

IMPROVING COURSEWORK AND PRACTICUM FOR A BETTER INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA

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Abstract

The article aims at proposing the improvement of initial teacher education in Africa. The authors used desk research to put together the arguments contained in this article. The main proposals of the chapter are two-fold. Firstly, the article proposes expansion of the teacher education coursework to include action research, African knowledge systems and intercultural education. Secondly, the article proposes a versatile practicum for initial teacher education. The practicum must be used for assessment and for professional development and teaching purposes. This chapter concludes that to produce the teacher of the 21st century, teacher preparation programmes must focus on active intellectual engagement by which teachers are equipped with requisite professional knowledge and skills. This agrees with the constructivist teaching/learning theory and participatory teaching methods, which advocate for active participation by students in the learning process. In this theory, learners are supposed to take charge of their learning through inquiry or discovery. To concretise this knowledge and skills acquisition through the practicum, the authors recommend for Zambia and indeed Africa, the school-based model. This preference for the school-based model is anchored on the fact that it is a much better model because, by attaching students to schools right from the first year of the programme, they will have adequate time for combining theory and practice and for developing correct professional dispositions.

Keywords: Initial Teacher Education, Mentor, Teacher Education, Teacher Training, Student Teachers, Practicum

Introduction

The quality of a nation depends on the quality of its citizens. The quality of citizens depends not exclusively but in critical measure upon the quality of their education. The quality of education depends more than upon any single factor on the quality of their teacher (American Commission on teacher education, cited in the Concept of Teacher Education; Kakuba *et al.*, 2015). This assertion is in agreement with Deacon (2016) who postulates that education research, the world over, is in increasing agreement that the most important determinants of educational quality is the competencies of teachers. There is no doubt from the statements above that the teachers' competencies are one variable, which impart on the learners' achievement. That is, they are decisive to the learners' outcomes.

for example, the practicum is weak. It remains weak not only in Zambia but throughout the sub-Saharan Africa (Mweemba *et al.*, 2015; Manchishi & Mwanza, 2013; Cabbold, 2011). In crafting this article, the authors have relied on an expansive desktop review of existing literature on the topic of teacher education to which they have added their own thoughts.

The article is divided into seven broad sections. The first is the introduction, which lays out the critical issues and questions that underpin the discussion. The second section forms a conceptual discussion that addresses key issues of initial teacher education, the dichotomy between teacher training and teacher education and the practicum. The third section proposes a new course regime for teacher education, while the fourth section describes in detail the practicum and is followed by a brief outline of practicum models. Thereafter, the chapter presents notable shortcomings associated with the practicum in Zambia and attendant suggestions to strengthen it. The conclusion sums up the narratives emerging out of the discourse on improving practicum for better initial teacher education.

Conceptual Definitions

Initial Teacher Education

In pre-service teacher education, teaching skills are acquired through linking theory and practice in real classroom environments. In this study, qualitative studies that focused on teacher education in general and the school practicum in particular, in Africa were reviewed (Tas & Karabay, 2016). Research has found that the school practicum is valuable for the development of teaching skills for the teacher education students. This is the case regardless of the mode of teacher education that is adopted; be it the concurrent model (Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2017; Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė & Vainorytė, 2015; Luangala, 2008)) or the consecutive or serial model (Consuegra, Engels & Struyven, 2014, cited in Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė and Vainorytė, 2015). Under the concurrent model, disciplinary and pedagogical studies are integrated and taught at the same time. It involves education in subject content, pedagogy and practicum. The consecutive model, on the other hand, focuses mostly on pedagogy for those graduates that have a subject degree, without teacher qualification, but who are interested in getting into teaching.

As previously mentioned, initial teacher education is the entry-level qualification that is completed before entering the service as a teacher (Neigh & Lynch, 2017). It is the first phase in the teacher's professional career. The purpose of initial teacher education is to equip student teachers with knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills they will need to effectively perform their functions in the classroom, school and indeed in the wider community. It is during this period that they gain an understanding of what is involved in the teaching career and what it means to be a teacher. This calls for diversified competencies. Some of these competencies are subject, didactic, social, adaptive, developmental and professional competencies. Subject competence requires that student teachers be grounded in and master the

