

Teaching Practice Assessment Challenges in Primary Teachers' Training Colleges and Recommendations on Addressing Them: A Case of Borabu Teachers College in Nyamira County, Kenya

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Abstract:- Teachers undergo a specified period of training, assessment and examinations to ascertain success before they can be assigned teaching responsibilities in Kenya. This study was conducted in Borabu Teachers' Training College which is one of the primary teachers training colleges in Kenya to establish whether teaching practice assessment that is conducted on teacher trainees has influence on trainees' suitability in the teaching profession. This study was also to investigate the role of practical teaching assessment on professional development of student teachers. Case study design was the bedrock research design employed and questionnaires used to collect data. The study population was made up of all the 22 tutors with a sample of 12 tutors because they were involved in the assessment during teaching practice though they lacked experience of teaching in primary teachers' training college. Qualitative data was thematically analyzed to generate themes as quantitative data was subjected to analysis employing the SPSS programme and data represented in tables of frequencies and percentages. Deducing from collected and analysed data the study concluded that assessments of teaching practice by tutors were not reliable as different tutors are prone to come up with different remarks in assessing same lesson by same practicing teacher. The study established that tutors are comfortable when one assesses a trainee teachers teaching in a subject area in which they had solid content knowledge. The study concluded that teacher trainees should be assessed by tutors who have background knowledge based on relevant training and past experiences. The study further enlisted that trainees in teachers' training colleges do not get adequate and expected desirable professional preparation due to incoherence in their training and teaching practice when assessed by tutors who were non-specialists. The study recommends that college tutors should be oriented in assessing teaching practice upon appointment. Tutors should assess students teaching a subject area in which they are knowledgeable in to avoid subjective assessment of teaching practice.

Keywords:- Assessment, Teaching Practice, Professional Development, Lecturer, Tutor, Team Assessment.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In Kenya students in primary teachers colleges go on teaching practice three times during their two year training. The teaching practice is concurrently conducted with the theory learning during the course programme. First year students go for their first teaching practice in their second term in college. The second teaching practice is undertaken in the first terms of their second year after they have done the end of first year theory examination commonly referred as 'mid course' and the final teaching practice in the last term of their studies that is also accompanied with the final course examination, Primary Teacher Education (PTE) examination. This study is conducted to investigate how effective supervision of trainees by tutors is in the professional development of student teachers.

Teaching practice, commonly referred to as TP constitutes an important part of the teacher- training programme. Students observe it as the most challenging based on their involvement in preparing the relevant professional documents, teaching / learning resources and other aids to enhance learning. It is most challenging especially when concern tutors have to redirect a trainee to re-do a certain task when not satisfying the required threshold or when the timelines are crumbling and a trainee hasn't accomplished the requirements. Teaching practice on the other hand becomes an exciting expedition of a teacher training as well as this provides an opportunity for one to test and evaluate ones level of achievement in the students' teaching skills. At Borabu Teachers' College, student teachers are attached to schools under a mentor, school tutor, for practical teaching in real classroom situations for three teaching practice sessions, this starts in the second term of the first year after going through curriculum orientation and methodology teaching in their first term when they have reported after admission. The first and second teaching practices are assessed internally with the college tutors with the third and final assessed both internally and externally.

Teaching practice serves more than one function for the trainee teacher. Foremost it is important in checking achievement level of trainee skills development and testing their teaching skills. On the other hand trainees are subjected

to rigorous supervision by tutors during practical teaching as they are being assessed. It is therefore important that they are given the appropriate support and the opportunity to make a good start. Study by Gipps (2004) observes that trainee assessment need to be a systematic process that goal directed and whose judgment concerns the extent of goals achievement. Tutors visiting schools have a sole mandate advice/ guide trainees as they assess individual trainee's performances and award a mark to trainees who teach any of the subjects in the primary school curriculum based on their self prepared approved timetable. Though the tutors to assess the trainees have background knowledge in one or two academic areas, they are expected to assess trainees teaching in any of the subjects of the primary school curriculum.

