

Why Are We Unable Bridging Theory-Practice Gap in Context of Plethora of Literature on Its Causes, Effects and Solutions?

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Abstract

This paper raises pertinent issues regarding an obvious gap that prevails between theory and practice in various professions. The paper makes it clear that there is theory-practice gap among professions; however, it focuses more on informing theory-practice gap in the teaching profession. The paper identifies and informs of causes, effects and practical solutions of theory-practice gap in education, in particular, in the teaching profession. Finally, the paper provides a tentative explanation for theory-practice gap persistence, and it raises important questions that may need researchers' attention.

Keywords: theory-practice gap, teaching profession, teacher education

1: Theory-practice gap: a general overview

Across professions, theory-practice gap is not a new phenomenon all over the world (see also Rolfe, 1992). For example, Normand and Pereiro, (2009) contend that most academics their practices are not linked to theories. This is a problem with a long standing history, and its improvement has been so gradual (Mallonee, Fowler & Istre, 2006). A number of studies have been conducted to establish the nature of and how to address the problem. For example, regarding nature of the problem Kislov (2014) mentions translation of innovation gap and knowledge gap as a source of the theory-practice gap in healthcare. The scholar identifies two knowledge, know that and know-how. That is one may possess "know that" knowledge and lack the "know-how" knowledge, thus, leading to theory-practice gap. Similarly, scholars (Benbarat & Zmud in Fitzgerald, 2003) assert that well over 80% of studies on management are not relevant (see also DeAngelis, 2010). For that reason, this fuels that theory-practice incompatibility in a field practice. Accordingly, academics have no point they make, but rather unnecessarily use of impressive language, which means the practitioners may therefore ignore their studies, and create a room for theory-practice gap. Moreover, scholars (Haines, Kuruvilla & Borchert, 2004) spell out that the uptake of research findings lags behind because of lack of ways to make researchers, policy makers and practitioners communicate effectively. Mallonee, Fowler and Istre (2006) add that theory-practice gap results from communication loop between researchers and practitioners and, lack of awareness of the public and support *i.e.* financial or political. Clearly, there are instances whereby new knowledge is mainstreamed in the context where practice cannot be successful (new knowledge in traditional context) (see Cheraghi, Salsali & Safari, 2010). This implies there are occasions whereby the setting is too traditional to apply new knowledge in a particular profession.

1.1: Theory-practice gap in the teaching profession: an overview of causes

On the part of the teaching profession, the situation is no different. That is the profession is not immune from the problem. For example, Delaney in schulze (2009) report that student-teachers when they go to the field they are told to forget everything they have been taught at the university, and they usually complain that field is the most difficult part of the training process. This is because they feel that they are not qualified to do their job. These student-teacher complaints are associated with short teaching practice and mismatch between what is taught at the university and what they ought to do during their practical training (EOCD in Gießler 2009). According Peercy (2012), the theory-practice gap in the teaching profession linked to varied understanding of teacher education among teachers. Further, Perrenoud in Normand & Pereiro (2009) proclaim that while doctors and engineers prefer integrating theory and practice this is a rare phenomenon in the process of teacher preparation in university curricula. Some researchers claim that in-school training may not be an effective way of integrating theory and practice (Gießler 2009). To add, scholars (Harsch & Schroder, 2009) report that teacher more often than not do not use research based language proficiency tests because they are not trained in and thus their assessment is based on teacher's norms.

In another case, Hutterlis & Prusse, (2009) point out that teacher's inadequate information about educational reforms makes him or her reject adopting some of instruments during uptake of educational innovations. This is because the innovations are mainstreamed without enough support from the responsible individuals and/or organs. Moreover, the theory-practice gap is revealed when student teachers complain that they cannot translate theory into practice which is attributable to failure of teacher educators to integrate theory and practice in a proper and meaningful way in curricula (Wren & Wren, 2009). This means subject matter knowledge must not be independent from practice (Dewey in Wren & Wren, 2009). Correspondingly, Berger (2009) claims that the studies are not relevant in the classroom context, which means they are not willing to use

them. In the long run, this leads to theory-practice gap.

