University Supervisors' and Student Teachers' Assessment of the Value of Teaching Practice and School Context Challenges in Kenya

Benedicta Aiyobei Tabot
School of Education and Social Sciences, University of Kabianga
P.O. BOX 2030-20200 Kericho, Kenya
Email:baiyobei@gmail.com

Abstract
This paper explores University supervisors' and student teachers' assessment of the value of teaching practice and school context challenges in Kenya based on a study that examined perceptions on the influence of the school context on the teacher interns performance in Moi University. Data was collected from a sample of thirty one university supervisors and one hundred and forty eight Fourth Year Bachelor of Education students proportionate to the four Degree programmes offered in the School of Education using questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics were computed using the SPSS computer package. It was found that despite the varied teaching practice school characteristics of school administration, the pupils, the teachers and the learning resources presenting a challenge to the student teachers' translation of theory into practice they were in agreement that teaching practice in the particular schools had made them more competent teachers and that they had adequate opportunity for practice. Though the student teachers generally felt that teaching practice experience was valuable to them irrespective of the school context, the university supervisors considered the Provincial school category more adequate in providing opportunity for practice. In view of this, it is recommended that there be regular evaluation of the teaching practice school contexts with regard to the adequacy of the opportunities they provide to the student teachers for practice so as to eliminate those seriously inadequate. Teaching practice schools should find ways of reducing debilitating factors so as to enhance the teaching-learning process and student teaching.
Keywords: School context challenges, university supervisors, student teachers, value of teaching practice

1.Introduction

The aim of teacher education is to produce quality teachers who can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes by the learners. Teacher education therefore, should emphasize the acquisition of skills rather than accumulation of knowledge (Okech and Asiachi, 1992). In Kenya, the concurrent program of undergraduate teacher education is practiced in all the public universities where both the professional courses and the subject area content are offered over the whole period of study. Moreover, this structure helps the student teachers to get used to a school situation gradually through the in-built teaching practice and provides adequate adjustment to the professional requirements of the teaching career before the teacher is certified. Thus teacher preparation demands not only good knowledge on the part of the teacher trainee, but also the experience of how to put theory into practice (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992) and make him/her yearn for more learning in becoming a successful teacher (Andambi, 1985).) The students' teaching practice therefore is the most valuable part of their professional training and therefore should receive the most attention (Karanja, 1996; Shiundu & Omulando, 1992 & Ondiek, 1978; Igaga (1978).

Among the three essential components of the teaching practice program as outlined by Ondiek (1978) is the cooperating or host schools and their cooperating teachers which share in the professional preparation of its future teachers. Teaching practice is a co-operative enterprise which gives the student teachers an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the typical school conditions under which they will work as trained professionals (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). It is in these schools, which in Kenya are categorised into National, Provincial, District and private located both in urban and rural settings, that the student teachers are expected to develop various professional skills under the guidance of the cooperating teachers and the university supervisors. These schools however vary and this difference is noticeable in pupil-teacher relationship, pupil activities, pupil academic orientation and discipline, learning facilities and resources, and administration (Halphin, cited in Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1991) herein referred to as school context which may affect the development of the student teachers positively or negatively. Yet as Zeichner cited in McIntyre and Byrd (1996) argues, teacher education has not paid enough attention to the relationship of the school context and teacher development.

Support from the placement school is indicated by various forms of student teachers' contact with the school personnel, student teachers' evaluation of the support they get from the regular supporting teachers, and the student teachers' participation in the wider school life (Tang Yee Fan, 1996). The demographics of a school site, will also affect the quality and quantity of opportunities at the site for the student teachers (Ribich, 1995). In

Kenya, it has been observed that student teachers do not receive support and guidance in the placement schools (Groenenewegen, cited in Karanja, 1996). Yet student teachers are expected to perform equally well in the acquisition of professional skills and development of positive values regarding the teaching profession in different teaching practice schools irrespective of their contexts.

