

# Improving Teaching Practice Exercise in Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

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**Abstract:** - The standard and quality of teachers and its impact on educational outcomes has remain issues of global concern. This paper focuses on Teaching Practice(TP) as important component of professional teacher training programmes as practiced in almost all part of the world. The paper reviewed literature on policy frameworks, theories, provisions on Teacher development programmes and teacher preparatory practices with specific reference to TP exercise Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS). The purpose is to how it is performed, identify the challenges and provide suggestions on how to improve. The major aspects of TP exercise in UDUS are course specification, payment of TP fees by students, posting of students and posting of staff to supervise and assess students. Challenges identified includes funding, staffing, students, pedagogy, scope of posting, duration of TP exercise, inadequate pre-TP, during TP and post-TP activities for staff and students, lack of adequate stake holder involvements. The paper suggests the need for TET Fund and International Developmental Partners collaborative supports and fund. The paper advances need for more Academic Staff, admission of high intelligent students into Faculty of Education, improvement in preparatory TP and post TP activities to involve orientation, briefing, dialogue, and feedback, need for student mastery of subject matter, methodology and provision instructional material, need for sustainable motivation and reinforcement and the need to improve, supervision, assessment and evaluation techniques. The study suggests need for setting of TP committee, and to conduct empirical researches to improve on the current situations. The paper concludes that without proper, well organized teaching practice as preparatory training for teacher development practices the issue of standard and quality and professionalism in our education system will remain an illusion.

**Key words:** Improving, Teaching, Teaching Practice, UDUS

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching has been described as the most important profession in the world. It is believed that the prophets of God who came before and their representatives up till today are teachers. Teaching is both an art and science of disseminating factual information, knowledge and skills to the recipients (learners) for the benefit of individuals and societies Ekeke(2016). The argument that teachers are born and not made has been put to rest by teacher training programme in which teaching practice is an important component. Teaching practice is an important part of Teacher Training Programme all over the world. In fact, it is the most important aspect of teacher training programme to the extent that it is accorded the highest credit units (6 units) in education degree awarding

programmes. According to Salawu, Okonkwo, Osuji and Adeoye (2008) teaching practice is a practical teaching activity by which student teachers are given opportunity in actual school situation to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skill over a period of time.

Teaching Practice is a global practice. In the International context, most of the prominent global agenda, EFA 1990- 2000, MDG 2000-2015, SDG 2015-2030 all acknowledged the important role of teachers in promoting learning outcome at all levels. Global attempts were made to provide a common platform for teacher development globally. UNESCO (2017) indicated that policy frameworks are meant “to ensure teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-reserved efficient and effectively governed system. One of the global best practices in teacher training programme is to expose prospective teachers in training to teaching practice. Usually in schools and faculties of education in Nigeria student teachers are either sent on six-week, three months or a whole semester teaching practice.

The ideal practice is that there should be pre, during and post-teaching practice activities, in which prospective teaching practice students are adequately informed, trained, mentored and motivated for the teaching tasks. The quality of this exercise to some extent determines the quality of teachers produced on one hand and the quality of education on the other hand. However, it is observed that these prerequisite activities are often neglected or improperly conducted in some universities including Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto which has negative consequences on the quality of teaching practice exercise and the quality of student teachers. It is in this context that the paper made attempt to examine the issues and challenges confronting TP conceptualization and conduct with a view to repositioning it for efficient delivery and end result for production of better teachers through our teacher education programme.

## II. CONCEPT OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Teaching practice as an integral part of teacher training is seen as an activity in which students are placed into schools to practice lesson planning, classroom organization and classroom teaching and most importantly it is an essential part of effective professional training (Ede and Ihiejiet, 2013). While Assimonge (2014) perceived teaching practice as an

exercise meant for prospective teachers opportunities to demonstrate and put into practice the theories of education already acquired in the training. Teaching Practice in the context of this paper is defined as an exercise used by teacher training institutions to expose student teachers (pre-service teachers) to real school and classroom situation for a period of time to enable them demonstrate their dispositions and skills in disseminating knowledge, instructions, and skills in their subject areas of specializations. This is to enable them to impact on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learners, in which they are assessed by supervisors to ascertain their fitness, readiness and competence as prospective teachers.

