching of the Faculty of Education, University of Buea, trains secondary school teachers and has a unique model in Cameroon. Students are expected to go for teaching practice twice; in the second year (level 300) and in the third year (level 400) while classes for other courses in education and in their teaching subject area (taken in other faculties) are going on. Therefore, a student will have completed 24 weeks (six months) of teaching practice upon graduation.

Students are posted to different schools where they are expected to spend 12 weeks per teaching practice session. They are assigned to cooperating teachers who are selected based on their competence and to university supervisors only from the Faculty of Education, who are expected to see the student at least twice during each session. After observing the cooperating teacher they begin teaching and the cooperating teacher follows up the student closely in all

aspects of the student's professional life. At the end of the exercise, the student receives an aggregate score derived from the cooperating teacher, the University supervisor and a students' portfolio which is made up of a report, lesson plans, lesson notes, a journal and teaching aids. This is the only secondary teacher training programme in Cameroon where teaching practice takes place concurrently with classes in the University.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Review

The Teaching Practice exercise is based on the social constructivist theory's concept of cognitive apprenticeship. Collins, Brown and Newman (1989, p. 456) succinctly define cognitive apprenticeship as "learning-through-guided-experience on cognitive and metacognitive, rather than physical, skills and processes. Learning in cognitive apprenticeship occurs through legitimate peripheral participation, a process in which newcomers enter on the periphery and gradually move toward full participation. According to Vygotsky (1978), much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviours and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky refers to this as co-operative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher), then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance. In the context of Teaching Practice the child represents the learner or teacher candidate while the tutor represents the supervisor who through collaborative dialogue, modelling, coaching or mentoring, guides the student teacher into acquiring teaching competencies. According to Brown (1998), "The central issue in learning is becoming a practitioner, not learning about practice. Collins, Holum and Brown, (1991) identify four important aspects of traditional apprenticeship: modeling, scaffolding, fading, and coaching.

Modeling, a form of demonstration followed by imitation, is frequently used as a way of helping the learner progress through the Zone of Proximal Development (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The work of Bandura (1977) showed that modeling is a more efficient way of learning than trial and error. In modeling, the apprentice observes the master demonstrating how to do different parts of the task. The master makes the target processes visible, often by explicitly showing the apprentice what to do. Similarly, during Teaching Practice the student teacher observes the school supervisor or the cooperating teacher for a specified period of time before they begin teaching in order to be able to imitate the supervisor.

Scaffolding is the support the master gives apprentices in carrying out a task. This can range from doing almost the entire task for them, to giving occasional hints as to what to do next. Fading is the notion of slowly removing the support, giving the apprentice more and more responsibility. Usually the student teacher works under the guidance of the supervisor who must correct their lesson plans and have pre and post conferences with the students to give them tips/hints and feedback respectively on their teaching. With time the students takes increasing responsibility of her teaching (Collins, Holum and Brown,1991)

Coaching and mentoring are sometimes used synonymously. A mentor, by its most basic definition, is one who mediates expert knowledge for novices, helping that which is tacit become more explicit. The two most common uses of the word *mentoring* are to describe: (a) a professional development relationship in which a more experienced participant assists a less experienced one in developing a career and (b) a guiding relationship between an adult and a

youth focused on helping the youth realize his or her potentials and perhaps overcome some barriers or challenges.¹ The master coaches the apprentice through a wide range of activities: choosing tasks, providing hints and scaffolding, evaluating the activities of apprentices and diagnosing the kinds of problems they are having. They also challenge them and offer encouragement, give feedback, structure the ways to do things and work on particular weaknesses. In short, coaching is the process of overseeing the student's learning. Some refer to mentoring and/or coaching as a form of scaffolding (e.g. McLoughlin, 2002), some refer to scaffolding as an aspect of coaching (e.g., Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989), and others maintain that they are separate strategies falling under the larger classification of cognitive apprenticeship. Whatever the case, the common thread in all these strategies is to help novices become experts in various fields through real world experiences. At the center of apprenticeship is the concept of more experienced people assisting less experienced ones, providing structure and examples to support the attainment of goals which is the rationale for the teaching practice exercise.

