



SCHOOL BASED PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT TO STUDENT TEACHERS IN PREPARATION OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENTS

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Abstract

Teaching practice is an important part of teacher training. Preparation of teacher professional documents is one among the major activities student teachers do during the teaching practice. This paper discusses the preparation of scheme of work and lesson plan as teacher professional documents and the professional support provided by experienced teachers in the teaching practice centers. The study was done in the southern highland of Tanzania during the 2015/2016 teaching practice period of the University of Dar es Salaam. Document analysis and interviews were done and qualitative data was collected. Content analysis was done and some descriptive statistics were used to describe the findings. Finds show that student teachers' scheme of work and lesson plan had some variation based on the perception they had from the university and that little is learnt from the teaching practice stations. Some of the entries in the documents were wrongly constructed and in most cases differed among student teachers working in the same teaching practice station. It was also found out that little collaboration and assistance was offered from regular school teachers in the preparation of the documents. The paper suggests among others that schools should prepare their experienced teachers to actively be involved in the mentorship process.

Keywords: *teaching practice, teacher professional documents, lesson plan, scheme of work.*

Teaching practice is a practical experience in teaching before one is certified as a professionally trained teacher. It is an integral part of teacher education which grants student teachers with an opportunity to practice the art of teaching before actually getting into the actual real world of teaching career (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Lee, Kwong, & Cheung, 1994; Martinet, Raymond, & Gauthier, 2001). Thungu, Wandera, Gachie, & Alumande (2010) see teaching practice as an activity that provides student teachers with an opportunity to experience real teaching and learning situation while building up their confidence and career experience. Kansanen (2003) contends that during teaching practice student teachers become acquainted with the basic teaching of various subjects and evaluation procedures where by student teachers practically plan, teach, and evaluate lessons in different subjects assigned to them. At the University of Dar es Salaam and its constituent colleges teaching practice involves participation in some or all school based activities. It provides student teachers with on ground professional experiences in teaching which involves multiple tasks. Student teachers are normally attached to one of the participating schools called teaching practice stations. The schools provide different kinds of support including professional and social support. The teaching practice is an arena for integrating knowledge, values and skills together with the socialization of the professional person (Lee, Kwong, & Cheung, 1994). In social aspect help is provided in terms of accommodation and interaction with the school community. In the professional aspect, which is the focus of this paper, help is provided in planning and preparation for teaching, classroom and out of classroom lesson delivery, and in other important extracurricular activities. The University instructors and experienced regular school teachers should work willingly and closely with student teachers to determine the kind of

teachers they will be after the training (Thungu, Wandera, Gachie, & Alumande, 2010). This paper discusses the help provided by teaching practice centers to student teachers in the planning and preparation of professional documents. The professional documents that are of concern in this paper are the scheme of work and the lesson plan. The scheme of work in teaching profession is a document that is intended to breakdown the syllabus content into a teacher perceived easy way of curriculum implementation. The scheme of work as coined by Thungu, Wandera, Gachie, & Alumande (2010) is a document that interprets the syllabus and puts in order the learning content to be taught by the respective teacher who prepares the document. It predetermines among others the pace of delivery and teaching resources available or which have to be prepared in advance before classroom interaction. It is a teacher guiding document for a relatively long period of time which may last up to a semester or a year. It ascertains the completion of the syllabus. The lesson plan on the other hand is a single teaching session guiding document. It is a teacher made document that details the course of instruction for a lone or double lessons session and is derived from the scheme of work (Thungu, Wandera, Gachie, & Alumande, 2010). It details the activities that are to be done and how they have to be done during the lesson. Both of these documents are teacher made and require professional knowledge and skills to prepare them. Student teachers, like their counterparts regular school teachers have to prepare these documents when they are preparing for teaching (Kalebiã, 2006). At the University of Dar es salaam the document format is provided by the teaching practice office for student teachers to follow. A study by Kalebiã shows that this is the common practice in other countries and that the preparation has to be discussed with school based mentors.

Objectives

There has been a problem in the preparation of scheme of work and lesson plan among student teachers from the University of Dar es Salaam. Such difficulties were observed during their teaching practices which are normally done for eight weeks around July to September yearly. Despite having learned methodology courses at the university and the expected help from school based mentors as suggested by Kansanen (2003), student teachers could not effectively prepare scheme of work and lesson plan documents. This paper discusses the preparation of teacher's scheme of work and lesson plan and points out common mistakes in document preparation, it also explores what help student teachers received from their school based mentors. It answers question: 1) how well are student teachers professional document prepared and 2) what help do school based mentors provide to student teachers in the preparation of professional documents.

