

**A STUDY OF PRACTICE TEACHING PROGRAMME:
A TRANSITIONAL PHASE FOR STUDENT TEACHERS****Voice of Research**
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ISSN No. 2277-7733**Rakesh Ranjan**Assistant Professor, Waymade College of Education,
Vallabh Vidyanagar**Abstract**

Practice Teaching is an integral component of teacher training. This study explores the experiences of the student-teachers of Waymade College of Education during their 8-10 weeks' practice teaching. Semi-structured interviews and focused group discussion with all student-teachers were used to collect the data while content analysis was used to analyze the data. The research established that, despite the positive experiences during practice teaching, student-teachers experienced challenges. Based on the findings of this study, measures were suggested on how to improve practice teaching.

Keywords: Practice teaching, trainee teachers, transitional phase

Practice teaching is an important component towards becoming a teacher. It provides experiences to student-teachers in the actual teaching and learning environment. During practice teaching, a student-teacher is given the opportunity to try the art of teaching before actually getting into the real world of the teaching profession. Student-teachers also know the value of practice teaching and they perceive it as the important aspect of their preparation for the teaching profession since it provides for the real interface between student hood and membership of the profession. As a result, practice teaching creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the student-teachers as they commence their practice teaching.

The term practice teaching represents the range of experiences to which student-teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. Practice teaching is a challenging but important part of teacher training. Practice teaching is meant to provide for the authentic context within which student-teachers are exposed to experience the complexities and richness of the reality of being a teacher. However, despite its importance, practice teaching sometimes becomes a demoralizing and sometimes very frightening experience for the student-teachers.

The study identifies both the positive and negative experiences of student-teachers during practice teaching and suggests ways of assisting student-teachers to achieve the desired outcomes from the practice teaching. The study describes and gives a justification for practice teaching as a teacher training requirement. A brief review of how it is conducted at the WMCE, followed by an account of the Methodology and a discussion of findings. Finally suggestions as to how practice teaching could be improved in order to have a positive influence on the student-teachers perception of and attitude towards the teaching profession are presented.

Practice teaching Programme: A Mandatory Teacher Training Requirement

Practice teaching is the obligatory requirement in the B. Ed. curriculum. It occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education. It is a culminating experience in teacher preparation. It provides opportunity to beginning teachers to become socialized into the profession. The students are required to carry out this assignment throughout the course work. This is to give the students teachers a real classroom experience in teaching so that they can develop the required skills for their classroom teaching later after graduation. The duration is about 8-10 weeks. In order to do this, schools are selected according to the requirements of different phases. The practice teaching programme is classified under simulated stage teaching practice, macro teaching, block teaching, off-campus and internship. For simulated stage teaching practice students deliver their session in front of their peers in the college itself but the time duration is just 10 minutes and importance is given to practice of skills, for macro lesson again students deliver their session in front of their peers and in the college too but time of the session is increased to 25 minutes. Different methods of teaching have been focused in such lessons. Its ultimate aim is to make the students be familiar with various teaching methods and to make them use such methods in classroom teaching effectively. For block teaching programme student-teachers, for the first time, move out of the institution and deliver their sessions in the schools located in the vicinity of the campus, for this school is requested to provide their classes and the student-teachers from the campus are assigned to teach them. For the off-campus programme student-teachers deliver their sessions in schools outside the campus. Till now all the sessions are observed by the supervisors assigned to them. At the end of practice teaching programme student-teachers go for the internship



programme wherein there is no one from the college to supervise them but the school teachers/principal observe and give feedback. Each student-teacher has to teach at least one class a day with all the preparation and s/he is expected to practice the skills in his/her classroom that s/he learned in the courses. The supervisors are assigned to supervise their performance and provide them feedback to sharpen their teaching skills. The final evaluation is carried out by an external examiner at the end of the practice teaching. In addition to this teaching the students are also expected to carry out the assembly and conduct co-curricular activities.

Before the start of practice teaching phase the practice teaching coordinator/s met with a number of school principals before sending student-teachers out to different schools. The objective of the meeting was to establish positive educational and supportive relationships with the School Management from a number of schools in the region.

The coordinator/s selected suitable schools for practice teaching by visiting the schools, meeting with the principals and teachers and explaining the reasons why WMCE would like to establish a working professional relationship with them.

Lecturers had to give the student-teachers written and oral feedback. Improvements were commended, shortcomings highlighted and suggestions made on how to, for example, overcome anxiety, use non-verbal language to enhance their teaching and learning activities, and how to apply a variety of strategies to improve their teaching. The educators also had to observe the students' progress, behaviour and attitude at school and assess the student-teachers practical teaching and learning activities according to specific guidelines given to them by the teacher educators.