subjects (content) they are to teach. Didactic competence demands that mastering the content is not adequate in itself. Student teachers should be able to effectively deliver the content they have mastered. It also involves helping learners to learn how to learn. The other competence is social competence. This competence requires student teachers to be able to interact and communicate ably. They should be able to provide their experiences, stimulate learners to learn to cooperate with parents and should be encouraged to work with colleagues as a team (Teamwork). Adaptive and developmental competence, is also one of the competencies that requires the student teachers to be able to update academic and teaching methods frequently. It requires exposing them to change and instituting innovations. They should also be able to initiate new activities. Last but not the least, there is professional ethics. This competence requires that student teachers be able to differentiate general morals and ethics from the specific teaching professional ethics. This is the type of teacher we are looking for in the 21st century. But to have this kind of teacher, it needs to be clear whether an institution is following a teacher training programme or a teacher education programme.

Teacher Education as Opposed to Teacher Training

To help underscore the need for a competent teacher, the authors found it necessary to differentiate and clarify two concepts namely; teacher training and teacher education. Although to a layperson, this argument appears philosophical and academic, to a seasoned scholar of education, there is an ocean of a difference between the two concepts. In his review of the literature on this subject, Banja (2022) has arrived at a clear distinction between teacher training and teacher education. While teacher training focuses on mechanical routinisation and implementation of work offloaded to teachers by others, with a focus on preparing teachers in the routine tasks teachers do in a school, teacher education, on the other hand, emphasises active intellectual engagement by teachers in the work that they do. In other words, teacher education implies all the activities, which develop and enhance the professional competencies of teachers during initial, induction and in-service phases of their career. It is clear from these overarching positions that the purpose of a teacher education programme is to facilitate the preparation of quality competent teachers that are equipped with requisite professional knowledge and skills (Banja, 2022). The section that follows, zeroes in on initial teacher education.

Proposals for Improving Initial Teacher Education

The traditional courses that the current initial teacher education curriculum framework in Zambia offers, composed of one or two teaching subjects and methods courses, in addition to the foundational courses of theory and practice, history and philosophy of education, sociology of education, educational psychology, for the secondary school teachers, are, in our view, inadequate. There is a need to broaden the teacher education curriculum so that it is in tandem with the educational dynamics of our time. Curriculum

in teacher education should ensure that there is a shift from teacher training to teacher education. As already alluded to, teacher training focuses on mechanical routinisation and implementation of work offloaded to teachers by others, and preparing teachers in the routine tasks they do in a school. Teacher education, on the other hand, emphasises on active intellectual engagement by teachers in the work that they do.

Preparing such a teacher as discussed in the previous section calls for a participatory teacher education regime in which student teachers play an active role in their education process. They should be participants of a self-directed and self-taught process. Every aspect of their teacher preparation should be based on reflection and introspection (Akyempong, 2003 cited in the Concept of Teacher Education). This is in line with the Constructivist Teaching/Learning Theory and participatory teaching methods which advocate for active participation by students in the learning process and which guided this study. In this theory, learners are supposed to take charge of their learning through inquiry or discovery. The teacher/teacher educator simply acts as a facilitator or a provider of an enabling environment for the students to learn. In this vein, Von Glasersfeld (1989) has argued that knowledge is not passively received but built by the recipient.

Improving Coursework

As argued above, there is a need to broaden the teacher education curriculum so that it is in tandem with the educational dynamics of our time. Student teachers should be participants of a self-directed and self-taught process. Every aspect of their teacher preparation should be based on reflection and introspection (Akyempong, 2003 cited in the Concept of Teacher Education). Following this line of thought, the authors are proposing the generic curriculum for the initial teacher education coursework presented in Figure 1. The proposed model incorporates traditional teaching subjects, foundational courses and methods courses. Significantly, however, this model includes a number of additional courses such as action research, intracultural studies and indigenous knowledge systems.