Methodology

The study was done during the 2015/16 teaching practice of the University of Dar es Salaam. Students who were involved were those who did their teaching practice in southern highland of Tanzania. In total the study involved 57 students who were unevenly distributed in twelve teaching practice centers. Review of their documents (scheme of work and lesson plan) was done. Student teachers were also interviewed in order to obtain the kind of help they received from schools with respect to document preparation. The interviews group based involving all student teachers in each teaching practice station.

Findings

Instructional objectives are of two types: the general objectives and specific objectives (Franklin, n.d.). In the scheme of work some students 42(73.7%) wrote the general objectives which reflected the whole topic while others wrote specific objectives which address the subtopic. The lesson plan had both general objectives and specific objectives. Specific objective states what the teacher intends to accomplish with the students by the end of the lesson (Thungu, Wandera, Gachie, & Alumande, 2010). The most common mix-up was identified in the selection of action verbs. While writing objectives 40.4% of student teachers managed to use non measurable action verbs in their main objectives on the lesson plan. The common non measurable term used by student teachers was the verb to "understand". With reference to specific objectives 94.7% of student teachers were able to select appropriate measurable action verbs in their specific objectives. However, only 36.8% managed to correctly write their specific objectives whereby a complete specific objective was written with all the four major components: Audience, Behaviour,

Condition, and Degree of performance (ABCD). Majority of the student teachers' specific objectives (63.2%) lacked the degree/standard of performance.

Both the scheme of work and the lesson plan have teaching, learning, and assessment activities columns. The teaching and learning activities are directly derived from the syllabus and the scheme of works for the scheme of work and the lesson plan respectively with some specific circumstance customization. There was no identified trouble with writing of teaching and learning activities. However, some differences in writing the assessment activities were identified. In the scheme of work nearly all students used a guiding question to fill in the "assessment" column. In the lesson plan 12(21.1%) of the student teachers did not plan for assessment activities at all as the column was completely blank. Four students had partially filled in columns with reasons that they were taught so and that it is not necessary to fill in the entire column. Nevertheless, 71.9% of the student teachers filled in the whole assessment activities column. While 54.4% of student teachers used questions asking if students were able to do something, 31.6% of student teachers used a statement explaining what they will do with their students in the classroom as an assessment activity.

Teacher's evaluation was also studied. This is a statement which explains how the lesson was done. It reports on the level of success to which the lesson was implemented. This is part of teacher's reflection on the classroom interaction in which the teacher is the lead. Teacher's evaluation comments promote self-reflection which is vital for the process of learning to teach (Kalebiæ, 2006). Student teachers had different ways of reporting the implementation of the lesson. In the first part of the statement 57.9% of the students used a phrase "most of the students..." while 41.1% used quantitative phrase "x% of the students" (where "x" was a numeral). Other common phrases that followed were "... understood the lesson..." and they justified the success of the lesson by writing phrases such as "...they were able to answer the questions..." 26(45.6%) or "...they were able to (measurable terms used in the objectives)..." 31(54.4%).

Another area of concern was the "remarks" both in the scheme of work and in the lesson plan. In the scheme of work, 64.9% of some student teachers had the whole column full of the remarks including areas which were not yet implemented while 17.5% did not write the remarks at all. However in cases where remarks were written in the scheme of work, 51.1% of the student teachers used the word "taught" as a complete remark, 29.8% used the words "taught and understood/well understood", while 19.1% used more learner centered remarks such as "taught and student were able to do something". In the lesson plan student teachers



had long sentences as their remarks. However all of them commented on whether they will proceed to the next lesson as per their scheme of work or they will have to repeat the lesson. Their comments were based on the teacher's evaluation that they made at the end of the lesson.

In all the teaching practice centers the scheme of work and the lesson plan were reviewed by the school authorities. The documents had the head of school's signature and stamp on weekly basis. In all the student teacher documents reviewed there were no further comments by head of schools on the way documents were prepared.