1.3: Theory-practice gap in the teaching profession: Focus on effects

In the light of the theory-practice gap in teacher preparation, it is easy to see that curriculum as a vehicle of needs of society as it carries them through schooling may not be able to change the life of respective society when it is not effectively implemented (Beyers, 2009). Given this fact, a nation may not be able to create a kind of society it wants through education (Lee, 2012). Another effect, as has been noted, in the context of teacher preparation, it results in incompetent teachers who cannot professionally execute their day to day responsibilities effectively (Wren & Wren, 2009; Schulze, 2009). In other words, learning is not likely to take place because it happens either when there is practice of knowledge in really life situations or through simulated experience (Shulnk in Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Moreover, less informed educational innovations among teachers results in instructor frustration in teaching (Hutterlis & Prusse, 2009). Most importantly, theories explain how people learn, and therefore, they guide the choice of teaching strategies and techniques teachers use during teaching (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Given this assertion, one can correctly assert that without theories teachers may not be able to choose effective teaching strategies and techniques. In brief, practice without research-based theories in the teaching profession may culminate in the above highlighted negative effects.

1.4 Theory practice gap: Focus on solutions

Given the likely effects from theory-practice gap, a number of scholars have come up with a several practical solutions to hold the situation in control. For example, Fook (n.d) establishes that in order to bridge the theory-practice gap one has to scrutinise his or her practice in a profession on the basis of assumptions behind it. Similarly, Rolfe (1992) avers that practitioners should consider the relationship between practice and theory. Moreover, practice should derive theory which ultimately informs practice (Rolfe, 1992). To add, Nutley, Walter & Davis (2002) add that practitioners should provide evidence informing practice in professions. Indeed, this implies that the actions by practitioners should be well informed by theories in conscience, and that the practitioners are in a good position of developing relevant and workable theories because from practice theories are to be derived. Again, Harsch & Schroder (2009) suggest that bridging the gap between theory and practice teachers, schools, education policy makers and other relevant government organs need to work in synergy. Indeed, some scholars (like Fitzgerald, 2003) are very aware of the practical solutions which could bridge the gap between theory and practice in professions. What is more, Berger (2009) suggests the use of legal framework and recommended policies.

1.5: Theory-practice gap in teacher education in Tanzania: selected cases

For example, in Tanzania, the theory-practice gap in education is obvious. This is particularly the case in implementing educational innovations. Particular cases can be cited to establish existence of theory-practice gap in implementing educational innovations in teacher education in the country. As such, studies have established that the majority of teachers, about 73% to 82% do not teach using competence-based curriculum despite it being adopted in secondary schools since 2005 and in 2009 in teacher colleges (Komba & Mwandaji, 2015; Paulo & Tilya, 2014; Muneja, 2015; Makunja, 2015). Additionally, Pascal (2014) comparing teachers trained under the competence-based and Knowledge-based curriculum differed in other aspects, but they both lacked ethical competence in that they had amorous relationship with their female students. Moreover, one scholar (Kinyaduka, 2012; Kinyaduka, 2013) establishes that teacher educators who taught work skills in teacher colleges were not trained to teach the subject, and teachers who were taught how to teach the subject during their teacher training programme were not satisfied with the quality of teaching offered in teacher colleges. This is because they lacked foundational competence and practical competence. Without reservation, such teachers may not be able to link theory and practice. So Tanzania like other countries in Europe and elsewhere in the globe is not immune from the theory-practice gap, specifically in the teaching profession. To summarise, theory-practice gap is not a new phenomenon, and a lot has been documented on causes, effects and practical solutions. Despite the documentation, there has been little improvement on professional practices. As such, the question that arises is: How best can we really do away the persistent theory-practice gap in professions amid well documented causes, effects and practical solutions of the same? Why the theory-practice gap is persistent despite the existent of plethora of literature on its nature, effects and practical solutions? What could be a lasting solution(s) for theory-practice gap menace in the teaching profession?