Teaching practice as a learning experience is based on the constructivist theory that learning takes place in contexts and learners construct much of what they learn and understand as a function of their experiences in situations (Schunk, 1996). In this regard learning during teaching practice according to Schon (cited in Gidron, 1996) is possible within a learning environment relatively low in risk and with access to coaches who initiate the student teachers into the profession. The student teachers therefore, learn from the exposure in the teaching practice schools. However, field experiences have been criticized for merely socializing the novice in the existing school environment (McIntyre & Byrd, 1996) whereby new teachers are initiated into the school culture by the old teachers so that sometimes, the new teacher abandons what he/she learnt in the pre-service course (Musvosvi, 1998). "Are student-teachers' exceptional and would they still consider teaching practice valuable under such circumstances?" are questions that one is bound to ask. It was against this backdrop that the study sought to find out whether the practical experience provided to student teachers in different school contexts, provides them with equal opportunity to put theory into practice and consequently whether the school context influences the value they attach to teaching practice.

2. Review of Related Literature
2.1. Importance of Teaching Practice
Student teaching is important and worthwhile in the professional development of teachers (Kersh, 1995). It is a necessary and valuable part of pre-service education. The term 'student teaching' suggests active participation in the work of a teacher hence the emphasis is on experience. This is because it provides the student teacher the opportunity to put into practice their theoretical knowledge and acquire 'real-life' experience in regular classroom situations and in the school routine. As Clark and Starr (1976) point out other teacher preparation experiences, such as simulations, mini-lessons, and micro-teaching do not match the reality one finds in student teaching. In view of the above observations, Ondiek (1978) notes that the functional opportunities that Teaching Practice affords student teachers make them more ready to meet the demands of an actual classroom situation of their own hence its value. It is critically important to the growth and development of a teacher so that even a bad experience contributes (Ribich, 1995).

Student teaching is regarded as the most powerful intervention in the teachers' professional preparation (Seagren and Khamis, 1985) and in study after study, pre-service teachers indicate it as the most valuable and helpful experience during their entire teacher preparation program (Slick, 1995). In emphasizing the importance of teaching practice, Ribich (1995) argues that there should be opportunities for student teachers to interact with professionals and pupils in diverse settings and require a strong connection between the university programme and the real world of the schools. The case for teaching practice according to Otieno-Alego (1990) is based on the hope that the student teachers will acquire teaching skills and develop positive attitudes and commitment to the teaching service and acquaint himself with the teaching profession to which he will later become a member (Ondiek, 1978) and increase his self-confidence (Mayo cited by Andambi, 1985). It is for this reason that teacher education programmes the world over consider the teaching practice exercise an important contributory component to the overall teacher training exercise. However, Kemp (1997) notes that student teachers' expectations and perceptions of achievement in practice teaching were significantly different from those of their cooperating teachers and college based supervisors.

Though teaching practice is considered important in the training of teachers and has received a lot of research attention which has shed light on the way in which it influences the student teachers' professional development and has been the focal point of discussion among teacher educators (Scroggie et al, 1997), Al Barwani (1997) indicates that the field experience has not always been considered to be an exceptionally educative experience. He argues that while teachers consistently rate student teaching as the single most beneficial component of their preparation, researchers have cautioned that student teaching can have both positive as well as negative consequences for prospective teachers. He further notes that other researchers have suggested that student teaching may have little impact on teachers' development of pedagogical skills or reflective abilities. This could be due to the varied school contexts hence Widlack cited by Andambi (1985) commenting on school practices says that when there is no relationship between the theories learned in college and what takes place in the host schools, the student teacher reaches a state of surrender over what he learned. However it is not clear whether such a student teacher would still consider teaching practice valuable.