Apart from reviewing the student teachers prepared professional documents, students were also interviewed on the assistance that they received from their school mentors in the documents preparation process. Very few students (31.6%) reported to have had an opportunity to collaborate with their mentors in preparing their documents especially in the first few days of their eight weeks teaching practice. This was in contrast with the view that collaboration and team work activities are important since they encourage better development of future teachers (Vaillant & Manso, 2013). Of all the student teachers only 9(15.8%) had an opportunity to see the scheme of work prepared by their mentors and had to prepare theirs on their own. Most of the student teachers (52.6%) were simply told the topics that had been covered and those that were not yet taught. These student teachers also reported that they had to forge their way to having the professional documents prepared on their own.

In a group interview with five student teachers from one teaching practice station it reported that some regular school teachers who were supposed to be their active mentors claimed that there were some differences in the formats of the documents. They also reported that the differences in the scheme of work and lesson plan formats made regular school teachers uncomfortable in sharing their experiences with student teachers. In another school, during the group interview with four student teachers it was reported that some regular school teachers felt inferior and left to student teachers all the subject teaching activities on their own. Regular school teachers' involvement may be improved through what is referred to as the articulation with teaching practice centers by building up alliance between universities and participating schools (Vaillant & Manso, 2013; Andersson & Sarenbrant, 2013; Agaoglu, 2013). The presence of student teachers provided an opportunity for school teachers to put their feet up quite contrary to the view put forward by Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi (2012) that regular school teachers work load increases as they are supposed to teach students and supervise student teachers. In two out of twelve schools student teachers were given an isolate office different from

the usual or common offices used by regular school teachers. In these schools it was reported that there was no close interaction between school teachers and student teachers as they used quite different offices.

Discussion

The student teachers own made professional document such as the scheme of work and the lesson plan were seen to differ greatly in the way students wrote or perceived the required content of some of the entries in the documents. Major variations in the scheme of work were identified in the writing of objectives, assessment activities, and remarks. In the lesson plan variations were noted in the instructional objectives, assessment activities, and in the teacher's evaluation. Student teachers who used instructional objectives reflecting the subtopic in the scheme of work had to rewrite it for every subtopic listed unlike those whose objectives reflected the whole topic. A good number of student teachers were able to use non measurable terms while writing their general objectives. However, the most common term used by nearly every student was the verb to "*understand*". This suggests that student teachers did not have a wide range of non measurable terms to choose from. Probably the general objective itself (by virtue of being general) does not necessarily require a big range of term to choose from. Nevertheless the general action verbs that can be used include among others to know, understand, appreciate, have faith, believe in, and grasp the importance (Winegarden, 2005). The specific instructional objective was seen as one of the most difficult things student teachers had to write. Unlike the general objectives, specific instructional objectives use action verbs such as to write, identify, explain, mention, list, recite, sort, solve, construct, compare, contrast, and build to mention but a few which have fewer interpretations (Winegarden, 2005; Soto, n.d). Some student teachers were not able to identify measurable action verbs to use in their specific objectives. More still some student teachers failed to write a statement of intent which had all the basic four components building up a complete and well constructed statement of intent. As a result most student teachers overlooked the role of the degree or standard of performance. This suggests that to most student teachers the level of performance of their students in a particular concept or task is not given the required weight in their statements of intent. In other words, any level of completion of a task is ok as their objectives are silent on any performance benchmark required. Winegarden (2005) argues that a complete specific instructional objective should have all the basic four components which are the audience, behavior, condition and degree of performance. The components should be organized to form a detailed and meaning carrying statement.



The assessment activities in the scheme of work were written in form of a question by majority of students. These questions can be used as guiding tools to determine if the curriculum implementation is a success. Questions such as “*are students able to explain/narrate....*” can suffice the purpose for assessment since the scheme of work is a projection of what has to be done but for later days. This requires a precise planning for assessment activities when it comes to lesson planning (William, 2013). While the lesson plan format explicitly requires assessment activities, most student teachers did not plan the activities that would be done in the classroom so as to assess the teaching and learning interaction but instead wrote questions. While the questions were not activities, they also did not tell what exactly would be done and who would do it.