Competencies Acquired during Teaching Practice

The competencies teacher candidates are expected to acquire during Teaching Practice are reflected in their intended outcomes or the goals and objectives. According to the NOUN (2008), the goals of teaching practice focus on providing students the opportunity to learn the art of teaching in actual classroom situations, under the guidance of an experienced cooperating teacher; providing students the opportunity to demonstrate in real classroom situations, their mastery of teaching the subject matter and the methodology of imparting it to learners; providing students with professional development and fostering a positive attitude to teaching in them; assessing the extent to which students satisfy the requirements for the award of the certificate they are pursuing, and to enable Schools of Education to evaluate the adequacy or otherwise of the practical aspects of the teacher education program.

Specifically, Teaching Practice is expected to enable the student: Develop skills and competencies of teaching; apply the principles learnt from the courses studied to teach in addition to bringing about meaningful changes in learners; write schemes of work and lesson notes using appropriate concepts and generalizations that will facilitate learning; select and use a variety of teaching strategies and instructional resources that are appropriate to achieve the objectives stated in their lesson plans; study and diagnose learning difficulties of pupils and provide guidance and remedial instruction to those who need them; apply the principles of evaluation in assessing the effectiveness of their teaching as well as the progress of the pupils, as a means of improving instruction; acquire skills in democratic classroom management; participate actively and effectively in the various instructional and non-instructional programs and activities of the school where they are posted for teaching practice; establish good human relations with the students, staff, parents and other members of the community of the school and have the opportunity to participate in community activities which will enhance their professional growth as a teacher.

¹ Dennen, V.P. Cognitive apprenticeship in educational practice: Research on scaffolding, modeling, mentoring and coaching as instructional strategies. USA. Florida State University. Accessed @ ocw.metu.edu.tr/pluginfile.php/9106/mod_resource/content/1/Dennen.PDF

With regard to the attitude component of competencies acquired during teaching the Northern Michigan University² expects the teacher candidate to collaborate with all stakeholders in education, value learning, students, teaching, and schooling; demonstrate openness, courtesy, conscientiousness, reliability, caring, and compassion; identify with professional educators; dress and behave professionally and discern the extent to which personal belief systems and values may affect the instructional process.

Responsibilities of the Supervising Teacher

All supervisors have an important role to play in order to ensure quality or effectiveness. With regard to the school climate, they should support the student teachers (Williams, 1994), give a considerable amount of feedback (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Maynard, 1996), and collaborate with the student teachers even to the point of team teaching with them (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997; Fosnot, 1996). To the North Michigan University, the supervising teacher's first responsibility is to the pupils in his/her class. This must be kept in mind if the public, administration, and pupils are to continuously support the Student Teaching Program. He/she must prepare pupils to work with a student teacher and notify the parents that there will be a student teacher in the classroom; provide a working area for the student teacher (a desk or table) and share responsibilities whenever possible, accepting him/her as a co-worker and professional person. The supervising teacher also acquaints the student teacher with pertinent school policies and regulations, philosophy, priorities, and assessment criteria; immediately involves the student teacher in specific classroom tasks; plans a schedule with the student teacher for assuming responsibilities of the classroom, which will allow the student teacher to assume increasing responsibility as he/she exhibits readiness to do so.

With regard to teaching, the supervising teacher also requires the student teacher to be solely responsible for all planning, preparation, instruction and evaluation for a minimum of one day before the first progress report, one week before the Mid-Term Evaluation and an additional two weeks before the Final Evaluation to demonstrate the continuity of instruction and teacher accountability; guides the student teacher in preparing daily lesson plans, unit plans, and tests, and approve and critique all plans before they are taught; assists in understanding and applying evaluation techniques; demonstrates a variety of effective teaching techniques and arrange for visits to other classrooms from time to time; guides the student teacher in developing and understanding the skills of self-evaluation; evaluates the quality of the student teacher's performance and engage in frequent conferences with the student teacher to ensure continuous progress and/or early identification of problems; encourages the student teacher to participate in community activities; helps the student teacher relate theory to practice and keeps a record of attendance and tardiness of the student teacher. If excessive absences or tardiness are observed, the cooperating teacher reports this to the university supervisor or Director of Field Experiences and prepares and submits evaluation reports according to schedule.

