

COMPARING THE PERCEPTION OF TEACHING PRACTICE BY COOPERATING SCIENCE TEACHERS WITH THAT OF THEIR PRE-SERVICE COUNTERPARTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study was an exploratory cross-sectional survey research that sought to juxtapose the perception of teaching practice by cooperating science teachers with that of the pre-service science student-teachers in Nasarawa State of Nigeria. Three research questions and two null hypotheses guided the investigation. Stratified random sampling technique was applied for selecting a sample size of 305 consisting of 105 cooperating science teachers in 21 secondary schools in Nasarawa State and 200 pre-service science teachers from the College of Education, Akwanga and the Faculty of Education, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, both disaggregated by gender. Data were collected using researcher-developed 21-item questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at alpha level of 0.05. Findings revealed the existence of high positive perception of teaching practice and its relevance by both practicing and pre-service science teachers. However, the practicing science teachers portrayed a higher positive perception of teaching practice than the pre-service science teachers. Cross-tabulation of the key variables with gender showed that female practicing teachers and the pre-service science teachers had a remarkably higher positive perception than their male counterparts. The researchers concluded that pre-service science teachers need adequate orientation on teaching as a pertinent aspect of teacher education for professionalization. It was recommended that teacher educators and other stakeholders should intensify efforts to orientate the student-teachers on the importance of teaching practice.

Introduction

One of the essential qualities of a worthy profession is the inclusion of internship into its training programme during which the trainees are given the opportunity to demonstrate practically what they have learned in theory. The teaching practice programme partly serves as a period of internship and

partly as equivalent to Students' Work Industrial Experience Scheme (SIWES). Baikiein Gbari (2012) affirmed that teacher education programme should have three related component parts. First is the need for the prospective teacher to acquire a body of knowledge in some subject disciplines. Secondly, he/she is expected to take courses in Education. Thirdly, the pre-service science teacher must acquire a practical experience in classroom teaching through a sort of supervised 'apprenticeship system'. The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), recognizes the fact that Nigeria needs well-trained and well-groomed teachers in her classrooms. Therefore, teacher preparation must be intensified in both university faculties of education and the colleges of education which serve as teacher producer centers.

Teaching practice is a replica of SIWES as obtained in Engineering and other vocational technical areas. For the pre-service science teacher, the successful completion of teaching practice builds life-long self-confidence in the prospective teacher and enables further professional advancement. This is consequent upon development of rich repertoire of pedagogic skills as confirmed by mentors. As a result, the pre-service teacher would doubtless feel a great sense of professional self-worth.

The practicum, as it is referred to by Anikweze (2011), requires every teacher-trainee to undertake a minimum of twelve weeks of supervised teaching practice for the acquisition of practical experiences in real life classroom situation after initial attempts during micro-teaching at the college centre for educational technology. It is during the teaching practice that the prospective teacher acquires the skills and characteristics of an effective teacher which include: appropriate set induction for arousing learner attention; 'dramatic elements' intended to make learning memorable (Nelson, 2002); and active methods and thinking skills that consist of reasoning, inquiry, concept formation and translation skills that produce reflective and reasonable students. However, there exists empirical evidence that student teachers often perceive teacher's role as teacher-centeredness rather than an inclination towards student-centeredness in lesson delivery (Yu-Mei, 2001).

Noah (2011) affirms that the teaching practice has been described as the most singular aspect of the teacher training programme that leads to professionalization. Incidentally, some student-teachers often trivialize the essence of teaching practice and so fail to subject themselves to the mentoring of cooperating teachers they encounter at the practicing schools. Could it be that such prospective teachers have a divergent perception of teaching practice with their senior colleagues that are confirmed practicing teachers? It has also been surmised that female pre-service teachers seem to be more devoted to the

practicum than their male counterparts. This needs to be empirically substantiated.

Bisong (2005) painted a picture of his perception of the teaching practice scheme based on experience gotten during several supervision exercises. There seemed to prevail a lack of seriousness by the pre-service teachers as manifested in acts of lateness to classes, truancy, poor demonstration of knowledge of subject-matter, poor communication skill, glaring grammatical mistakes, spelling errors and lack of effective class control among other flaws. On their part, the pre-service teachers presented catalogue of problems hindering their optimal performance during the teaching practice at the co-operating schools. Among the problems tabled by the pre-service teachers on teaching practice included the lack of co-operation from practicing teachers who are permanent staff of the cooperating schools. They also listed problems of overcrowded classes, work overload, poor pupil motivation and absence of necessary motivating incentives. Obviously, the practicing science teachers in the cooperating schools do not abandon the teaching to the pre-service teachers on practical teaching. They merely sublet part of the workload to these uncertified teachers. The veracity of the claims by pre-service teachers may be questionable.