Objectives of the study

To study the student-teachers experiences during practice teaching programme.

Research Design

The population of the study includes all the student teachers of B. Ed. programme of the Sardar Patel University. The sample is constituted of all the student teachers of Waymade College of Education. Semi-structured interviews and Focused Group Discussion were employed as a tool to collect data. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The broad aim of the research was to examine the student-teachers experiences during practice teaching programme.

Setting of the study

A qualitative research approach was used in the study conducted at the different schools in the Vallabh Vidyanagar and Anand region.

Lecturers also accompany the students during their practice teaching period. All WMCE student-teachers of the last two years were included in the sample (n=189). Data were collected mainly through semi-structured interviews and focused group discussion with student-teachers in the B. Ed. programme at the end of an 8-10-week practice teaching period. The participants were briefed on the focus of the inquiry. Interviews and focused group discussion were conducted to explore student-teachers positive experiences and challenges faced during practice teaching. The interviewer directed and encouraged dialogue by asking reflective and probing questions.

Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and focused group discussion were analysed through content analysis.

Findings

The data was analyzed through content analysis and they are discussed below in detail.

Preparation of Student-teachers to Translate Theory into Practice

The respondents in this study indicated that they were prepared and able to translate theory into practice and also that they were able to apply the education theory learnt at institution into practice during the practice teaching.

When asked whether the course had prepared them for the teaching experience, the respondents answered that they felt that the B. Ed. course had indeed prepared them for the practice teaching.

Most respondents said that they found practice teaching very interesting because they were able to apply what they had studied and they enjoyed teaching because they were conversant with the subject content. For example, they had been taught the code of professional ethics, duties and responsibilities of educators and based on that training the students knew how to handle themselves in a professional manner in order to protect the dignity of the profession, and could also make a fair judgement about the professionalism of the educators in the schools.

The respondents indicated that they applied the knowledge they had acquired during the specific subject and studies to plan, prepare and present the lessons. They acknowledged the importance of positive reinforcement and of creating a favorable environment for learning.

However, it should be noted that the respondents in this study reported that, despite the thorough teacher preparation, they found that it was not easy to teach because the learners were not cooperative, they did not do assignments, were noisy and were not actively involved in classroom activities. Moreover there was a language barrier. "Learners could not communicate in English. This affected the student-teachers performance during practice



teaching and their perception of the teaching profession in general.

Lesson Planning

All respondents pointed out that to be an effective teacher one needs to plan out his work before undertaking its implementation. So a teacher should plan and prepare his teaching lessons. But they all have pointed out the following problems with the general lesson planning:

Time taking and mechanical: The commonly used format of the general lesson planning take lots of time in its preparation and the format of lesson plan is too mechanical.

Too much assumption and practically not feasible : While preparing the lesson plan a teacher has to assume lots of thing and any wrong assumption leads to the failure of the plan and practically the general lesson plan is not fully practically implementable.

Inclusion of all aspects: While preparing lesson plan a teacher has to include lots of things/aspects in its preparation and practically speaking the general lesson plan is not liked by anyone

Gap between planning and implementation: Student teachers said that they devote most of their time in preparing a good plan to please the teacher but when it comes to implementation nothing is implemented according to the plan.

Big: The general lesson plan includes too many components and because of that it is too big.

Timing of the Practice teaching

All respondents pointed out that practice teaching were planned quite well especially the distribution i.e. preparation at the institution and then going out for the block teaching and then in the second semester off-campus and internship programme. Some of the respondents have said that executing the practice teaching before and after the examination is not appropriate. Lesson planning was very inconvenient, while at the same time they were required to do their own assignments for the fulfillment of their academic qualification. It was a challenge having to do both at the same time.

Student-teachers Induction into the School

Respondents from three of the schools noted that there was no general initiation in place when they first arrived at the schools. They were not introduced to staff members, as attested by the following statement: "They do not have staff meetings so we were not introduced formally. Other educators and learners just see us there."

Some respondents felt a sense of alienation. One student-teacher remarked thus: "We were never introduced to staff. This affected us psychologically because we felt like strangers. We never felt that sense of belonging."

Such feelings of alienation resulted in panic and a lack of

self-confidence, which in turn reduced the effectiveness of practice teaching and negatively affected student-teachers attitude towards the teaching profession.

On the other hand, a good reception from the headmasters and teachers contributed to a positive attitude towards teaching, as confirmed by the statement by one of the student-teachers, who received a good reception:

"We were introduced to the staff and students and welcomed in the assembly. They took us to the classes and we introduced ourselves to the learners. Learners were told to respect us. We were introduced as teachers not as student-teachers and this to a certain extent influenced the way other teachers and learners related to us."