2: Analytical process

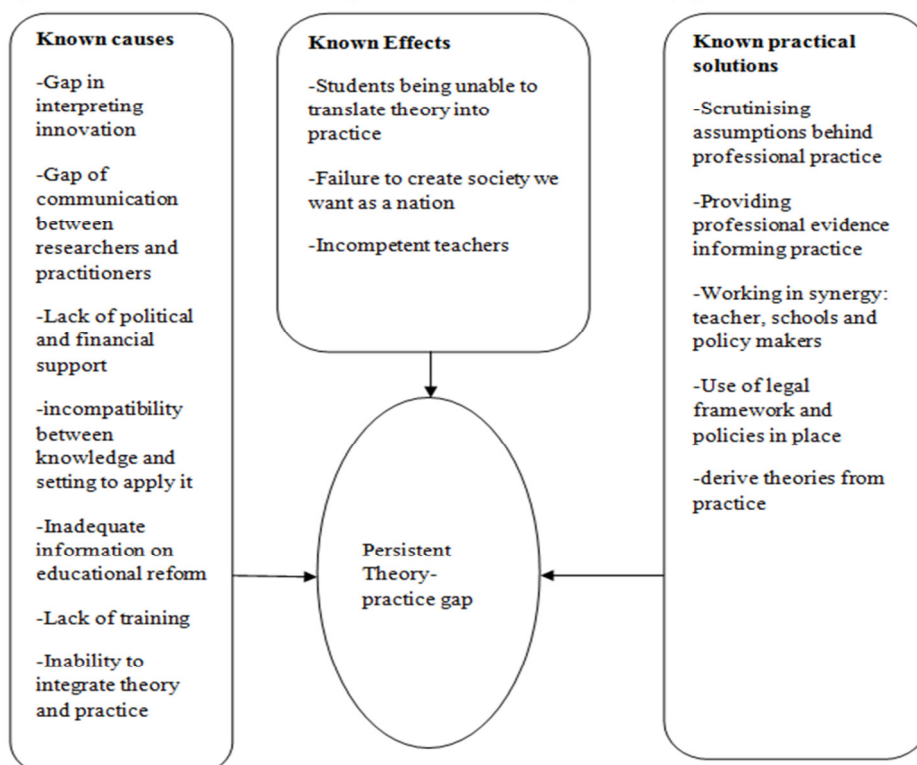
First, the author collected articles from various sources, namely library and internet on the subject under discussion. Second, the author read the articles which stood to be the most relevant ones when looking at the subject of interest. Third, the author wrote summaries for each article he read, and then, he began writing while making meaning out of what was understood from each of the articles. Based on meaning drawn from the

articles, the author developed a conclusion that needs more data support from intensive studies and serious researchers.

3: Model

Figure 1 is a model developed to summarise most of the information given in this paper. The model assumes that the quest of theory-practice gap is prevalent amidst known causes, effects and practical solutions. This context raises important questions on why theory-practice gap is persistent despite well documented causes, effects and solutions of the problem (theory-practice gap).

Figure 1: Model showing context of theory-practice gap menace in teaching profession



Source: Author's construct 2017

4: Conclusion

Despite research done and its policy implications being well-documented in literature on theory-practice gap in various professions including the teaching profession, and despite quite good practical solutions being in place, the theory-practice gap is still persistent. More importantly, change in teacher's practice has been progressing at a snail's pace (Berger, 2009). Indeed, the theories determine the strategies and techniques based on the belief on how people learn. That is to say, each teaching and learning theory is based on the belief about how people learn, and consequently, affect the choice of teaching methods (Ertmer & Newby, 2009). However, there are very few courses actually less than two percent translate certain concepts of theories into practice during their teaching (Johnson in Ertmer & Newby, 2009). Indeed, from the analysis of the entire paper one can arrive into what we may call "Human being Action Theory" which assumes that there are always circumstances and acting forces influencing an individual or organization not to act according to laid down plans, practices, beliefs, laws, position(s) and/or principles, thus resulting in theory practice gap. As such, the circumstances can be contextual (temporal), and the forces can be from within or from outside an individual or an organization. However, researchers' attention remains to be important to know a theory explaining the theory-practice gap in life and/or professions in general. Why are legal frameworks and policies in education violated? Does it mean that there is theory-practice gap in implementing practical solutions on theory-practice gap?

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