In recent times, it appears that the noble ideals of teaching practice seem to be misconstrued and abused by some stakeholders involved in the scheme. Many practicing and pre-service teachers appear not to be properly aware of the relevance of the scheme. Some undergraduates that opt for Education as a course of study during admission never sincerely intended to practice teaching on graduation. Thus, from the outset, some pre-service teachers harbour a rather low perception of teaching practice. Some others view the teaching practice exposure as an avenue to make cheap money and achieve other private goals different from the authentic purpose of the scheme. Some pre-service teachers seem to be scared and view practical teaching life and work in a co-operating school setting as unduly tasking and unsatisfying. Some pre-service science teachers particularly take their laboratory experiment classes in the science subjects seriously but do not consider the teaching practice as demanding the same positive attention. Yet few others have high hopes and expectations of the scheme with exhilarating desire to make the best out of the exercise. Such are the ones that aim at preparing themselves to becoming self-reliant and self-actualizing professional teachers. How can teaching be effectively professionalized if pre-service teachers trivialize teaching practice? The thrust of the study was to investigate the variable

perceptions of teaching practice by cooperating science teachers and their pre-service counterparts on practical teaching exercise.

Several factors influence the degree of students' achievement especially in science-related subjects. These factors, identified by Bruce Fuller's analyses of thirty research studies as cited in Adeyanju (2004) include: teacher quality, funding, quality curricula, small class size etc. The consensus confirmed that teacher quality is one of the main strategies for achieving high standard of education. A critical aspect of teacher preparation lies in exposing teacher trainees to teaching practice exercise, since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers as rightly pointed out by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). Incidentally, a properly executed teaching practice remains a vital condition precedent for developing high quality teachers. Udeani and Ejikeme (2011) averred that student-teachers' perception of teaching practice supports the continuation of practical aspect of teacher education. Bilesanmi-Awoderu, (2007), reported that a high positive perception of teaching practice contributes to the enhancement of students studying science education.

Teaching practice refers to the preparation of student teachers for teaching through practical training. It is variously called practice teaching, student teaching, teaching practice, field studies, infield experience, school based experience or internship (Taneja, 2000). As acknowledged by Gujjar (2017), it occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education for its 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 programme as distinct from theoretical studies.

Among the objectives of teaching practice as listed by Akbar (2002) are to:

1. provide the prospective teachers with an opportunity of establishing an appropriate teacher-pupil relationship
2. provide an opportunity for evaluating the student potential as a teacher and suitability for the teaching profession
3. develop personal relationship with others: administrators, teachers, parents and students
4. provide the future teacher with practical experience in school to overcome the problems of discipline and enable him / her to develop method of control
5. provide with an opportunity to put theories into practice and to develop a deeper understanding of educational principles and their implication for learning

6. provide an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover own strengths and weaknesses
7. provide an opportunity to liaise with school environment, its functioning and with community and its resources.

One of the problems that seemed to militate against effective co-ordination and supervision of teaching practice by staff of Colleges of Education, Faculties and Institutes of Education in universities has been associated with the issue of funds requirements (Okujagu and Osah-Ogulu, 2002).

Ukeje (2004) identified two areas that appeared defective in teaching practice arrangements. First, the Education students in universities hardly have enough opportunities for supervised teaching practice. The student teachers spend less than four weeks of haphazard experience in the programme. Secondly, Education students seem to be generally impervious of the intention of policy makers and so fail to discriminate between the subject discipline, educational foundation courses and the teaching practice programme all of which co-equally contribute to the professional preparation of teachers.

Yusuf, Ajidagba, Agbonna and Olumorin (2010) had argued that despite the benefits of teaching practice, many people still expressed concern over the low productivity and non-performance of many 'trained teachers' in classroom activities including assessment practices that prepare learners for public examinations. One wonders if such certificated teachers ever had positive perception of teaching practice as a pre-service teacher.

Writing on professional development of teachers, Anikweze (2012) had recommended that student-teachers should be groomed to work as team members and to identify opportunities for working with colleagues both in instructional delivery and in assessment practices thereby sharing the development of effective practice with colleagues. Of course, the need has been established by professional associations of teachers such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), the Institute of Certified Teachers of Nigeria (ICTON), and the Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN) for the Federal Government to contribute to the total funds requirements for student-teacher support to facilitate their shouldering the responsibilities involved in executing the teaching practice programme with the seriousness it deserves.