Brembeck cited in Okech (1985) on the value of student teaching in terms of its influence upon students desire to become full time teachers showed that 80% of the respondents were looking forward more eagerly than ever before while 10% were ambivalent. It was also noted that student teaching both encouraged and discouraged the respondents as well as both increased and decreased their desire to teach. It was therefore

concluded that personal experiences with actual classes, school environment among others influenced students into the teaching profession. The post teaching practice interviews in the above mentioned study revealed that the student teachers' perception of the role of teaching practice and feedback in learning how to teach largely depended among others on the type of cooperating teacher, the school environment, and the personalized relationship between the student teacher and the ecological variables surrounding them. Based on the results of his study, Al Barwani(1997) recommended that further research is required in order to identify those ecological and school variables that would be conducive to better learning how to teach.

Due to the many comments made about the poor quality of teaching as well as deficient preparation of teachers, Schmitz (1996) carried out a study to find out the reality, problems and alternatives in teaching practice. In concluding the findings of the study, the researcher indicates that all the people involved in teaching practice considered it to be very important as a practical moment of learning and that it integrates theory and practice though they differ on the conditions in which teaching practice should occur and the way it should be done. Francis (1985) notes that since the aim of teacher education is to produce people who can teach effectively in real settings, there must be substantial provision for the acquisition of actual teaching skills through practice in the real settings of the school and classroom. However due to varying school contexts it is extremely difficult for all pre-service students to have an identical experience even when students attend the same school site due to the influence of the co-operating teacher, the learners in a particular class, and the physical and social milieus Ribich (1995).The context in which teaching practice takes place is therefore paramount.

2.2. School Contexts

Various authors have tried to differentiate schools according to their effectiveness and efficiency. Halliday (1995) notes that "a 'good' school is identified by the positive attitude of its pupils, the wide range of activities undertaken, the success which these generate, and the involvement of the staff ..." (p.24). School environments in Kenya vary and as Makau (1986) notes, there is much concern that the majority of schools are not adequately facilitating both the affective and cognitive growth of the pupils. This phenomenon which is associated with the rapid growth of the number of schools and enrolments since 1963 is thought to be more serious in the secondary sector, where wide disparities exist between schools in one geographical area with more or less the same natural environment. Such variation he notes is in terms of resources and facilities and the head teachers' management which is seen as the key determinant of school success or failure. Moreover criteria that define efficient schools in Kenya as spelled out by the Ministry of Education include good discipline and appropriately qualified and adequate staff whose substantial proportion must be university graduates, without which proper learning cannot be expected to take place (Eshiwani, 1993).

Though Okech and Asiachi (1992) emphasize that the teaching practice experience should be obtained from a school as similar as possible to that in which the student teachers will later teach, the staff who should be the best for the student teachers to have a chance to see good teachers and fine role models in action, should be a major factor in selecting the schools. Studies have revealed that placing pre-service teachers in schools with good morale, pleasant surroundings and a compatible and welcoming cooperating teacher who is a good role model may just be as important as the pupils' backgrounds (Guyton & Wesche, 1996) and availability of facilities (Andambi, 1985) in determining success of teaching practice. Maranga (undated) cites teaching in an overcrowded classroom as a major problem which he notes affects class discipline due to inability to control the pupils, provide individual attention to all the pupils, as well as inability to prepare instructional materials, and lack of adequate time to mark the pupils' work adequately. Such situations would affect student teaching and the value they attach to the experience hence there is need for "...careful attention to situational contexts in which (field) experiences occur ... must consider the opportunities and constraints of each site" (Werner, et al. 1995 p. 52). Each school context should provide opportunities for the student teachers to experience a wide range of professional activities.

Al Barwani (1997) recommends that, "The ecology and the school environment need to be among the most important criteria in selecting schools that would be involved in Teaching Practice" (p.155) as well as classrooms whose teachers have demonstrated expertise rather than being chosen for convenience (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Law Sin Yee and Fu Yin Wah, 1996; Diab, 1996 and Oakland, Fernandez, & Kueter (1995). This is because pre-service teachers have more frequent contact with the supporting teachers than the principal (Tang Yee Fan, 1996) and university supervisors and frequently begin to emulate their cooperating teachers by the end of teaching practice (Martin, 1997 and Al Barwani, 1997).