Attitude of other teachers in the School

Respondents intimated that teachers who were not mentors did not make them feel welcome and they did not respect them. One respondent remarked that "We were not respected as their colleagues. They just order us around. They treat us like proxy teachers."

The language was also a challenge, especially for those student-teachers coming from other states and did not understand the local language of communication used in a particular school.

Involvement in other School Activities

Teaching involves many experiences, and student-teachers are required to get involved in all aspects of the school. Though school principals had been requested to provide student-teachers with the opportunity to become "fully integrated" teachers by allowing students teacher participation in all school activities, the student-teachers were limited in their participation in the school activities. The majority of student-teachers said that:

"They were not invited for staff meetings so they never know what takes place in the meetings. They would like to be involved and attend those meetings because they believe that they can give some valuable input."

Learner Discipline

Student-teachers experienced a deterioration of moral values in schools and a neglect of discipline, the majority of respondents in the present study also noted that discipline was almost non-existent in most schools. One respondent remarked,

"Learners were very unruly because there were no effective disciplinary measures taken against misconduct."

Another respondent indicated, "Learners gave an impression that we are their age mates so they don't respect us. There is no discipline at all. Learners are rude. It is not easy to control the class."

In contrast to the above negative responses, respondents from one school said that learners were well behaved and that they actively participated in the class activities.

"Learners respect us as teachers, though there are some



who think that since we are student-teachers, we don't have the power/authority to punish them."

Resources to Facilitate Teaching and Learning

The results obtained from the respondents with regard to resources revealed that the schools did not have sufficient resources to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Some of the respondents remarked that school library was having shortage of supplementary reading materials.

Respondents indicated that they did not have access to the photocopying machine when they wanted to make copies of worksheets and other reading materials for learners.

Discussion

Generally, the respondents in this study indicated that they had benefited from the practice teaching programmes. However, all respondents felt that in as much as the theory acquired during lectures provided them with enough information on how to teach, it was the practice teaching that introduced them to and gave them the exposure into the experiences of the real teaching world. However, practice teaching provides student-teachers with the opportunity to integrate the theory of education in the practice through the first hand experiences of teaching.

Students have said that they gain much specialized knowledge by attending lectures but practice teaching adds meaning to this knowledge when they comes into direct contact with the real classroom situation.

The findings in relation to the influence of the teacher educators varied from student-teacher to student-teacher. Some teacher educators effectively fulfilled their role of guiding student-teachers. They offered student-teachers under their supervision, guidance and showed them what to do. Some respondents were dissatisfied with the relationship between teacher educators and student-teachers. Some of the student-teachers were dissatisfied with the feedback given to them. Some said that they were criticized for their session but suggestion to improve the same was not concrete.

The way in which student-teachers were received and treated varied from one school to another. The majority of student-teachers in the present study attested to the fact that they were not well received and introduced at their schools of placement and that resulted into other teachers and learners not respecting them. This significantly influenced student-teachers' performance during practice teaching.

Learner discipline was a serious restraint for the student-teachers. The teaching environment did not allow student-teachers to execute what they had learnt at college. There is a possibility that student-teachers had not been fully prepared for the real environment in which they were supposed to teach.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from the research indicate that student-teachers view practice teaching as an important component in their training because it exposes them to the actual teaching and learning environment in which they are enabled to contextualize their theoretical knowledge gained during training. Student-teachers felt that the practice teaching programme had prepared them for the practice teaching. However, despite the thorough preparation, students were faced with challenges which significantly affected students' ability to accumulate maximum benefits from the practice teaching.

Some time the timing of the practice teaching was also inappropriate. Especially when it was arranged before or after the completion of examination in the schools. School teachers view this period as critical for their learners; consequently they are reluctant to relinquish their classes to inexperienced student-teachers thus defeating the purpose of practice teaching. It is thus recommended that the teaching programme timetable should be designed in such a way that it does not coincide with key school terms. Lesson planning is also a cumbersome process, so it is recommended that it should be made more practicable and feasible.

Furthermore, student-teachers were not always made to feel welcome and were not generally respected by other staff members. Student-teachers were often excluded from many school activities and were made to feel insignificant which greatly demoralized them. It was suggested that before and during each practice teaching session there should be thorough public relations groundwork undertaken by the institution in order to maintain good relations between the student-teachers and all relevant role players.

Practice teaching is an activity, which can play an important role in the preparation of teachers. Its effectiveness is necessary for the nation. It is a combination of personality, professional skills, knowledge and training, which is fuel for an endless journey. Now it is the responsibility of teacher educators and teachers of practicing schools to make this fuel endless.

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