Anikweze (2013) noted that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) with the collaboration of Commonwealth of Learning (COL) while institutionalizing quality assurance systems for teacher preparation gave special attention to the prosecution of teaching practice which obviously is the single aspect of teacher education programme that lends to professionalization.

However, despite the excellent prescriptions, the handling of teaching practice in some universities has been so disgustingly unsatisfactory that the pre-service teachers visit their schools of practice teaching only when they have lessons, thereby denying themselves opportunities for integration into the school system. In some University Faculties of Education, teaching practice is merely organized to fulfill routine requirements and generate course grades for pre-service teachers without recourse to the full relevance of the programme which is the bedrock of teacher training. The consequence of such shoddy preparation of student-teachers is low performance on the part of both the pre-service teachers and the students taught by them. In the final analysis, the philosophy and objectives of teaching practice might not be achieved in as expected by stakeholders in teacher education. It is in view of these developments that this study embarked on comparing cooperating science teachers' perception of teaching practice with that of pre-service science teachers in Nasarawa State.

Three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study and they include:

1. What is the perception of practicing/cooperating science teachers about the teaching practice scheme in Nasarawa State secondary schools?
2. What is the perception of cooperating and pre-service science teachers about the different components of the teaching practice scheme in Nasarawa State secondary schools?
3. How do cooperating science teachers perceive the different components of the teaching practice scheme in Nasarawa State when segregated by sex?
4. What is the influence of gender on the variable perception of teaching practice scheme by the pre-service science teachers?
 1. There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of teaching practice scheme between the cooperating science teachers and the pre-service science teachers on teaching practice in Nasarawa State secondary schools.
 2. There is no significant difference in the perception of teaching practice between male and female cooperating/practicing science teachers and their pre-service counterparts.

The null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Method

The study adopted exploratory cross-sectional survey design which is considered appropriate for the type of investigation (Emaikwu, 2011). Cross-sectional research design according to Anikweze (2013) involves the collection of data within a short span of time from a random sample of the

target population distributed over a wide geographical area. The target population of the study comprised 2,600 practicing science teachers in government owned secondary schools in Nasarawa state and science Education students (3rd year and 4th year) of the Nasarawa State University and final year Science Education students of the College of Education, Akwanga. This was made up of 2,100 cooperating science teachers in the various public secondary schools, 200 third and fourth year science education students of the Nasarawa State University, Keffi, and 300 final year science education students of the College of Education, Akwanga.

Multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was adopted for selecting a sample size of 305 comprising 105 cooperating science teachers (5% of their population), 100 student science teachers from the university representing 50% of 3rd year and 4th year Science Education students and 100 final year representing 33% of the Science Education students at the College of Education, Akwanga.

A structured 20-item questionnaire developed by the researchers was used for data collection. The Likert-type instrument had two sections. Section A demanded essential bio-data from respondents as par the moderator variables of status, sex and school location. Section B contained items that elicited information on respondents' perception of teaching practice. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in educational research, measurement and evaluation at the Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Their rated scores of the items provided a logical validity index of 0.89 based on rational consensus. The instrument was further subjected to trialing in a pilot test that yielded data for obtaining 0.87 coefficient of internal consistency using Cronbach alpha. A total of 305 questionnaires were administered by wait-and-take method. Even at that, the researchers recorded a return of 298 completed and usable questionnaires, that is, 97.7% retrieval.

Results

Table 1: Comparison of Cooperating and Pre-Service Science Teachers' Perception on Teaching Practice

S/N	Description of Items	Coopering Teachers			Pre-service Teachers		
		No	Mean	SD	No	Mean	SD
4	I perceive teaching Practice as one of the routine exercises in teacher education	101	2.96	1.26	197	3.04	1.18
5	I regard teaching practice	101	2.02	1.02	197	1.93	1.03

	as a serious business						
6	Teaching Practice is a tedious and unnecessary exercise.	101	3.26	0.93	197	3.15	1.01
7	I regard teaching practice as integral and necessary requirements in the preparation of professional teachers.	101	2.98	1.56	197	2.83	1.11
8	I regard teaching practice as integral and necessary requirements in the preparation of professional teachers.	101	3.35	1.00	197	2.88	1.42
9	I consider teaching practice as avenue to practicalise the different principles of teaching and methods of instruction.	101	3.64	0.34	197	3.20	1.07
Weighted Mean and SD			3.04	1.02		2.84	1.14

Table 1 shows the comparison of the perception of teaching practice by cooperating science teachers and the pre-service science teachers. From the table, the weighted mean score for cooperating science teachers was 3.04 with SD of 1.02; while the pre-service science teachers had a relatively lower weighted mean of 2.84 with SD of 1.14. The analysis indicates that cooperating science teachers place a high premium on teaching practice relative to the perception of teaching practice by pre-service science teachers who are learning the trade of teaching in a sort of SIWES.