Though emphasis is laid on the importance of the cooperating teachers, literature has shown that many of the supervising teachers have been away from university classrooms for many years and may not model effective instructional strategies (McIntyre, 1984 cited in Daane and Latham, 1998). Moreover, the relationship between the cooperating teacher and student teachers is influenced by shaping forces exerted by the ecological system of the classroom and the school (Al Barwani, 1997). In Kenya, there are still quite a number of untrained teachers at the secondary school level and this was estimated at 5,275 in 1995 (Republic of Kenya, 1995). As a

result, as Law Sin Yee and Fu Yin Wash (1996) indicate, some student teachers experience endless frustration in having to cope with the day-to-day teaching due to the minimal support they got from the schools. Such student teachers, they note, found the aims and principles advocated by the college irrelevant leading to a conflict between theory and practice which affected their professional development and may influence the value they attach to teaching practice.

3. Methodology

A survey research design was employed in the study based in Moi University, one of the public universities in Kenya chosen due to its unique teaching practice program of two sessions as such the first TP of one month could influence the value a student teacher attaches to TP during the full term session. The sample selected through proportionate and systematic random sampling comprised 148 student teachers' drawn from the 578 Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Fourth Year students representative of the B. Ed Arts, B. Ed Home-Science and Technology, B. Ed Technology and B. Ed Science who had completed their full term teaching practice and 31 lecturers. The lecturers' sample drawn from the 104 supervisors involved in the exercise was representative of the schools which were involved in the preparation of the student teachers both professionally and academically and inclusive of the 11 Area Supervisors and the TP Coordinator.

The data was collected through questionnaires and interviews which enabled the respondents to give their views, opinions, attitudes and feelings in depth. The instruments were validated and their reliability ascertained before use using Cronbach's coefficient alpha that yielded 0.8 for the student teachers' questionnaire and 0.6 for the university supervisors. Frequencies and percentages were computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer package and presented in tabular form for easy interpretation. Responses to the interview questions were thematically analysed and reported directly in relation to the responses from the questionnaires.

4. Results and Discussion

The teaching practice schools that were used in the final teaching practice were categorised into three. 77 (52.0) students practiced in the Provincial school category, 47(31.8) in District schools while 24 (16.2) practiced in the "other" school category. The "other" category comprised private secondary schools, technical institutions and other post -secondary institutions. The majority of the student teachers therefore practiced in Provincial public schools. The variations in these institutions in terms of the nature of the administration, the teachers, the nature of the learners and the learning resources (Eshiwani, 1993, Makau, 1986) was affirmed by the university supervisors and the student teachers in the open response items with many debilitating factors being cited in many of the District and "other" school categories. Yet previous studies (Guyton & Wesche, 1996) have reiterated that for the student teachers to carry out their teaching practice effectively, and for the objectives of teaching practice to be achieved, there is need for a conducive teaching/learning environment where the student teachers are accorded support without which teaching practice would be a threat to the student teachers and consequently affect their performance (Al Barwani, 1997). However, despite the challenges noted by the university supervisors and the student teachers based on the differing school contexts, the student teachers' perceptions on the value of teaching practice based on their experience in the schools in relation to the competencies they acquired was positive in most aspects irrespective of the school category.

Almost all 144(97.3) the student teachers irrespective of the school context agreed that teaching practice in the particular school had made them more competent teachers with the exception of 2(1.4). The student teachers therefore felt that the teaching practice experience was beneficial to them in the acquisition of the competencies required of a teacher irrespective of the context hence influenced their professional development positively. This finding concurs with earlier studies on the importance of teaching practice (Seagren and Khamis, 1985; Slick, 1995; Schmitz, 1996) whereby teachers consistently rate student teaching as the single most beneficial component of their preparation.