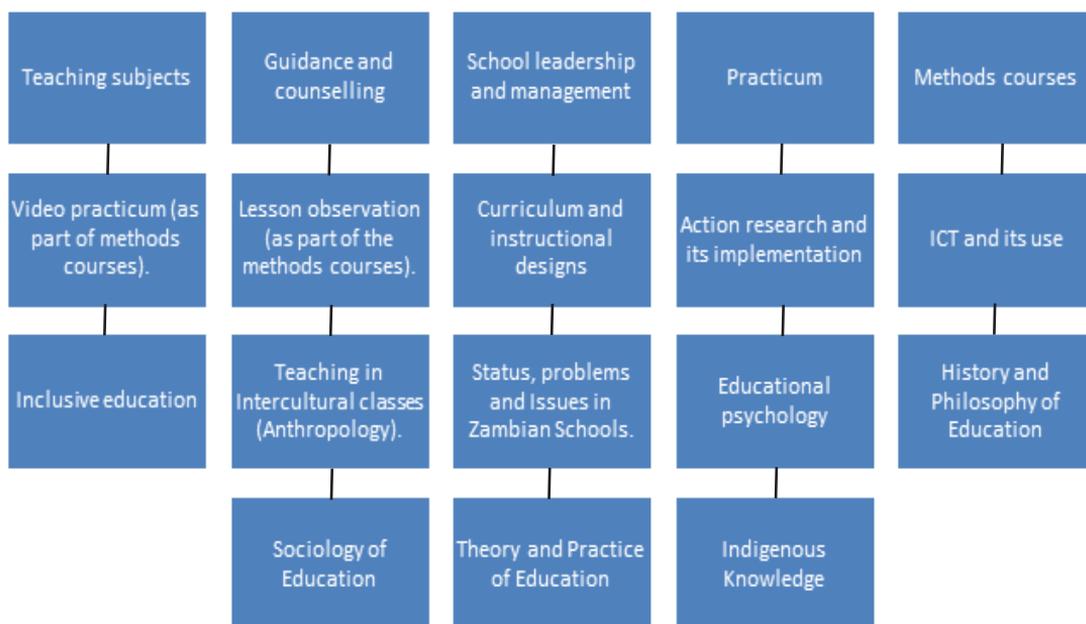


Figure 1: Proposed Courses for Initial Teacher Education

While the majority of the courses in teacher education programmes have a regular familiarity, this article proposes inclusion of a few courses that are not yet popular in most teacher education programmes. These are ICT and its use, inclusive education, guidance and counselling, indigenous knowledge, teaching in intracultural classes (Anthropology) and action research. The following section briefly explains these courses.

The need for the latest knowledge and skills in methodology that encompasses the use of ICT is key to a modern teacher. In relation to this study proposes the use of the video practicum. With regard to inclusive education, the authors observe that while inclusive education has over the past two decades become increasingly common in most teacher education programmes in Africa, the understanding is still blurred.

The worsening socio-economic situation in Africa has left many a learner needing guidance and counselling in many aspects of their lives. This will respond to the emotional, psychological, social and other needs of learners. The increase in the number of suicide deaths among school-going children in Zambia points to the need for such counselling. This requires the teacher to be equipped with the necessary guidance and counselling skills to help such learners as opposed to peripheral counselling.

In recent decades, there has been a movement for the decolonisation of Africa, which has focused on the decolonisation of the African mind. At the centre of this movement is the content of the education system. Proponents are now more than ever before advocating for the inclusion of African knowledge systems

in the African education curriculum. Not only this, but the removal of certain education content that have colonial vestiges to them. In addition to African knowledge systems, the authors suggest inclusion of teaching in intracultural classes (Anthropology), due to the cultural diversity of the classes the student teachers are going to handle, brought about by immigration, increase in the number of refugees and globalisation of education. This raises the need to equip them with intercultural competency. In other words, the solution to the challenges brought about by diversity in the classroom might lie in intercultural education.

This article also proposes the incorporation of action research as an alternative to the traditionally theoretical and academically-based teaching about research. Action research, whether it uses qualitative and quantitative methods, can contribute significantly to finding solutions to the many challenges that the classroom and school situations present. Literature by most scholars reveals that most research tends to under-emphasise the concerns of the site being investigated. Action research, on the other hand, focuses on addressing whatever practical issues the researcher identifies in their workplace (Stringer, 2014; Mertler, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Dawson, 2011; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Such a course in teacher education will equip students with knowledge and skills to conduct research that finds solutions to clearly identified challenges in the workplace within an educational setting rather than simply contributing to knowledge generation about educational situations in general.

Improving the Practicum

The Standard Council of the Teaching Profession (1998 cited by Cobbold, 2011: p.10) defines teaching practicum as:

A period of time spent in schools where the prime focus for the trainee teacher is to practice teaching under the supervision of a mentor who should be trained for this job, to spend time with teachers and classes, observing, teaching small groups and whole classes, and undertaking the range of tasks that make up the teacher's role including planning, assessing and reporting.