Historically, the genesis of formal teacher training activities or teaching practice in Nigeria could be traced to missionary since 1859- through teacher- pupil apprenticeship system. Then came the establishment of formal teacher training, institutions, as teachers' college, or teacher Grades III, Grade II and Pivotal in which student teachers were exposed to teacher preparatory training, involving teaching practice, then came the era of National Certificate in Education, graduate and postgraduate programmes in education (Ogunyika, Okeke & Adedoyin 2015). The objectives of teaching practice are as follows:

1. Exposing student teachers to real life classroom experiences under the supervision of teachers.
2. To provide forum for student teachers to translate educational theories and principles into practice.
3. To involve student teachers' interaction to discuss their own strengths and weaknesses and consolidate on their strengths.
4. To familiarize student teachers with the school environment as their work place.
5. To provide student teachers with opportunities for further acquisition of professional skills, competence, personal characteristics and experiences for full time teaching after graduation.
6. To help students develop positive attitude toward teaching profession.
7. To serve as means of assessing the professional competence of students (National Policy on Education, 2013)

### III. THEORETICAL POSITION

The theoretical premises on which this paper was built or hinged upon are the reflective theory by Gibbs, (1998) and constructivists theory developed by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner (in Santrock, 2007). Gibbs (1998). In his reflective theory, Gibbs emphasizes on reflective teaching. This involves a lot of reflective activities such as reflective learning, reflective judgment, and reflective abstraction, reflective practice. The theory fundamentally seeks to promote the use of reflective practices to improve quality of care, stimulate personal and professional growth and promote deep learning and closing the gap between theory and

practice. In the conduct of teaching practice it is imperative to entrench the culture of reflective thinking in the whole process.

The constructivist theory on the other hand is a paradigm or world view that learners are active and constructive in the process of learning Constructivism states that learning is an active contextual process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it, constructed based on personal experience and hypothesis, (Santrock 2007). The relevance of these theories are to reflect and construct new and better ways of practicing teaching and learning to promote educational outcomes. According to UNESCO (2017) producing teacher training taxonomy, requires standardize approaches based on dimension of complexity and connectivity to enhance quantity and quality of outcomes.

In putting a strong structure for education the Drury University Teacher Education program adopted a model called Bridge model. Analogy of the bridge helps to express the connection between the world of practice and the body of knowledge, theory and research which exist for professional education. The bridge is built when the candidate is adequately trained and used it as a lifelong resource. Bridges share three common principles the pier, the arch and the truss which determine the integral strength of the final construction. (European Union 2015).

Using the analogy of the bridge model to teacher education, the pier is symbolic of the liberal arts general education, the security and stability of the individual teacher, and the dispositions which each person brings to the profession. The arch is the subject area of specialization and the truss is the pedagogy. Also in teaching practice the common principles could be likened to the pre-teaching, during and post teaching practice activities which are essential component of the TP exercise. What it takes to have good TP exercise is to do the ideal.

### IV. IDEAL PROCESS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

The National Universities Commission provided minimum standard of operation for Nigerian Universities in which teacher education is usually domesticated in Institutes or Faculties of education (Nakpodia2011). Teaching practice is compulsory course in training of teachers with stipulations and processes to be followed in order to achieve a desirable exercise. But, the operations TP differs across Nigerian Universities. According to Jekayinta, Yahya, Yusuf, Ajidagba, Oniye, Chiyangi and Ibrahim(2012) defaults in the system of operation could lead to problems in teaching Practice exercise.