Tutors taking teaching practice assessment are guided by assessment guidelines in the individual trainee's assessment booklet provided by the institution on what to look for in a lesson. Study by Uhlenbeck et al. (2002) on factors influencing teacher trainees' performance during teaching practice identified that teaching practice assessment impacts on trainee's performance during practical teaching. the study further observed that when trainees teach without the presence of supervisor they deliver well though it is commonly used in assessment of student teachers to establish their ability to disseminate instructional content to learners in a class setup. This study was directed on the aspect of validity and reliability as it is the main challenge based on the nature of supervisors involved and how it is conducted which is also a concern by Stones and Morris (2001) that there is need to establish the reliability and validity of the assessment process. The studies identified challenges facing teaching practice assessment such as:

- The lack of validity and reliability of the teaching marks awarded
- Lacks of practical value of the assessment grading.
- Assessment grades lack objectivity in teaching practice and some circumstances strain the student –tutor (assessor) relationship.

Focusing on the various challenges a study by Stones and Morris (2001) recommends the need for performance-based assessment to be used in assessment of teacher trainees in teachers' training colleges though the study questions effectiveness and consistence of tutors when assessing different subjects. Study by Brown and Brown (2007) further contends that the inconsistencies arising among different assessors who assess the same student even at the same time and same subject bring to doubt the credibility of the assessments. In addition, Shumbayaonda (2007) points out that lack of background knowledge and training on the part of tutors on assessment of practical teaching as a challenge facing teaching practice in teacher trainees. This the study observes as the product of majority of tutors lacking primary teacher training background and training hence calls for the need for adequate and appropriate orientation and training of tutors on teaching practice assessment by those who have

gone through primary teacher training as trainees or have been trained or inducted to teacher the trainee courses so as to satisfy the pedagogical demands of the subjects offered at primary school and minimize inconsistencies.

Shumbayaonda (2007) contends that the effectiveness of teaching practice assessment is influenced by experience and knowledge base of the tutors on practical teaching and subject content. Hence experience and expertise play an important role in ensuring effective teaching practice assessment. Though, those who have gone through the primary teacher training and have received further professional training or orientation are perceived to play a key role due to multiple exposure factors.

This current research holds on one assumption that teaching practice assessment has myriad of inconsistencies and its subjectivity calls for an establishment of a valid and reliable methodology in judgement of teacher trainees' performance in practical teaching. According to Makoni (2000) emphasis should be on consistency as well as validity and reliability of teaching practice assessment during teacher trainees' practical teaching. The study further opined that that can be only a product of well oriented or trained tutors in assessment of practical teaching. It is hoped that findings of this study will be an eye opener to stakeholders involved in planning for teacher trainee training and assessment of teaching practice towards the development of programmes for tutors to address the challenges and inconsistencies in trainees' practical teaching to enhance validity and reliability of the processes. The findings will also assist in reducing subjectivity in teaching practice assessment and be an eye opener to the teachers' employer, (Teachers Service Commission, TSC) whenever making decisions on hiring tutors or contracting professionals to manage practical teacher practice especially the final teaching practice which is conducted by external assessors above the internal assessors.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Perception by a number of stakeholders and the teacher trainees involved in the Teaching practice or assessment in Kenya identifies a myriad of inconsistencies in the process. Lack of reliability and validity is a concern of all parties concern which has always been interrogated by trainees and tutors alike. Observed that most tutors in the interested locale have either been absorbed from teaching in secondary schools, or administrators with inability or having been faced with other professional challenges or from primary schools through a window of attaining higher qualification hence most tutors safe for those with primary teacher background do not have basic training in assessing practicing primary teachers. Cases of inconsistencies are prominent especially with the inception and launch of the Competency Based Curriculum which they have to assess teacher trainees while a majority or almost all are ill equipped. Hence this research

was carried out to establish factors affecting teaching practice assessment by college tutors and how these factors can be addressed so as to impact positively on teacher trainees' professional development.

➤ *Research Objectives*

- i. To establish factors impacting on teaching practice assessment in primary teachers colleges.
- ii. To determine the content knowledge gaps on teaching practice assessment prevalent among tutors.
- iii. To provide recommendations on how teaching practice assessment can be improved to enhance its validity and reliability.