When the student teachers were asked to state the specific skills they gained in the specific teaching practice schools, instructional skills which include the use of various methods of teaching and learning resources as well as planning to teach (Moi University, 1990), was highly rated at 64.2 % irrespective of the school context. This is contrary to suggestions from previous research cited by Al Barwani's (1997) that student teaching may have little impact on teachers' development of pedagogical skills. The other skills though cited by comparably a few student teachers ranging from 46% to 4.7%, include interpersonal/interactional skills with both the regular teachers and the learners, class management skills, organizing learners for co-curricular activities such as games and clubs within and outside the school, confidence, administrative skills such as supervising duties, evaluating the learners in terms of setting and marking exams/tests and grading the learners, guiding and counselling learners and preparing and maintaining records such as class attendance registers, pupils' progress records, and records of work covered.

The fact that only the first skill was cited by a high proportion of 95(64.2) respondents while the others had low proportions ranging from 68(46.0) to 7(4.7) implies that teaching practice was most beneficial to the student teachers in the acquisition of instructional skills, thus supporting further the assertion that teaching practice often confined student teachers to pedagogical work (Tang Yee Fan (1996). Yet student teaching is supposed to provide the student teachers with opportunities to apply all the theories learnt into practice and enable them to participate in all professional experiences under the close guidance of a cooperating teacher (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992; Werner, et al. 1995).

The teaching practice experience gave the student teachers a positive view of teaching according to 124(83.8) of the respondents who were in agreement. Out of these, 41(87.2) were in the District school category, 20(83.4) in the 'Other' and 63(81.9) in the Provincial school category. This has the implication that a higher percentage of student teachers in the District schools developed a positive view to teaching compared to the other school categories in spite of the challenges which most of them cited in the open response items as affecting the teaching-learning process in the District school category. These challenges, in order of the most cited, included lack of/or inadequate supply of teaching/learning resources, indiscipline of the learners and their non-participation in the lesson, some, due to language problems, uncooperative staff including the head teacher and the co-operating teachers, absence of learners or lateness especially in the day schools, unstable timetables and interference of lessons by other school activities such as prolonged assemblies and out-of-class activities which had not been included in the school calendar of events, and allocation of too many lessons and other responsibilities which did not accord them humble time to learn/translate theory into practice.

Though such positive view of teaching in spite of the challenges experienced in most of the District schools may be attributed to either adequate preparation in the university or the experience the students gained during the first (one month) teaching practice session, this may not suffice because it could have been reflected in all the responses irrespective of the school category. The most plausible explanation therefore would be based on the characteristics of the school categories cited in the open response items whereby the Provincial school category was noted to have high expectations of the student teachers in terms of performance of their teaching and other assigned duties with close supervision. Whereas the administration in the District schools was noted by both the student teachers and the university supervisors in the open response items to be lax leading to undue student teacher absences compounded by the shortage of staff cited and presence of untrained teachers so that some student teachers were never assigned cooperating teachers hence had no standards to measure up to and therefore carried out their duties on their own. Moreover, the learners in such schools did not present much challenge to the student teacher during the teaching learning process. This explains why field experiences have been criticized for merely socializing the novice in the existing school environment (McIntyre & Byrd, 1996) whereby new teachers are initiated into the school culture by the old teachers so that sometimes, the new teacher may abandon what he/she learnt in the pre-service course (Musvosvi, 1998). This might be one of the reasons why researchers have cautioned that student teaching can have both positive as well as negative consequences for prospective teachers (Al Barwani (1997). It is also possible that their response was influenced by the fact that they scored high grades despite the challenges characteristic of District schools.