*Administration:* Ideally, administrative structure of TP exercise is a shared responsibility involving the university management in providing funds, facilities and support services. The Faculty of Education serves the intermediary function, oversees and co-ordinates TP activities, while the Departments function as key players, by planning, organizing

and executing the TP programmes involving staff students, cooperating school environment and other stake holders. Nakpodia(2011) and Ekeke (2016) identified the following three interconnected activities in the conduct of teaching practice in Nigerian Universities.

#### *Pre-Teaching Practice Activities*

This is preparatory stage in which the faculties of education plan for the TP exercise. The pre-TP stage involves setting up of machinery for actions such as constituting TP committee with terms of reference, sourcing for funds and disbursement for various activities such as micro-teaching, school observation by students, pre-school visit by staff, supervision claims, purchase of teaching practice materials, submission of names and posting as well as pre-teaching practice briefing. It is important to stress that funds must be disbursed before the commencement of the exercise. The importance of these activities is to adequately prepare the students, staff, hosting schools and the University management for their respective responsibilities in order to have a hitch free and successful exercise. Okobia, Ogunmugu and Osagie(2013) opined that lack of adequate preparation can jeopardize the whole exercise.

#### *During Teaching Practice Activities*

This is a stage of putting the plans into actions. Student teachers and supervisors are engaged in different activities. The student teachers are supposed to be in their respective schools involved in the preparation of schemes, lessons, instructional materials, instructional delivery, students evaluation and participation in extra-curricular activities such as assembly, meeting, games and sports, school clubs and interacting with students and staff. This is the time supervisors are expected to visit their students for supervision. The supervisors offer guidance and assessment in the development of knowledge and skills of teaching. They do not go there for fault seeking. The conventional supervision practice is that student teachers should have a number of supervision from different supervisors. In this regard, Ekeke (2016) suggested that each student-teacher should not have less than three visits. He further suggested that where the TP duration is three months the first visit can take place before the end of the first month. This visit is to allow the student-teachers to settle down into their assignments. The second visit can be made at the middle of the exercise and the third visit could be three weeks or thereabout before the conclusion of the exercise.

The supervision is to be done in three stages. The first stage is a pre-conference supervision where the supervisor establishes rapport with the student-teachers and ascertaining the readiness of the student-teachers by going through their scheme of work, lesson plan and instructional materials. The essence of this is to guide and correct the student-teachers before going to classes for actual teaching. At the observation stage the student-teachers', teaching styles, mastery of subject matters, the use of instructional materials,

classroom control and management as well as their personalities are observed and assessed by the supervisors. The last stage is called post-observation conference. This is where the supervisors give feedback and corrections to the student teachers on their performances.

#### *Post-Teaching Practice Activities*

The post TP activities comprise a number of events such as students-supervisors' interactive sessions to be organized by the departments where experiences are shared. The reports from various schools are also considered and appropriate actions taken. The essence of these meetings is to identify and offer solutions to challenges faced during the TP.

Decision on duration, timing of TP and assessment format are determined by faculty, while the departments schedule the posting arrangements for staff and students. Jekafinta, Yahya, Yusuf, Ajidagba, Oniye, Oniyangi and Ibrahim (2012) indicated that duration of TP is not fixed. Some Universities like Ahmadu Bello University Zaria do twelve weeks at once. While University of Benin do 10 to 15 weeks (Ekundayo, Alonge, Kolawale and Ekundayo 2014), Usmanu Danfodiyo do 6 weeks each for two sessions of TP exercise. However, NUC benchmark (2007) proposed a whole semester TP. Nakpodia (2011) suggested one year internship equivalent to houseman ship as practiced in medical related courses to allow for adequate exposure and engagement of student teachers in to broad range of experiences and practices and to support the move for professionalism of teaching profession.

Teaching practice is a flexible exercise ( Olayinka, Okekeand Adedayin2015), as such the practices specified are conventional practices serving as frameworks for institutions to follow and even improve upon. This means that the practices could defer from institutions based on such improvements. What is the analysis of TP in UDUS?