Table 2: Comparison of cooperating science teachers' perception of the different components of teaching practice with the perception of pre-service science teachers

S/N	Description of the items	Cooperating Teachers			Pre-service Teachers		
		No	Means	SD	No	Means	SD
10	Supervision of teaching practice should be done by school based co-operating teachers, not by visiting lecturers.	101	3.53	0.67	197	3.03	1.22

The analysis indicates that cooperating science teachers probably had deeper insight into the components of practical teaching compared to the pre-service science teachers' perception of the different components of teaching practice. Both categories of respondents however, seem to agree that the pre-service teaching practice orientation programme meant to prepare student-teachers for the actual teaching practice was inadequate.

Table 3: Comparison of male and female cooperating teachers' perception towards teaching practice

S/N	Description of items	Male Coop Trs.			Female Trs.		
		No	Mean	SD	No	Mean	SD
4	I perceive teaching practice as one of the routine exercises in teacher education.	68	3.06	1.29	33	3.30	1.03
5	I regard teaching practice as a serious business.	68	1.88	1.24	33	1.79	1.17
6	Teaching practice is a tedious and unnecessary exercise	68	3.06	1.25	33	3.12	1.36
7	I regard teaching practice as an avenue to master the subjects and content which I teach the pupils/students	68	2.26	0.88	33	2.30	0.91
8	I regard teaching practice as integral and necessary requirements in the preparation of professional teachers.	68	2.77	1.08	33	2.94	1.06
9	I consider teaching practice as avenue to practicalise the different principles of teaching and methods of instruction	68	2.29	0.78	33	2.18	0.65
Weighted Mean and SD			2.55	1.08		2.61	1.03

Thus, it could be seen that female cooperating science teachers perceive teaching practice from a slightly higher pedestal than their male counterparts.

Table 4: Comparison of Male and Female Pre-service Science Teachers Perception of Teaching Practice

S/N	Description of items	Male Pre-service Trs			Female Pre-service Trs		
		No	Mean	SD	No	Mean	SD
4	I perceive teaching practice as one of the routine exercises in teacher education.	132	3.09	1.37	65	3.09	1.37
5	I regard teaching practice as a serious business	132	1.82	1.13	65	1.92	1.26
6	Teaching practice is a tedious and unnecessary exercise.	132	3.09	1.24	65	3.15	1.10
7	I regard teaching practice as an avenue to master the subjects and content which I teach the pupils/students.	132	2.21	0.81	65	2.32	0.84
8	I regard teaching practice as integral and necessary requirements in the preparation of professional teachers.	132	2.73	1.06	65	2.75	1.13
9	I consider teaching practice as avenue to practicalise the different principles of teaching and methods of instruction	132	2.00	0.70	65	2.08	0.70
Weighted Mean and SD			2.49	1.05		2.55	1.07

Evidence from Table 4 shows that although the females have a slightly higher weighted mean than the males, yet they also had a slightly higher standard deviation suggesting greater disparity among the females.

Table 5: t-test of the difference between practicing and Pre-service Science Teachers' Perception on Teaching Practice

S/N	Variable	No	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
1	Practicing Science teachers	101	3.04	1.02			
2	Pre-service Science teachers	197	2.84	1.14	1.54	1.96	Accepted

The result in Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.54 is less than the critical value of 1.96 from the t-table at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. The implication is that there is no significance difference in the perception of teaching practice scheme in Nasarawa State between cooperating science and the pre-service (student) science teachers. Although the cooperating science teachers had a higher mean with smaller standard deviation than the student teachers, yet the differences were not significant statistically.