The variations in the school contexts in the opportunities accorded to student teachers for practice is further supported by the respondents in that though a majority 133(89.9) in all the school categories were in agreement that the pupils could be easily involved in the lesson, the highest proportions were in the Provincial 71(92.2) and 'Other' 22(91.7) school categories unlike the District schools 40(84.8). There were also a few schools 11(7.5) where the student teachers found it hard to involve the learners in the lesson, the majority 6(8.6) being in the District school category. This is supported by the responses from the university supervisors in which 22 (71.0) accepted that in some schools the student teachers found it hard to involve the pupils in the lesson which was noted to be quite frustrating for a student teacher yet it is one of the competencies required of a teacher and should be demonstrated practically in the classroom by the student teacher (Ayot and Wanga, 1987). Similarly, though the majority of the respondents 86(68.1) in all the three school categories combined indicated that pupil discipline was not a problem and did not interfere with the teaching/learning process, a majority were in the Provincial school 50(65.0) followed by the 'Other' school category 13(54.2) while the District school category had the lowest 23(49.0) respondents. This implies that in a majority of District schools pupil discipline interfered with student teaching a view held by a large proportion 28 (90.3) of university supervisors which they partly attributed to overcrowded classrooms. Taking this into consideration, it is quite unexpected that such student teachers would have a positive view of teaching as a profession and consequently the value they attached to teaching practice. This implies that the student teachers either took the challenges positively as part of the experiences they would undergo as teachers or were merely socialised into the school culture (McIntyre & Byrd, 1996).

Further evidence is based on the response by a majority of the respondents 91(61.5) in all the school categories that lack of adequate resources greatly affected the teaching learning process where the highest proportion 35(74.0) were in the District schools while the Provincial schools had only 40(52.0) respondents who

were in agreement. Student teaching was therefore affected by lack of learning resources in most District schools. This implies that the student teachers in these schools experienced problems with preparation as well as content presentation due to the lack of resources as affirmed by a majority 29 (93.5) of the university supervisors who noted that student teaching was enriched where learning materials were available. Emphasis was particularly laid on the teaching of science subjects in which the student teachers found it difficult to explain some concepts which could have been easily demonstrated with availability of resources. This suggests that the student teachers in these schools did not get adequate opportunity to develop the competence of preparing and using learning resources as recommended by Ayot and Wanga (1987). Since this did not affect their view of teaching and consequently the value they attached to teaching practice, it may imply that they were initiated into the school culture by the regular teachers as pointed out by the university supervisors hence may have abandoned what they learnt in the pre-service course (Musvosvi, 1998) on the importance of using teaching learning resources to enhance the teaching/learning process.

A majority of the student teachers 87(58.8) were in agreement that some practices of teaching in the school did not correspond to university recommendations, a large proportion 16(66.7) being those who practiced in the 'Other' school category unlike the Provincial and District categories with 44(57.2) and 27(57.5) respectively. This suggests that there were institutions in this category whose teaching practices conflicted with what the student teachers learnt in the university. This may be due to the fact private schools as well as Polytechnics tend to employ untrained teachers who may not be conversant with the appropriate pedagogical skills. Yet evidence indicates that student teachers frequently move closer to the practices of the regular teachers and especially the co-operating teacher by the end of the teaching practice period (Musvosvi, 1998; Al Barwani, 1997). This explains why the student teachers felt that the teaching practice experience gave them a positive view of teaching despite such inconsistencies. Moreover the university supervisors were none committal on this issue as reflected by their responses where 10(32.3) disagreed, 9 (29.0) were undecided while 12 (38.7) agreed implying that they might not have given serious thought to other school practices apart from classroom activities (Al Barwani, 1997) during supervision.

It is also evident from the student teachers' responses 133(88.5) that the cooperating teacher made contributions towards their teaching practice in a majority of the schools in all the three school categories. However a majority 14 (45.1) of the university supervisors were of the opinion that the cooperating teachers in all schools did not work closely with the student teachers though some 8 (25.8) were undecided. This implies that in some schools, the student teachers were left to work on their own with a large workload without much assistance from the co-operating teachers. This finding was confirmed in the interview with the supervisors and area supervisors who indicated that in some schools student teachers lacked teacher models to emulate or emulated wrong practices. This agrees with the findings of Law Sin Yee and Fu Yin Wash (1996) that when student teachers are placed in schools for teaching practice, the schools assume the responsibility of providing places only so that they gave minimal support to the student teachers and that the school teachers consider teaching practice a 'relief or a holiday as the student teachers took up their teaching duties (Tang Yee Fan, 1996). Such student teachers therefore lacked the guidance required of a cooperating teacher yet they felt that teaching practice accorded them adequate opportunity.