## V. TEACHING PRACTICE EXERCISE IN UDUS

As conventionally stipulated by NUC, in Usmanu Danfodiyo University, like other Nigerian universities, teacher training programmes are offered in the Faculty of Education and Extension Services, comprising four Departments namely: Adult Education and Extension Services; Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology; Educational Foundations; and Science and Vocational Education. Teaching practice exercise is carried out by each department as per course descriptions coordinated by a staff appointed by the head of each of the departments. The duration of the TP is usually six weeks for three and four hundred levels students. Students are posted to schools of their choices and they are responsible for their accommodation, feeding and all expenses related to TP such as production or improvisation of instructional materials. The members of staff are expected to claim their expenses such as transportation and night allowance based on specified number of nights according to staff rank.

The TP course descriptions and units currently in use is based on 2007 Bench-mark provided by National Universities Commission (NUC) for Faculties of Education in Nigerian universities. All undergraduate student teachers are expected to be exposed to two teaching practice exercises as a requirement for award of B. A. Ed, B. Sc. Ed and B.Ed. The course code and number as provided by the Departments are EDU 301, EDU 401, ADE 318, ADE 411, PED 301 and PED 401 and each of the courses has 3 units. It is observed that the course descriptions differ across the four departments in which some of descriptions do not even reflect the actual practices in TP exercise. For example EDU 301 description specifies as follows: "It is designed to assist the student/teacher with techniques and skills of teaching. They will be introduced to art of lesson delivery, questioning techniques & evaluation. There will be peer review through playback of the mini teaching" (Department of Educational Foundations Students Handbook, 2014).

The Department of Adult Education and Extension Services has other related courses and activities to prepare

students for teaching practice. These are School Visit and Micro-Teaching as ADE 218 and PED 213 as 2 units courses meant to acquaint students with real school activities through school visit and near classroom exposure through micro-teaching under the guidance of lecturers. In addition, TP briefings are conducted for students before the exercise.

Some other practices obtainable in UDUS as regards to TP are as follows:

*Funding:* The TP fund is raised through TP fees charged by the University and each student is expected to pay a fee of N5,000 .00 perTP, during their central registration into the university account. Supervisory staff usually fill their claim forms based on mileages covered, nights and local transport as statutorily provided. But TP supervision allowances are paid in lump sum to the Faculty, based on the discretion of the management, rather than the claims raised by individual staff. The amount paid for TP is usually five million Naira to be shared by the four Departments.

Table 1 showing number of staff, students and amount involved in 2016/2017 TP exercise

Department	No of Staff	No of Student	Student Payment	Staff Claim	Amount Received
AEES	11	467	₦2335000.00	1,875,128.00	₦1,020,000.00
CSET	13	475	₦2375000.00	1,916,860.00	₦1,030,000.00
EDF	19	304	₦1520000.00	3,727,240.00	₦1,250,000.00
SVE Faculty	10	80	₦4045000.00	4,088,116.00	₦1,400,000.00
	-	-	-	-	₦300,000.00
Total	53	2055	₦10275000.00	11,607,344.00	₦5,000,000.00

Source: Departments/Art and Humanities Complex

The table 1 shows that 53 staff and 2055 students were involved in 2016 2017, TP exercise with an estimated amount of N10,275,000 was paid as TP fees by students, and the total claim by staff was 11,607,344.00. In contrast to the sum of 5,000 000 paid to the Faculty as the TP supervision allowance and shared among the Departments, and each Department has its sharing format. The adequacy of the TP allowance receive by staff is dependent on the number of students and distances to be covered. Other activities that need funds such as pre-TP school visit by co-coordinator, TP briefing, Micro teaching, resource materials are not catered for and not part of activities implemented on TP.

*Posting:* TP postings are by convenience restricted to schools within Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states. Students are made to choose schools within this geographical coverage. This constitutes problem to students in areas of accommodation, feeding and transportation. Other issues related to posting are rejection by school, improper allocation of assignments to student teachers, poor school environment, lack of resources or instructional materials. Allocation of Students to staff for supervision is in number and distance covered. For instance,

the Highest number of students allocated to staff was 103 and the lowest was 17 students across the three States. This need to be looked into.