Supervisors and their roles

The supervisor has an important role in practice teaching as a resource person, an adviser, a general morale booster, an interpreter of feedback and an assessor. University supervisors

² North Michigan University. Responsibilities of the supervising teacher. Accessed @ www.nmu.edu/education/node/160

should work closely with associate teachers, support the student teachers, and visit the school sites often (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Casey & Howson, 1993).

Supervision is the core of Teaching Practice exercise. Valid information on student teachers' performances is obtained only through the supervision of their live teaching. The role of supervisors therefore is of great importance in ensuring quality. Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa (2010) believe that a university supervisor's duty is not only to evaluate the lessons of teaching practice, but to use his/her abilities to make this experience results-oriented. He/she should have meetings and conversations with teacher educators, experienced teachers of the institution, educationists, concerned school head teachers and other teachers. Introductory lectures should be arranged before the departure of student teachers to the practicing schools in order to acquaint the student teachers about the preparation of lesson plans and other assigned activities. During Teaching Practice it is the duty of supervisors to supervise their lessons, other assigned activities, carry out guidance and counseling as well as provide the student teachers with feedback to enable them to criticize and reform themselves. According to North Michigan University, university supervisors serve as a liaison between the schools and the university, cooperate with school personnel in a manner that will enhance the partnership between the school system and the university, identify and recommend potential supervising teachers, recommend assignments of student teachers, initiate conferences with student teachers, supervising teachers and others concerned with the student's progress, all aimed at enhancing the continuing growth and quality of the student teaching program.

Duration of Teaching Practice

The duration of teaching practice varies amongst institutions and/or from country to country. Some programmes provide for brief periods of classroom placement, others have yearlong internships, with students being assigned regular teaching obligations. In the University of Puerto Rico the clinical experience requires a minimum of 300 hours in a semester. Nakopodia (2011), reports that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Delta State Nigeria recommends a period of twelve weeks for the teaching practice and this is the practice in most Colleges of Education. In Pakistan, teaching practice duration is very short; it is about 4 to 8 weeks or teaching of 60 to 75 lessons (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa, 2010). Some institutions manage to send their student teachers a day per week while some manage a block of practicum (Perry, 2004) The practicum of Laurentian University in Canada comprises three different elements; pre-practicum placement (PPP), initial placement (IP), and professional year practicum (PYP). PPP comprises 120 hours in total.

In a study of practicum in nine universities around the world, Lu and Manzar-Abbas (2013), report that the University of Glasgow follows a more integrated practicum structure. In the first semester of the first year, the student teachers go to schools once in every week for the time of six weeks. In the second semester of the first year, they experience four full weeks in a middle or primary school. Again before the first semester of second year (overall 3rd semester), the students go to school for three full weeks and then one day every week for four weeks in the second semester of second year (overall 4th semester). Before the first semester of third year the students go to schools for four full weeks with the focus on moral and religious education. They again have four full weeks practice in the second semester of that year with the focus of expressive arts. In the last semester of the last year they have to teach in the schools for ten full weeks focusing on science

In another university of UK, the University of Edinburgh, the practicum is consisted of four phases; one in each year. In the second semester of first year there is a five weeks nursery school experience; in the second semester of second year they offer school experience of six weeks for early stages; in the first semester of third year there is practicum for middle and upper stages for ten weeks; and in the last semester of the programme (2nd semester of 4th year) there are 11 weeks for practicum at a school of the student-teacher's choice.

The University of Brunei Darussalam also offers a developmental kind of practicum structure both in competence and in duration of time spent in the field. Teaching Practice-1 is offered in the second semester of second year as teaching assistantship for three weeks; Teaching Practice- 2 is offered in the second semester of 3rd year for seven weeks; and Teaching Practice3 is offered in the second semester of fourth year for fourteen weeks.