➤ *Research Questions*

Therefore the study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

- i. What factors impact on effective assessment of teaching practice in primary teacher colleges?
- ii. What content knowledge gaps are prevalent in teaching practice assessment among tutors?
- iii. How can teaching practice assessment be improved to enhance validity and reliability?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Factors Impacting on Teaching Practice Assessment

Assessment according to Avalos, (2009) is the process of determining whether there has been change in learners' behavior in relation to the stated teaching- learning objectives. It is therefore imperative that practical teaching is assessed and judged to ascertain quality of teaching by the trainees. Brown and Brown (2007) observes that practice assessment involves the tutors taking an observation of what the trainees do, making inferences and estimating the level of performance hence accountability is in the court of that tutors in assessment of trainee teachers during teaching practice which is the focus of this study to establish factors influencing teaching practice assessment in primary teachers' training colleges in Kenya and their impact on trainee teachers' professional development.

Teaching practice is conducted by different persons in different institutions for a variety of reasons. Teaching practice is multifaceted as different stakeholders have different expectations and reasons for conducting both teaching practice and assessment. For trainees teaching practice assessment is expected to be a means for self evaluation on how they are progressing and a way of seeking recognition of their achievements by others and the institution especially when they feel they are performing well. In the case of tutors assess is a way of establishing whether trainees have mastered key concepts and skills, in teaching to what level and which areas need advice, improvement or adjustments.

B. Content Knowledge Gaps Prevalent in Teaching Practice Assessment

According to Luckett and Sutherland cited in Makoni, (2000), colleges undertake teaching practice assessment in order to establish the level of trainees' achievements based on standards set by the institution or government. It works as a gauge of acquisition of relevant skilled and competences suitable to undertake real field teaching after the training. This according to Yost et al. (2012) can be achieved through constant collegiality trainees and assessors which can be achieved through dialogue, writing and guiding of teacher trainees on what teaching practice entails; its expectations and the means towards such achievement. Further, one wonders, how much advice or content can an assessor who is or not a specialist in the task/ subject in question discuss with or writes for a trainee during a 35 minute lesson? Or what impact can it have on the subsequent lessons when the tutor/ assessor have inconsistencies?

According to Luckett and Sutherland, (2000) there are various forms of assessment, which are based on purposes such as diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment and quality Assurance of which teaching practice assessment is categorized as either formative or summative. The ongoing practical teaching provides for continuous assessment accruing to the final summative evaluation during the final teaching practice. Studies reveal that at the summative assessment level supervisors may exert a lot of pressure on trainees as this also has an impact on the college based on the observations made by external examiners. This study observes the need for continuous guidance of trainees to be to embrace the training and requirements to avoid the pressures hence exercising restraint from the part of the tutors is vital in utilizing time resource responsibly and accountably.

C. Assessment of Teaching Practice

Teachers on teaching practice are usually given time to undertake the practice. Teaching practice is a process though in some incidences taken as an event which just occurs at a particular time. Teaching practice assessment is guided by a pre-prepared assessment guideline in the trainees' assessment booklet. The form has outlined items and criteria to be used in judgement of performance in the teaching practice lesson. The assessor makes reference on the already set criterion with the aim of reducing subjectivity in the assessment as performance is judged against pre-specified criteria or standards. Brown and Brown, (2007) observed that trainee's performance is compared to that of the peers with the aim of comparing and ranking teacher trainees of different colleges after undertaking teaching practice. An institution can use assessment carried out by tutors to determine the level of attainment of teaching skills by trainees choosing an appropriate method for the purpose of assessment in teacher training colleges is of importance.

Brown, (2007) identifies that a number of scholars have undertaken studies which has shown that there are great inconsistencies between different assessors assessing the same work done by teacher trainees even under similar circumstances and recommended for the need to minimize the inconsistencies to make teaching practice assessment valid and reliable so as to serve the intended purposes though these assessments are influenced by the different assessment approaches such as the traditional approach where the tutors are usually considered to be the only legitimate assessors and integrated assessment or computer –based assessment which takes least cognizance of the input-output yardstick.