We now discuss the key component of the initial teacher education which is the practicum. Also known variably as school experience, field experience, school-based experience, internship, professional attachment, teaching practice and practical experience. Practicum is widely acknowledged as a crucial component in the professional development of student teachers (Muzata & Penda, 2014; Masaiti & Machinshi, 2011). Similarly, Zeichner and Liston (1990) make the argument that the quality of teacher education is defined by the quality of teaching practice. Further, Cobbold (2011) asserts that the practicum is rated more highly than any other element of any teacher education programme and recognised as undoubtedly the most effective tool for developing practical skills in students. This is because it grants experience in

real teaching and learning situation. That is, it provides an opportunity to student teachers to learn from experience in the workplace. Ingvarson, Beavis, Kleinhenz and Elliot (2004) state that there is a widespread agreement that professional experience is an integral part of all pre-service teacher education programmes and provides the key link between theory and practice. This seems to lend credibility to the assertion that the professional versatility of the kind of teachers that a programme produces is largely determined by the quality of this hands-on-wheel experience. Emphasising the importance of professional experience, the Australian Council of Deans of Education advances that teacher education programmes should focus on professional experience and that theory and practice should be complementary (Ingvarson *et al.*, 2004).

Therefore, it follows that the purpose of a practicum should be to provide an opportunity for student teachers to practice in schools, activities they will perform, in the future, in their job, in the classroom, in school and indeed in the wider community as opposed to merely demonstrating what they learnt, as is currently the practice. In short, the practicum intends to provide a platform for student teachers to link theory and practice in a sufficiently close relationship that a teacher may be able to resolve everyday teaching problems based on his or her theoretical knowledge in the content area and the teaching methodology.

With regard to the importance of the practicum in initial teacher education, the Education and Training Committee (2005) cited by Cobbold (2011), postulates that:

Teaching practicum is regarded as the most effective means of preparing preservice teachers to teach the curriculum that schools are accountable for; of preparing them for assessment, reporting and administrative responsibilities, and for the human relations dimensions required for developing relationships with students, colleagues and parents.

In light of these viewpoints, the practicum should be taken seriously because it is a vital element of initial teacher education. It is during the practicum that the student teachers are exposed to the art of teaching before they join the real world of teaching career. In a nutshell, the practicum provides an opportunity to the student teachers to learn from experience in the work field. That is, the practicum provides training in the activities student teachers will perform in the future, in their job. Currently, in Zambia as an example, the practicum is a compulsory component of teacher education.

According to Aglazor (2017), the objectives of the practicum are:

1. To expose student teachers to real-life classroom experience.
2. To provide a forum for student teachers to translate educational theories and principles into practice.
3. To enable student-teachers to discover their strengths and weaknesses in classroom teaching and provide opportunities to enable them to address their weaknesses and enrich their strengths.
4. To familiarise student teachers with the real school environment as their future workplace.

5. To provide student teachers with an opportunity for further acquisition of professional skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experiences for full-time teaching after graduation.
6. To help student teachers develop a positive attitude towards the teaching profession.
7. To serve as a means of assessing the quality of training being provided by teacher training institutions.

Components of the Practicum in Zambia: An Overview

A year before the completion of their training, student teachers are given an opportunity to go into schools for 'school experience.' The activity is mandatory as one cannot graduate without passing it. The duration is generally a school term (almost three months). It is treated as a separate course with its own code. School experience committees headed by coordinators, are in each teacher preparation institution responsible for the planning and administration of the school experience component.

Placement of the Students

As regards the placement of the students, the school experience coordinator facilitates the identification of schools where students can go and teach. In other words, the students are free to teach in the schools of their own choice with the approval of the coordinator.

Students' Teaching

While on the practicum, the students are treated as full-time teachers. In addition to the classroom teaching, they are also required to participate in extra-curricular activities such as; sports, club activities etcetera. Before they actually start teaching, they are in principle supposed to observe experienced teachers' lessons for one week. However, in reality, this rarely takes place.