The practicum structure of the University of Hong Kong offers three practicum experiences throughout the programme. Teaching Practice-1 is offered in the second year for three weeks which has six credit hours; Teaching Practice-2 is offered in third year for eight weeks of 12 credit hours; and Teaching Practice-3 is offered in fourth year for eight weeks of 12 credit hours.

In most of the Chinese Normal universities the practicum experience is offered mostly in the 7th semester (beginning of 4th year). The duration of the practicum is from 8 to 10 weeks (Chen & Mu, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Teaching Practice is a key component of a teacher training program. It should be the central pivot of the professional training (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa, 2010) and contributes significantly to teacher quality. The best teacher education programs provide many opportunities for students to spend time in real classrooms under the supervision of an experienced mentor. Yet, in many cases support for beginning teachers is often uneven and inadequate. Such a situation may occur when teaching practice runs concurrently with classes in the university as is the case with the University of Buea. In such a situation, the competencies the students acquire, the quality of supervision and time spent on teaching practice may be limited, thus affecting the quality of teachers being trained. Against this backdrop it is critical to assess the effectiveness of the teaching practice model of the University of Buea as this has implications for quality in pre-service teacher education. Such a study will serve as a basis for improvement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the teaching practice model of the teacher education programme of the University of Buea.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study:

1. Do students effectively acquire pedagogic competencies during teaching practice?
2. Is there effective supervision of students during teaching practice?

3. Is the duration of teaching practice adequate for students to acquire competencies?

Methodology

The study incorporated descriptive survey that sought to ascertain the effectiveness of the teaching practice model in the Faculty of Education, University of Buea. Participants who were randomly selected, consisted of 90 level 400 (final year) students who had had the field experience twice and 50 level 300 (second year) students who had been on Teaching Practice once, all from the Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching in the 2012/2013 academic year. A closed-ended questionnaire made up of 22 items from a review of literature on the duration, supervision and competencies acquired during teaching practice served as indicators of the effectiveness of teaching practice. The items were rated on a four-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire was validated by 15 students who did not take part in the study. Data were analyzed descriptively, using means. Statements that scored a mean of 2.5 and above were considered positive. Items were further grouped according to research questions and an average of all the means of the items per research question (global mean) was used to answer and discuss the research questions.

Findings and Discussions

Research Question 1: Do students effectively acquire pedagogic competencies during teaching practice?

1. Teaching practice helped me apply the teaching skills I learnt in class	132	1.00	4.00	3.7955
2. Teaching practice helped me acquire problem-solving skills when I met situations that differed from what I was taught in class.	133	1.00	4.00	3.1955
3. Teaching practice made me master my subject matter	133	1.00	4.00	3.2256
4. I learnt to use a variety of teaching methods	130	1.00	4.00	3.7846
5. I learnt to use a variety of teaching-learning materials	130	1.00	4.00	3.3428
6. I improved on my classroom management skills based on feedback from my supervisors	133	1.00	4.00	3.4962
7. I took part in giving tests, marking and recording.	133	1.00	4.00	3.2391
8. I was able to identify students who have difficulties and attend to them	130	1.00	4.00	2.8946
GLOBAL MEAN				3.3717

Table 1: Pedagogic Competencies Acquired from Teaching Practice

Table 1 above highlights results of competencies acquired from Teaching Practice incorporated in items 1-8. Seven out of eight of the items scored a minimum of 3. Only one item (item 8) scored 2.8964, which is still above the 2.5 decision point. The global mean of these items is 3.3717. This indicates that the aims of the teaching practice exercise are being achieved as it allows students to acquire competencies to a very large extent (NOUN, 2008). Bourgonje and Tromp, (2011) report that competence standards (competence-based education) have been employed as a basis for teacher education curriculum and for programme approval for teacher assessment, appraisal, certification and more. As such they work as a control mechanism and ensure quality. Based on the results one can assert that the University of Buea is producing teachers of good quality.