Luckett and Sutherland, (2000) have observed that trainees' assessments of performance during teaching practice is conducted by the trainees' tutors who are also their teachers in class. The tutors are trained professionals and their assessment relies heavily on their professional judgment and questions of objectivity arise since a tutor may assess a trainee with a prior established opinion arising from previous classroom or in college interactions. These further points to what may arise as a result of assessments of subjects which the tutor has no mastery and may not be specialists in though Lockett and Sutherland (2000) further echoed that in assessment, the issues of objectivity and subjectivity will always arise among scholars hence the need to acknowledge that different assessors interpret student performances using different standards making the assessments subjective in nature. The study suggests the need to minimize issues of inconsistencies and subjectivity by employing double grading or cross grading of assessment to improve reliability while emphasize should be put on the need to make reliable and valid qualitative and quantitative judgments by assessors when assessing teaching practice.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

To give a more focused study on the study topic this study employed case study as it suitable in soliciting data in depth from pre defined respondents from a known target locale and population. The design is also favoured for this study as it gives a more focused ground of obtaining respondents opinions, perceptions and views on the study topic as directed by identified locale Borabu Teachers' College.

B. Population and Sample

Borabu Teachers Training College has a total of 22 tutors and all were considered as the target population. Twelve tutors at Borabu Teachers' College were purposively selected on the basis of willingness to respond to a questionnaire out of a population of 22 tutors. These tutors were preferred because they were willing to provide the relevant data on teaching practice assessment. Borabu Teachers' College was preferred because the research considered its young establishment among other colleges in

Kenya and majority new college tutor entrants. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the tutors as respondents.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

A closed- and open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from tutors who responded to the questions. The questionnaire was preferred because it enabled tutors to give their own experience on teaching practice and the population sample is literate hence data collection through questionnaire was fast and convenient. These tutors had been involved in teaching practice assessment in the first and second year training of teachers. The SPSS programme was used to analyse quantitative data in tables containing percentages and frequencies while qualitative data would be analysed thematically and represented as themes.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

	N	%
Males	5	41.7
Females	7	58.3
Total	12	100.00

Table 1:- Gender Composition (N=12)

The distribution of tutors who participated in this research shows that 41.7% were males and 58.3% were females. As such the results of this study were not influenced by gender imbalances.

	N	Percentage
Below 5 years	6	50.00
6 – 10 years	5	41.7
Above 10 years	1	8.3
Total	12	100.00

Table 2:- Work Experience

The majority of the tutors (50%) had less than 5years of tutoring experience. The years of experience have a bearing on the results of the study since it shows that the majority of the tutors had little experience in supervision of teaching experience as such they needed more guidance and staff development.

Subject	N	Percentage
Social studies	3	25.0
Mathematics	1	8.3
Sciences	2	16.7
English	3	25.0
Kiswahili	2	16.7
Education	1	8.3
Total	12	100.00

Table 3:- Distribution of tutors in Area of Specialization

Table 3 shows that most of the tutors who participated in this research specialized in Social studies, English and Kiswahili at (25%) each. Only a few were specialized in Mathematics (8.3%) and Science (16.7%). In Teacher Education, Education lays a foundational theoretical framework for effective teaching. As such the participation of less tutors from Education Department opined that the researchers relevant data relates to teacher preparation is scanty.

Qualification	N	Percentage
undergraduate Degree	7	58.3
Masters Degree	3	25.0
Doctoral Degree	2	16.7
Total	12	100.0

Table 4:- Qualifications of tutors (N=12)

Most of the tutors (58.3%) who participated in this study had undergraduate degree and only 25% had master’s degree qualifications. With only 2 (16.7%) tutors having doctoral qualification the assumption is that students will be effectively trained and guided well in their professional development by these experts.