When asked the specific roles played by the cooperating teachers, the student teachers' responses included: advising them on how to handle the classes and helping them with learner discipline 101 (68.2), assisting in preparation of schemes of work, lesson plans, tests and learning aids 98(66.2), provision or requisition of teaching/learning resources from the school such as textbooks 47(31.8), helping them on content that the student teachers found difficult as well as guiding them on the choice of teaching methods 28(18.9), briefing the student teachers on the school expectations and regulations and giving them an orientation of the school 24(16.2), discussing the progress of the student teachers with them and giving them encouragement 14(9.5), assisting them in out-of-class activities such as games and clubs 6(4.1), observing and assessing the student teachers' lessons 3(2.0). All of these were in line with the university expectations of a cooperating teacher according to the area supervisors. The co-operating teachers therefore made contributions to and influenced the performance of the student teachers though the influence may either have been negative or positive depending on the kind of cooperating teacher one was assigned in relation to the other school context factors as earlier discussed. It is for this reason that Diab (1996) and Guyton and Wesche (1996) suggested that cooperating teachers should be good, experienced and committed teachers who can be good role models because the cooperating teacher's role is important, influential and essential (Oakland (1995) hence serious attention should be given to their selection.

The student teachers were in agreement that their performance was influenced by the nature of the school. In all the school categories combined 121(81.8) respondents agreed while only 32(21.6) were in disagreement. This is in terms of the various school factors such as the administration, the teachers, the pupils and the learning resources. This in turn influences the value they attach to teaching practice. Hence, it is important for any teacher training institution to ensure that student teachers are posted to a supportive school

which provides the students with adequate opportunities for practice and relatively low in risks (Schon, cited in Gidron, 1996). Such a school according to Halliday (1995) is identified by the positive attitude of its pupils and the wide range of activities undertaken as well as the involvement of the staff.

When the student teachers were asked specifically whether the teaching practice experience in the school provided adequate opportunity for the acquisition of various professional skills, a very high proportion 135(91.3) were in agreement in all the school categories combined. Interestingly when the school categories were compared, the District school category had the highest percentage followed by the 'Other' and lastly the Provincial with 46(97.9), 22(91.7) and 67(87.0) respectively. Whereas the majority supervisors 19 (61.3) indicated that both National and Provincial schools offered the student teachers greater opportunity in acquiring professional skills than the District schools 5 (16.1). The student teachers' response therefore has the implication that although they experienced various challenges which could have affected the teaching-learning process in some District schools as noted earlier, they felt that they had adequate opportunity for practice in contrast to the opinion of their supervisors. This may be due to the fact that the student teachers chose the schools mainly based on financial considerations with regard to factors such as accommodation as opposed to professional development as revealed by the interview with the TP coordinator and zone supervisors. The supervisors' response shows that contextual characteristics of the schools in the Provincial school category in terms of the nature of the learners, the teachers, the administration and the learning resources and facilities as discussed earlier, were conducive for student learning as noted by Eshiwani (1993).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The placement schools, categorized into 'Provincial', 'District' and 'Other' school categories, differed noticeably whereby the District schools were more disadvantaged in terms of the availability and quality of teachers, the nature of the pupils with regard to their academic background and discipline, and the learning resources and facilities. These contextual variations in the school categories presented challenges to the student teachers in translating theory into practice. The student teachers however felt that they had adequate opportunity for practice in all the schools categories though the Provincial school category provided more adequate opportunity. It made them more competent teachers and gave them a positive view of teaching hence the experience was valuable to their training as teachers despite the contextual challenges.

In view of the above conclusions it is recommended that regular post-mortem of the teaching practice exercise be done with emphasis on the evaluation of the teaching practice schools with regard to the adequacy of the opportunities they provide to the student teachers for practice so as to eliminate those seriously inadequate. Schools should find ways of reducing debilitating factors so as to enhance the teaching-learning process and student teaching. A self-reflection form on the teaching practice experience with regard to the varied school contexts be developed to be completed by the student teachers after every teaching practice session.