*TP Duration:* The duration of the TP exercise is six weeks as provided in The Bench Mark, while the time for the TP is usually after second semester break to coincide with when students and pupils in the posting environment are in school session. Sometime TP students encounter clashes with registration in the University.

*TP Supervision:* Each Department assigns students to staff for supervision and assessment based on criteria contained in the TP evaluation form, comprising areas of lesson preparation, presentation, classroom management, communication skills, attainment of stated objectives, and teachers' personality giving a total score obtainable to 100%. The scoring is used to depict level of competence displayed by students during contact with supervisory staff and is based on one supervision, which is not adequate thus accounting for high grades as shown by results on TP. For the 2016/2017 academic Session.

Table II Showing TP Grades in 2016/2017

Grade	Departments				Total
	AEES	CSET	EDF	SVE	
A	8 (1.8%)	20(4.2%)	28(9.2%)	0(0%)	56(2.9%)
B	149 (33%)	200(42.1%)	107(35.1%)	99(13.9%)	555(28.6%)
C	227 (50.3%)	230(48.2%)	147(48.3%)	585(82.5%)	1189(61.3%)
D	19 (4.2%)	19(4.0%)	8 (2.6%)	23(3.2%)	69(3.6%)
E	1 (0.2)	4(0.84%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	5(0.3%)
F	47(10.4)	2(0.42%)	14(4.6%)	2(0.3%)	65(3.4%)
<b>Total</b>	451	475	304	709	1939

The table II shows that out of 1939 students that participated in TP a total of 1800 (92.8%) passed with grades “C” and above, while students with low grades were 74 (3.9%) and those who failed were 65 (3.3%). This implies that most of the student teachers displayed high level of teaching professional competence, indicating good prospect for teaching profession. The result shows no cause for alarm, despite shortcomings on manners and circumstances in which TP supervisions were conducted and other inadequacies related to TP in UDUS. The contention of this paper is whether the grades are true or imaginary reflections of student-teacher’s competence and proficiency. This need critical analysis and research.

#### VI. ISSUES ARISING FROM TEACHING PRACTICE CONDUCT IN UDUS

Based on the discussions of how teaching practice exercise is being conducted in UDUS the paper observes the following gaps:

*Funding:* Inadequate and late payment of staff TP supervision allowances has demoralizing effect on the quality of TP supervision, hence, the quality of the outcomes are not encouraging. Other contingency services are not funded such as production of TP supervision evaluation forms, provision of instructional materials, pre-teaching visits by TP coordinators, TP orientation, School visit and observation for students and staff which have a lot of negative consequences on TP exercise.

*Scope of Posting Coverage:* The geographical limitation for TP posting to only three states poses serious problem to students who are posted outside their residential areas especially female students.

*Duration and Timing of TP:* The duration of TP is inadequate for adequate supervision of students due to their large numbers and few staff available as presented in table one. If students are to be adequately supervised there is at least more than an hour per student to cover for full supervision. Ekeke(2016) provided list of supervision activities for TP students to comprise pre-observation conference, actual classroom observation, analysis of teaching and strategy of

feedback and post observation conference. These activities are hard to be accomplished due to number of students and limitation of duration.

The timing of TP is often scheduled during second semester holiday to coincide with time when primary and secondary schools are in session. Staff need to mark exam scripts and get results ready on time. School resumes for registration and lectures before completion of TP exercise.

*Supervision:* Members of staff are assigned to supervise students in the respective schools they are posted to within the duration of six weeks. Supervision is a cumbersome activity and is often not done properly where students and schools are many to be covered coupled with distances between schools which lead to some sharp practices. Mostly students are not supervised during their lesson period. Some faulty practices involved are assigning colleagues, rushing to finish, missing the TP, use of only lesson plan as means of assessment.