	N	Percentage
Able to assess all subjects	5	41.7
Not able to assess all subjects	7	58.3
Total	12	100.0

Table 5:- Primary School Subjects Tutors’ Ability to Assess Effectively (N=12)

Most tutors 7(58.3%) could not comfortably assess students teach all the subjects of the primary school curriculum. However, 5(41.7%) claimed that they could assess students teach in all the subjects in the primary school curriculum. From the findings it seems most tutors were not in a position to assess students teaching any subject in the primary school but would prefer to assess students teach certain subjects in which they were more comfortable.

Statement	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of relevant Past teaching Experience	3	25.0	6	50.0	3	25.0
Inadequate time for assessment	7	58.3	3	25.0	2	16.7
Lack of specialist pedagogical Knowledge	2	16.7	4	33.3	6	50.0
Lack of content in subject area	9	75.0	1	8.3	2	16.7
Lack of supervisory skills	1	8.3	4	33.3	7	58.3
Limitation in scope of assessment Instrument	2	16.7	1	8.3	9	75.0

Table 8:- Factors Contributing to Failure to Assess Effectively

The majority of the tutors concurred, that the following factors contributed to failure to effectively assess students practical teaching; these included past teaching experience, area of specialization, lack of content in subject area and

Subjects	Not competent		Just competent		Very competent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mathematics	4	33.3	7	58.3	1	8.3
English	1	8.3	9	75.0	2	16.7
Kiswahili	5	41.7	6	50.0	1	8.3
Science	6	50.0	4	33.3	2	16.7
Creative Art	8	66.7	3	25.0	1	8.3
Social Studies	3	25.0	7	58.3	2	16.7
CRE	6	50.0	5	41.7	1	8.3
Physical Education	7	58.3	2	16.7	3	25.0

Table 6:- Level of Competency in Assessment of Teaching Practice (N=12)

Asked to indicate the tutors’ own level of competency in the assessment of practical teaching, most tutors revealed that they were not competent to assess Creative Art (66.7%), English (8.3%), Kiswahili (41.7%), Social Studies (25.0%), Physical Education (58.3%), C.R.E (50.0%), Science (50.0%) and Mathematics (33.3%). Most tutors 3 (25.0%) though indicated that they were very competent in assessing Physical Education yet this is a specialist area and colleges have found that it is difficult to get highly qualified tutors in this area.

Little extent		Not sure		To a great extent	
N	%	N	%	N	%
6	50.0	4	33.3	2	16.7

Table 7:- Orientation of Tutors on Appointment (N=12)

In trying to determine the extent to which tutors have been oriented when they were appointed, almost half of the tutors 6(50.0%) indicated that they were received little orientation to a great extent, 2(16.7%) were oriented and another 4 (33.3%) were not sure if really they were adequately oriented.

inadequate time for assessment, limitation in the scope of the assessment instruments. The factors need to be ranked when presented as per the findings.

Statement	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tutors need adequate orientation	5	41.7	3	25.0	4	33.3
Tutors need to be continuously staff developed	8	66.7	1	8.3	3	25.0
Tutors should only assess subjects of specialization	10	83.3	0	00	2	16.7
Pair or team assessment	4	33.3	2	16.7	6	50.0

Table 9:- Factors That Can Assist In Improving the Assessment of Teaching Practice

The majority of tutors observed that ensuring tutors assess subjects in which they are specialists 10(83.3%) with the lowest 2(16.7%) disagreeing. out of the total eight respondents 8 (66.7%) agreed that assessment can be more effective and can be improved through staff development with 5(41.7%) supporting adequate orientation and 4(33.3%) giving preference to team/pair assessment which a large number of respondents 6(50%) disagreed that it can assist in improving assessment of teaching practice.

VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from the respondents it was depicted that most tutors challenges in assessing trainees teach subject areas in which they no background orientation hence majority were not objectively able to assess trainees teach most of the subjects of the primary school curriculum. Despite having prescribed assessment guidelines to guide in assessment majority were ill or not well equipped to assessing most subjects taught in primary school curriculum by trainees. The study findings provide an authenticated conclusion that tutors taking practical assessment of teachers who are not fully inducted before undertaking the exercise do not objectively assist trainees in their teaching skills acquisition towards their desired professional development hence the assessment results of teaching practice become unreliable and largely invalid.