References

Al Barwani, T. (1997). Learning how to teach: Student teachers' perception of the impact of feedback from university supervisors and cooperating teachers. *International Yearbook on Teacher Education. 1,135 - 157.*

Andambi, M.I. (1985). "The role of teaching practice in the improvement of secondary school teacher education in Kenya". Unpublished Thesis, University of Nairobi.

Ayot, H.O. and Wanga P. E (1987). *Teaching Practice.* Nairobi: Kenyatta University. Daane, C. J. and Latham, D. (1998). Helping supervising teachers stay abreast of effective instructional strategies. C*ontemporary Education 69, (3), 14 1-143.* Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). What matters most: 21st century teaching. *Education Digest 63, (3),4-9.*

Diab, T. (1996). The practical education programme at the University of Jordan: A look from within. *International Yearbook on teacher education 2, 429 - 438.*

Eshiwani, G. S. (1993). *Education in Kenya since independence.* Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers.

Francis, H. (Ed) (1985). *Learning to teach: Psychology in teacher training.* London: The Falmer Press.

Guyton, E. & Wesche, M. (1996). Relationships among school context and student teachers' attitudes and performance. In McIntyre, J.D. & Byrd, D.M. *Preparing tomorrow's teachers: The field experience.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Igaga, J.M (1978). *A Guide to teaching practice in Africa.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Kersh, M. E. (1995). Coordinating Theory with Practice. In G. A. Slick, (ed.) *The field experience: Creating successful programmes for new teachers.* Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Lunenburg, F.C. and Ornstein, A.C. (1991). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices.* Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing company.

Makau, B. M. (1986). "Improving teacher effectiveness in the schools of Kenya. Approaches to quality learning through cost saving professional management". University of Nairobi, Discussion Paper No. 281.

Maranga, J.S. (Undated). "Problems of teachers: A survey of experienced and inexperienced teachers' perception

of school and classroom problems". Research Paper.

McIntyre, D.J. and Byrd, D.M. (Eds) (1996). Preparing tomorrow's teachers: The field experience. *Education Year Book IV*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press Inc.

Moi University (1990). *Teaching practice guide*. Eldoret: Moi University.

Musvosvi, D, (1998) *Effective teaching in the 21st century*. Kendu Bay: African Herald Publishing House.

Ondiek, P.E. (1978). *A Guide to teaching practice for student teachers in Africa*. Nairobi: Africa Book Services (E.A) Ltd.

Otieno-Alego (1990). "Some deplorable aspects of teaching practice supervision. The case of Kenyatta University". Seminar paper.

Republic of Kenya (1995). "The quality teacher for the 21st Century and beyond". *Report of the third teacher education conference*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

Ribich, F. (1995). "Providing meaningful field experiences". In Slick, G. (Ed) *The field experience. Creating successful programs for new teachers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Scroggie, F., Bader, *Q.,* Khilifah, G. (1997). Teacher professionalism: School and college collaboration. *International Yearbook on Teacher Education 1, 255-283*.

Schmitz, E. F. (1996). "Practice teaching in teacher education". *International Yearbook on Teacher Education 2,165-171*.

Schunk, D. H. (1996). *Learning Theories. An educational perspective 2nd Ed*. Purdue University.

Shiundu, J. S. and Omulando, S. J. (1992). *Curriculum: Theory and practice in Kenya*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Slick, G. (Ed) (1995). *The field experience. Creating successful programs for new teachers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Tang Yee Fan, S. (1996). "Insights derived from pre-service student teachers' evaluation of an early field experience and a supported teaching practice program." *International Yearbook on Teacher Education 2, 173-181*.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
http://www.iiste.org

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: http://www.iiste.org/journals/ All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: http://www.iiste.org/book/

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digtial Library , NewJour, Google Scholar