Assessment activities provide information used by the teacher to evaluate the lesson. This evaluation tells the extent to which the lesson has been successful. Evaluation also provides the teacher with an opportunity to reflect on their work and enables them to improve their teaching (Lavriè, 2013). At the start of the sentence some student teachers used phrases such as “*most of students...*” while other used percentages. While “*most of*” is easy to determine, the percentage is difficult to obtain in a lesson of forty or eighty minutes. It is also debatable as to whether one can actually come up with the actual representative number or percentage of students who have successfully completed classroom activities within the limited lesson time. Nevertheless, it is also open to discussion if a phrase “*most of*” which is very vague can be of use in future when the lesson plan is revisited. Specific numerical data can easily inform the level of learners involvement, participation, or achievement especially when the teacher as suggested by Lavriè (2013) need to improve their teaching and address specific areas of concern in future. It is argued here that while phrases such as “*most of and majority of*” can easily present the average portion of students who did well in the lesson, the numerical portion such as percentages can help in further decision especially in organizing remedial and revision lessons as it can simply be differentiated from another numerical figure. Student teachers also explained the success of their lesson by giving reasons either that students were able to answer questions or were able to do (specific objective action verb) something. While both views tell what students have been able to do, answering questions may not necessarily reflect what was envisaged to be done in the classroom. In most cases the lesson is planned to help students do be able to do something from the syllabus content rather than simply answering questions. Therefore, a good teacher’s evaluation should tell exactly if students were able to do what specific

objective wanted them to do by the end of classroom or lesson interaction.

In both the scheme of work and in the lesson plan there were some remarks. While in the scheme of work the role of the remarks is to report the implementation of the curriculum, in the lesson plan the remarks reports the next step to be taken after the teacher’s evaluation (Thungu, Wandera, Gachie, & Alumande, 2010). In the scheme of work most remarks were “*taught*” or “*well taught*”. Few student teachers used “*taught and understood*” or “*taught and students were able to*”. The first two remarks were teacher centered and were silent on what has happened to students who are actually the centre of teaching and learning process. The latter two remarks were learner centered to some extent. While “*taught and understood*” considers what happened to students, it is still too vague. A good remark in the scheme of work is that which tells what students have been able to do/learn as contented by Lavriè, (2013) that teaching has now become to put students as the main focus. In the lesson plan a good remark as was written by most student teachers tells what will happen next based on the information from the assessment activities and the teacher’s evaluation. Specifically, lesson plan remarks indicated as to whether the next session will be used to learn new content and perform new activities or the lesson will be repeated. Remedial classes were also mentioned when student teachers thought it necessary.

Some of these variations were observed among student teachers working in the same teaching practice station. This suggests that student teachers from the same teaching practice station do not learn same things in the same ways. The teaching practice mentorships was not well organized by school administration to the extent that each student teacher had to forge their way forward from what they learnt at the university. Most regular school teachers neither helped student teachers to prepare the professional documents nor did they provide even a little guidance except for a few of them. In some schools regular school teachers did not even share the office rooms with student teachers. This put student teachers who are in the making in teaching practice stations in isolation. Consequently, it is argued here that little may be learnt from the teaching practice stations as far as teaching profession documents such as the scheme of work and lesson plan preparation is concerned. Therefore, it is suggested in this paper that schools should prepare their teachers to play the mentorship roles. Andersson & Sarenbrant, (2013) suggest that head of schools have a big role to play as they have to plan and organize the mentorship process for both their school development and the partner University. The collaboration between the University and the schools is vital to enable common understanding between the



involved (Andersson & Sarenbrant, 2013; Agaoglu, 2013)

Recommendation and Conclusion

In this paper it is recommended that school based mentors should be trained by school administration to handle the mentorship process before student teachers are assigned subjects of their mentors to teach. This places the regular school teachers in a position of being comfortable to interact with student teachers placed under their professional care. While the teaching professional documents formats may differ, in most cases the basic features remain intact and if mentors are well prepared and flexible, they can easily help in preparing student teachers to gain the expected practical experiences. Furthermore, collaboration and sharing of knowledge and experiences may bridge the knowledge and social gap that may exist based on organizational based behaviors. It is also recommended to the University to update their document formats to match those used in the school. This is important because the prospective teachers that are prepared by the universities are expected to work in such schools.

This paper discussed the preparation of teacher professional documents such as the scheme of work and lesson plan by student teachers from the University of Dares Salaam during their teaching practice. It points out some variations in preparing the documents which partly result from uncoordinated school based mentorship. Student teacher faced some difficulties in writing their documents, the challenges which may be alleviated if proper mentorships is provided. As most of the student teachers find themselves working alone without any guidance from experienced teachers, they end up writing documents with lots of mistakes. The paper concludes that in most teaching practice stations that the University of Dares Salaam student teachers undertake their practical training, very little is learnt as far as writing teacher professional documents are concerned. Schools should take responsibility in ensuring that student teachers learn something new and of use from them. And this can only be done if schools train and prepare their teachers for mentorship.

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