The tutors identified the following challenges as contributing to their incompetency in assessing teaching practice. These included;

- Lack of past teaching/ learning experience which was a common challenge for those tutors who did not undergo primary teacher training before being deployed to teach in a primary teacher training college.
- Lack of pedagogical knowledge resulting from the inability or unwillingness to learn from colleagues. It is also a result of inability to offer structured orientation of new staff before being assigned assessment duties.
- The limited scope of the assessment guideline instrument which leaves it to the individual assessor's interpretation making it relative and lacking objectivity.
- Lack of subject content as most tutors especially those who have Diploma or university inclination background are trained to teach at most two subjects hence will fumble through assessing areas which they least have understanding. this has been complicated further by the introduction of a new curriculum, The Competency Based

Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya which none of the tutors can claim competence in handling it and so the question that arises; if the assessor has least or no knowledge of the curriculum which he/ she is to assess what of the trainees to be assessed? And can the assessor assess what he/ she doesn't know?

- Inadequate time for effective assessment during teaching practice as most time is used in preparing teaching/ learning resources as compared to the really classroom practise .

These results concur with the observations made by Shumbayaonda (2000) that the tutors lacked content and training in teaching practice assessment. The tutors found the assessment instrument as limited in scope and majority were not aware of the pedagogical knowledge needed to assist students relevant to the primary school curriculum as majority had no prior interaction with the curriculum as they had bachelors degree orientations from university education which had little link to the curriculum they teach and purport to supervise at the primary teacher training college.

To improve teaching practice assessment the tutors suggested the following strategies as useful, these included;

- Tutors should be allowed to assess their areas of specialization only so as to advice trainees appropriately.
- Staff development and refreshment of tutors in the areas of teaching practice and assessment should be frequently done.
- There is need for frequent and proper orientation of tutors upon appointment as college tutors on all areas undertaken in primary teacher training especially teaching practise assessment.
- There is need to ensure that there is a variety of assessment techniques so as triangulate the results and improve their reliability and validity like team/ pair or multiple assessment approach used in teaching practice assessment in teachers colleges.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study established that teaching practice assessment outcomes can be objectively used to ascertain a teacher trainee's suitability in teaching based on the recommendations of the findings of this study and concluded that student teachers should get adequate grounding and preparation as professionals to teach effectively with confidence in the primary schools upon completion of the

practice programme. Tutors should be oriented to assess teaching practice upon appointment and their professional competences refreshed regularly through institutional appraisals to enable them possess relevant content knowledge to objectively teach and assess student teachers during teaching practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Guided by the findings, responses from respondents who are the tutors and the reviewed literature the following recommendations were made;

- Tutors in teachers colleges should only assess students teaching in a subject area in which they have adequate content knowledge as well as the pedagogical know-how.
- Tutors should be thoroughly oriented by relevant specialists in the area of teaching practice assessment upon appointment to the position of lecturer or tutor and given responsibility in a teachers training college.
- Lectures/ tutors should be frequently trained in the area of teaching practice assessment and need to be staff developed from time to time based on the dynamics of education in the county.
- Recruitment of lecturers/ tutors in primary training teachers' colleges should consider relevant past experience to primary school teaching so that these tutors can assist with hands on approaches to primary school teaching.
- Teachers' Colleges need to introduce, facilitate and equip well selected specialized teams or pairs for assessment techniques to be used during teaching practice assessment to improve on effectiveness.
- The teaching practice assessment instrument needs to be improved to enhance its objectivity and tutors should spend more time with the students during classroom observation and teaching practice assessment.
- The study established that assessment of student trainees need to be friendlier, guiding and meant to improve future performance of the practicing teacher trainees and not intimidative or fault finding.
- This study recommends the need for individual tutor assessment of a teacher trainee to follow up with ease the recommendations previously made after observing the trainee teacher.
- The study provides for initial meeting before assessment by tutors which should be alternated with coaching the trainee to discuss merits and demerits of the assessed lesson before taking another class during assessment.

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