*School Visit and Micro Teaching:* The problem as regards to micro-teaching is that currently the Faculty has no micro teaching laboratory facilities and the exercise is conductedly haphazardly.

*Attitudinal Problems:* Additional problems identified by the paper relates to general attitude of the University Management, Staff and Students toward TP exercise, such as lack of commitment, enthusiasm, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, lack of coordination, team work and collaboration with other stakeholders. Issues related to students are reporting to place of TP late or absconding from the exercise, while many of them lack proper dispositions, confidence, and inadequate mastery of subject matter and communication skills. Other issues are inadequate use of instructional facilities, lack of adequate interpersonal interaction with learners, school staff and TP supervisors.

#### VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Based on the challenges advanced in the paper the following suggestions are offered.

1. There is need for lecturers in the Faculty of Education to foster reflective and constructivist’s

approaches in their instructional delivery for students to emulate. This will help to change the current practice of teachers seeing teaching as a static craft, involving application of fixed repertoire of skills learnt during their training or as dogmatic following of ready-made modules provided in implementing given set of goals, lesson plans that were actually designed by other people rather than individual teachers.

2. There is need for vigorous advanced planning, preparation, orientations, school visitations, micro-teachings, and collaborative team work between supervisory staff, students and hosting schools prior to actual TP by the Faculty and the Departments. There is need to extend the scope of posting and duration of TP from six weeks to twelve weeks as being practiced in other universities and supervision to be thorough by three more staff per students.
3. There is the need for increased funding to cater for TP activities by the University Management is very essential for improvement. The leadership of the Faculty should intensify its efforts in realizing the needed funds for the exercise. Support for funds and assistance can also be sourced from development partners, NGOs. The Faculty can also initiate workshops and consultancy services to raise funds.
4. The need for the Faculty to domesticate all its courses is deemed necessary for proper conduct of TP Exercise. This is to enable proper training of students in their subject areas based on the content of basic and Secondary School curriculum. Similarly, the Faculty can fashion out the duration and timing of TP conveniently.
5. It is also important that the Faculty intensifies its efforts to ensure that the proposed micro teaching laboratory becomes a reality. TETFUND support can be solicited for in this regard.
6. TP fees paid by students should be lodged into specific account domiciled in the Faculty of Education for adequate management, and utilization for activities connected to TP exercise in UDUS.
7. The paper suggests for the need for empirical researches on TP to unravel the actual situations with a view to taking proper actions for improvement.
8. There should be a Faculty Standing Committee on Teaching Practice to pursue issues related to TP exercise promptly. The Faculty Standing Committee on TP Should mobilise and pool all the staff for the faculty for supervision centrally and the staff strength in some Departments cannot cope with number of students.
9. The paper suggests the use of the Bridge Model adopted by Drury University Teacher Education Programme. The model is expressed in the analogy of the bridge as powerful construction made of interlocking components which are the “pier” the “arch” and the “truss”, using systematic design,

concerted efforts, adequate funding, collaborative and team work approach. Just like a bridge, teaching practice is a strong component of teacher education programme that deserves systematic design and actions to foster needed interrelationship between purposes, processes and outcomes in education which determine other life outcomes. If the bridge construction is not good, then people are not safe and cannot use it to access to other side of the river. This analogy is applicable to teacher training programme with TP as the first step to stir quality and standard in the outcome of teacher education programme. Analogy of the bridge helps to express the connection between the world of practice and the body of knowledge, theory and research which exist for professional education. The TP is the bridge is built by candidates for career prospect.

### VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The paper concludes TP is like a bridge that links student teacher to teaching career. Once the bridge is not well constructed with every component and collaborative efforts adequately in place a then proficiency of teachers in teaching may not be obtained. Teaching Practice is very important in teacher professional training and if not properly conducted, the issue of standard and quality in our education will remain an illusion. Thus the need for reflective and constructivist approaches by all stake holders to address various challenges might be viable.

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