However, the quality of the Teaching Practice model is just relatively good as there are areas that need to be improved upon in order to improve the acquisition of pedagogic competencies. University supervision of teaching practice is insufficient (see Tab. 2, item 16). This will be discussed under Table 2.

Research Question 2: Is there effective supervision of students during teaching practice?

9. During teaching practice I discussed my lesson with my cooperating teacher before preparing my lesson.	131	1.00	4.00	3.1756
10. I always presented my lesson plan and notes for correction before teaching.	131	1.00	4.00	2.8244
11. My cooperating teacher was always present in class when I was teaching.	135	1.00	4.00	1.9185
12. I was not allowed to teach when my cooperating teacher was absent.	133	1.00	4.00	2.0526
13. My cooperating teacher always held a session to discuss my lesson after every class.	133	1.00	4.00	2.8120
14. My cooperating teacher insisted on the use of teaching-learning materials.	89	1.00	4.00	3.0562
15. I observed my cooperating teacher teach for a while before I was allowed to teach	92	1.00	4.00	2.8913
16. My university supervisor came around twice to supervise me.	91	1.00	4.00	2.0989
17. My university supervisor talked to my cooperating teacher to find out about my progress	135	1.00	4.00	2.6926
GLOBAL MEAN				2.6135

Table 2: Supervision of Teaching Practice

Table 2 shows findings on effective supervision of Teaching Practice. Items 9-17 were geared towards assessing the effectiveness of supervision during teaching practice. Six items scored a positive mean while three items (11, 12, 16) scored a negative mean. Students were allowed to teach sometimes in the absence of their cooperating teachers (items 11 and 12) and the university supervisors did not come round at least twice (item 16). The global mean was 2.6135 showing that supervision of teaching practice is averagely effective.

A mean of 2.6135 is only average and should be improved to make supervision more effective. A closer look at the results reveals that the supervision by the cooperating teacher is more effective than that of the university supervisor even though they need to be more present in class when student-teachers are teaching (item 11). Watching the students teach forms the basis of their coaching and mentoring.

University supervisors do not usually see the student teacher twice as stipulated in the regulations (item 16). Even though results show that student-teachers acquire competencies, with effective supervision, the acquisition of competencies by student-teachers may be greater. According to North Michigan University², university supervisors serve as a liaison between the schools and the University, cooperate with school personnel in a manner that will enhance the partnership between the school system and the university, identify and recommend potential supervising teachers, recommend assignments of student teachers, initiate conferences with student teachers, supervising teachers and others concerned with the student's progress, all aimed

at enhancing the continuing growth and quality of the student teaching program. Also, valid information on student-teachers performance is obtained only through supervision of live teaching (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa, 2010), without which adequate coaching and mentoring may not be done (Akbar, 2002). University supervisors are expected to work closely with associate teachers, support the student teachers, and visit the school sites often (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Casey & Howson, 1993).

Research Question 3: Is the duration of teaching practice adequate for students to acquire competencies?

18. I have less than three classes a week to teach	91	1.00	4.00	3.0330
19. I teach less than ten lessons before the end of the teaching practice exercise.	92	1.00	4.00	1.7500
20. I sometimes miss teaching practice to attend classes in the university.	92	1.00	4.00	1.8370
21. The duration of the teaching practice exercise is usually shorter due to problems between the university and cooperating schools.	91	1.00	4.00	1.8242
22. The number of periods a student has is negotiable with the cooperating teacher.	92	1.00	4.00	3.0326
GLOBAL MEAN				2.2953