Assessment

During their stay in schools, student teachers are visited only once by their lecturers to assess their classroom performance. Equally, the schools to which they are attached, are required to assess them. Each teacher preparation institution has in place assessment tool(s), which lecturers and schools use to grade the student teachers. In addition, the student teachers are at the end of the practicum required to submit a teaching file, which should contain among other things, schemes of work, lesson plans, records of work, and assessment grades. Ideally, the overall assessment is supposed to take into consideration the following: lecturer's grade, school grade and the teaching file to arrive at the final grade. In practice, it is only the lecturer's grade, which is considered.

Shortcomings in the Practicum in Zambia

The implementation of the practicum in Zambia is beset by many shortcomings. For example, it has been observed that student teachers are not adequately prepared for the practicum except in terms of what they acquire in the methods courses. In this vain, teacher preparation institutions are encouraged to introduce lectures and tutorials as a preparatory component of the practicum so that students broaden their perception of the hands-on-the-wheel experience.

During the practicum, the student teachers are visited and observed only once by their lecturers for the entire duration of the activity. This affects the quality of feedback provided to the student teachers. Additionally, more often than not, such visits by the lecturers end up being for assessment rather than development and teaching purposes as can be noted from the attached assessment tools. This is common in all the colleges of education and universities in the country. It is quite obvious that an assessment based on just a single observation may not be a reliable and valid way of appraising the classroom competence of a student teacher. This inadequacy is a result of financial constraints since teacher educators who observe the student teachers often have to travel long distances from their institution to observe the students. Transport and lodging costs, plus out of station allowances compel institutions to reduce the exercise to only one visit.

In some cases, although not related to financial constraints, in some institutions, the duration of the practicum falls far less than the recommended full school term. If the period for teaching practice is too short, the practicum is unlikely to make any meaningful contribution to the training of students in methodology. The difficulties are even greater for those students who suffer the handicap of conducting their practicum at the end of the final year of study. This arrangement is not helpful to future teachers as they are denied an opportunity to review with their lecturers, issues arising from the practicum, during the period of the practicum.

It is also important to note that in some cases, the lecturers assigned to observe the student teachers are themselves not specialised in the subject area of the student that they are observing (Muzata, 2018). Clearly, considering the current form of the practicum, the quality of the graduates from some institutions within the country is likely to be questioned because it appears the activity is treated as a ritual to be fulfilled and not as a key part of teacher education. This explains why in some teacher preparation institutions in Zambia, the practicum is not graded and does not contribute points to the classification of the degree that a student is awarded. This affects students not taking the practicum seriously and not putting their best into the exercise.

In light of these negative tendencies associated with the practicum, suggestions are made in the following section to improve the practicum.

Proposals for Improving the Practicum

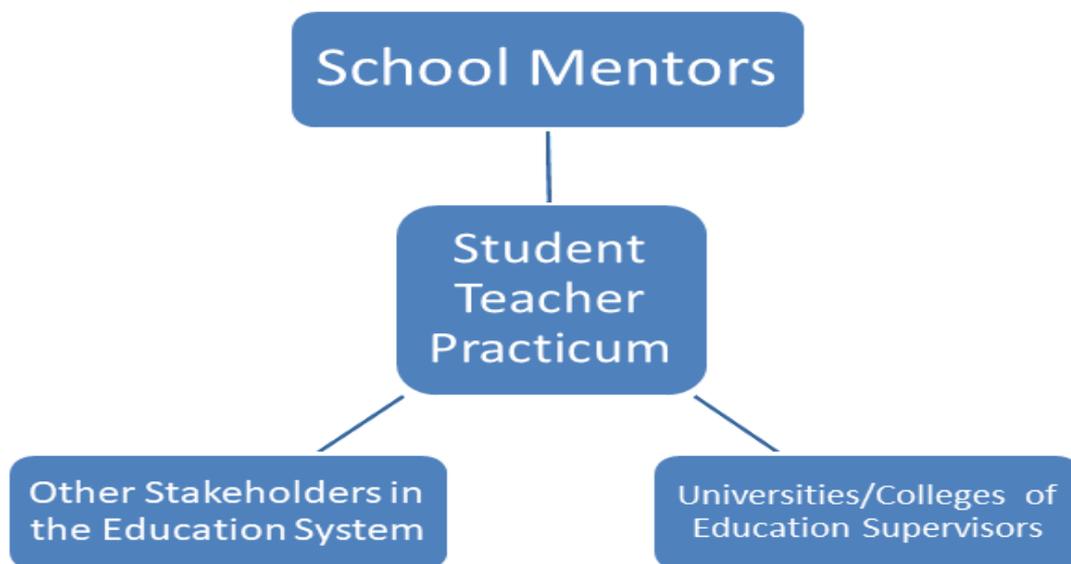
The following are the suggestions made for improving the practicum; this is

irrespective of the model adopted by individual institutions offering teacher education programmes. In addition, the authors suggest that these matters must not be left to an institution to decide, but must run across all teacher education programmes.