Table 6: t-test Statistics on the Difference between Male and Female Teachers' Perception towards Teaching Practice

S/N	Variable	No	Mean	SD	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
1	Male Science teachers	200	2.52	1.07	0.06	1.96	Accepted
2	Female Science teachers	98	2.58	1.05			

The result in table 6 shows that the calculated t-value is less than the critical value ($0.06 < 1.96$) at the 0.05 level of significance. There is, therefore no justification for rejecting the null hypothesis. The implication is that, both male and female science teachers share about equal perceptions of the teaching practice scheme.

Discussion

The study has established the existence of relatively high perception of the teaching practice scheme by both cooperating and pre-service science teachers. However, it is noteworthy that the cooperating Science teachers, from this study's empirical evidence, had a higher positive perception of the teaching practice scheme than the pre-service (student) science teachers. The cooperating science teachers also had a higher perception of the components of teaching practice, especially in areas of supervision, evaluation procedure, orientation programme and other arrangements for effective implementation of the scheme. These findings confirm the position of Udeani and Ejikeme (2011) that asserted that teachers' perception supports the continuation of teaching practice. Findings from the study encourage a strong content background in the preparation of the programme for teaching practice students.

Findings from this study also agree with that of Bilesanmi-Awoderu (2007), who reported a high positive perception of teaching practice. The

reason for this finding is probably the awareness by teachers that teaching practice contributes to the enhancement of students studying science education, in that it provides them with the practical tools that are needed for them to excel in their teaching career. In addition, practicing science teachers had experienced the positive effect of teaching practice in their teaching career in the course of long period of practice.

The outcome of the study also corroborates the results of Yusuf, Ajidagba, Agbonna and Olumori (2010), who perceived that practicing and pre-service science teachers take seriously the supervision of students undergoing teaching practice scheme. They suggested the objective evaluation of students on teaching practice as a means of determining the level of involvement of students partaking in the scheme. In their study, greater percentage of practicing science teachers than pre-service science teachers views that collaborative evaluation of teaching practice by supervisors, teachers of the co-operating schools and student-teachers, would be more reliable in positioning a high perception of teachers towards teaching practice.

The findings from hypothesis two revealed that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female practicing and pre-service science teachers towards teaching practice. The male practicing science teachers has a lesser mean and higher standard deviation compared to the female practicing science teachers in terms of their perception towards the scheme; the male pre-service science teachers also has a lesser mean, though lesser standard deviation compared to the female pre-service science teachers in terms of their perception of teaching practice. The interpretation of this finding is that both male and female practicing and pre-service science teachers have the same views concerning how they perceive teaching practice as a tool towards education students teaching development; though the female practicing and pre-service science teachers have a better positive perception of teaching practice compared to their male counterpart. This finding differs from Bileanmi-Awoderu (2007), who reported that male and female respondents differed in opinion about teaching practice. The study however agrees with NCCE (2003), which reported that female respondents had more positive perception about teaching practice than their male counterparts. The reason for this outcome perhaps is that female science teachers have put in more interest and seriousness to the scheme consequently helped them discover the effectiveness of the scheme in enhancing the teaching abilities of intending teachers whose ultimate goal is being able to impart science skills and knowledge in students.

Conclusion

Teaching Practice is identified as a vital aspect of teacher education programme and meant to initiate trainee into the teaching profession. It demands seriousness from all stakeholders involved in it especially the pre-service teachers for whom it is particularly meant. This is very important because no educational system can be greater than the quality of her teachers as corroborated by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). It offers opportunity to the pre-service science teacher to be able to demonstrate practically what he or she has been exposed to in theory and geared towards professionalization.

Evidence from study however, seems to suggest that student teachers, and in this particular study the pre-service science teachers, do not perceive the practical teaching as a vital opportunity for the acquisition of needed skills for becoming a competent science teacher.

Comparison on perception done between the male practicing and female practicing science teachers on one hand and between the male pre-service and female pre-service science teachers on the other hand show that the female of both practicing and pre-service science teachers have better awareness and higher perception of the essence and component parts of the scheme compared to their male counterparts.

Recommendations

1. The NCCE should expand its monitoring and quality assurance oversight on the operations of the colleges of education and other NCE-awarding institutions in the country with a view to ensuring that necessary reforms in the curriculum and strategies for improved teaching practice are duly implemented to enable the production of teachers that will be relevant for their prospective job schedules.
2. As a condition precedent, student-teachers should manifest evidence of adequate acquisition of teaching skills under micro teaching conditions before they are exposed to practical teaching in the field.
3. The duration of teaching practice for initial training of teachers should be extended to one year of fairly remunerated service. Student-teachers need financial support for procuring instructional materials besides their personal welfare issues.

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