Table 3: Duration of Teaching Practice

Table 3 shows means of items 18-22 which were meant to find out if the duration of the Teaching Practice exercise is adequate. All five items had a negative connotation. Out of these, three had negative means (items 19, 20, 21) making the responses positive. However, the means of items 18 and 22 scored highly positive means making the answers negative. . The global mean came up to 2.2953 which is negative, implying that the duration for the teaching practice exercise in the University of Buea is not inadequate. The duration of Teaching Practice varies widely amongst institutions. The University of Buea has two placements (12 weeks each) for teaching practice culminating to 24 weeks (6 months) for the entire 3-year programme. This duration is long enough compared to is available in other teacher education institutions. That may explain why even though this model is rare, it is also effective. The student has a longer period to acquire competencies and the supervisor has enough time to make up for any lapses in his/her role. Nakopodia (2011), reports that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Delta State Nigeria recommends a period of twelve weeks for the teaching practice and this is the practice in most Colleges of Education. However, the quality of each placement in the University of Buea would be improved if there were a minimum number of hours a student is supposed to teach, because even though students claim that they do not teach less than 10 lessons during a full session (item 19), and they do not miss classes in the university because of Teaching Practice, the fact that they can negotiate the number of hours they teach can make the Teaching Practice duration ineffective since there may be inconsistencies in the duration of teaching per student. This may also have implications for competencies acquired and for quality.

Recommendations

The Teaching Practice model of the University of Buea is effective to some extent, but could be modified or improved to make it more effective. The field experience course is a key component in the initial teacher certification course and it is an important factor in teacher quality. This study has identified specific issues that may act as a deterrent to a highly effective Teaching Practice exercise and based on these, the following recommendations are made:

In order to make Teaching Practice more effective university supervisors must pay student-teachers visits at least twice in their cooperating schools, have conversations with school authorities and teachers, counsel students and give them feedback. One of the problems the university supervisors face is the fact that classes in the university hold concurrently with the teaching practice exercise. If the Faculty of Education can revisit the structure of their teaching practice exercise by offering teaching subjects within the faculty it will permit them get teachers and students focus on the exercise better. Also, there should be a minimum number of hours every student is expected to teach. This can be achieved if students are sent to schools out of the municipality of Buea to avoid overcrowding in Buea schools. When there are too many student-teachers per cooperating school, the tendency is for them to have fewer opportunities to teach. Schools in neighbouring towns could be involved if only a period is 'blocked' for teaching practice so that students and even university supervisors don't have to shuttle between classes and practicum.

Conclusion

Implications for Pre-service Teacher Education

The effectiveness of teaching practice must be approached from a systems perspective. If one component (eg supervision or duration) is weak, student-teachers may not acquire adequate competencies and this will affect the quality of the exercise. Practicum in education has been consistently characterized by some strengths and recurring weaknesses (Ralph, Walker and Wimmer, 2007a, 2007b). Neville, Sherman and Cohen (2005) assert that the richness and value of the clinical experience vary depending on the quality of the supervisor and the amount of time he or she spends monitoring and coaching the student. In a study that compared the mentoring process in pre-service professional teacher education with that in Medicine and Business/Management, Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent (2004) analysed over 300 research studies across three disciplines, where they identified positive and negative aspects of the supervisory monitoring process which affected the teacher candidate, the mentors or the institutions or a combination of all. Supervisors must be assigned to practicum based on their workload. In order to improve on the quality of supervision two major issues have to be taken into consideration:

- All stakeholders in the practicum program must collaborate to minimize the limitations because mentoring has huge potentials to bring about learning, personal growth and development for professionals.
- Supervisors with heavy schedule or significant administrative functions should be given fewer students to supervise.

With regard to the duration of Teaching Practice, the longer it is, the better. Furey (2014), in a study on teachers' and administrators' perspectives of whether there is a need for practicum experience in the Bachelor of Special Education Program, the most frequent suggestion by pre-

service teachers and administrators was that the practicum should be of a longer duration similar to an internship, in order to delve into the full role of a special education teacher, collaborate with special education teachers, plan and participate in Individualized Education Programs. Similar views have been expressed by Conelly and Graham (2009). This also holds true for the general education teacher as well.

Sufficient duration of practicum allows pre-service and practicing teachers time to utilize specific evidence-based teaching strategies in their practicum placements and to offer active experiential learning opportunities (Brownwel et al, 2005). Duration has also been a predictor of special education teacher retention (Connelly and Graham, 2009). Supervision and duration are important in ensuring quality in pre-service teacher education..

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