1. A minimum of two observations per student by his/her lecturer must be mandatory during the period of the practicum. It is quite obvious that an assessment based on just a single observation may not be a reliable and valid way of appraising the classroom competence of a student teacher. In addition, school authorities should be involved in assessing the student teachers both in teaching and in professional ethics. The overall assessment should take into consideration the following; lecturer's grade, school grade and a portfolio to arrive at the final grade.
2. The practicum must not be used only for assessment but also for professional development and teaching purposes with quality feedback provided to the student teachers. Assessment tools should reflect this intentionality.
3. The duration of the practicum in all institutions should not be less than one full-term. If the period for teaching practice is too short, it is unlikely to make any meaningful contribution to the training of students in methodology. While in the school, students should be encouraged to reflect on their experiences (on the teaching-learning process). This is known as reflective pedagogy or inquiry-orientated model. This is one of the strategies that should be used to enhance the practicum.
4. All the lecturers assigned to observe the student teachers should themselves be specialised in the subject area of the student they are observing (Muzata, 2018). This would ensure that they contribute to the development of the teacher in terms of both subject content and methodology.
5. The teaching practice must be conducted before the final year of study. This arrangement accords the future teachers an opportunity to review with their lecturers, issues arising from the practicum, during and after the practicum.
6. Specific study areas should have their own appropriate assessment tools, corresponding to their needs and which lecturers and schools use to assess and grade their students.
7. As discussed in the above sections, the current partnership between universities/colleges of education and schools in Zambia, is weak. To improve the practicum component of teacher education, and make it effective, the authors are proposing a partnership whereby some neighboring schools to the teacher preparation institutions be selected to serve as cooperating or professional development schools for whatever delivery model an institution that prepares teachers, chooses to use under the school-based model. In these schools, experienced teachers in the various teaching subjects should officially be appointed as mentors who would be required to undergo some orientation/training in mentorship. There is a need for a stronger focus on mentoring rather than supervision to enrich experiences for students (Manchishi, 2013). A collaboration model is proposed in Figure 2. It emphasises that the fact that the preparation of teachers,

the practicum in particular, is a partnership between universities/colleges of education, schools and other stakeholders in the education system. These are key participants in ensuring the quality of learning on the part of the trainees.

Figure 2: Proposed Partnership Model between Teacher Education Institutions and Schools



Adapted from University of Minnesota (<https://www.cehd.umn.edu/co-teaching/pairs'triad>)

Practicum Models

There are many different types of teacher education practicum models available to teacher education programmes. The following section discusses some of them in brief.

The Internship Model

The trend now in some countries, for example, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands is that each student teacher spends one day a week at a school to observe and familiarise, while he or she spends the other four days at the college or university doing the course work. In the lectures and tutorials set aside as preparation for teaching practice, students could discuss their observations with lecturers so that the former are counselled. The days the students spend at a school gradually increase until they fuse into the teaching practice period properly. This is the method of training known as the internship model (Luangala, 2001), which many countries in the West are increasingly adopting. The internship model also known as the apprenticeship or the realistic model, allows student teachers ample time to adjust to the different scenarios and demands of teaching and enables them to acquire pedagogical skills. With such skills, they are able to devise

appropriate interventions of their own, based on reflective practice to counter emerging challenges. The internship model is a much better model than the immersion one where students suddenly wake up on a day to find they have to wear the mantle of a teacher.

The School-Based Model

The second model is the school-based model. In this model, student teachers spend some time in schools throughout their study period in a college or university. In a nutshell, the future teachers are right from the first year in the university/college of education attached to some school in the neighbourhood. Indiana, Ohio and Michigan universities do practice this model. The only notable difference between the school-based model and the internship model is that in the latter, it is not clear when student teachers should go into schools, while in the other one, it is right from year one in their teacher preparation institution. This model has not been used in Zambia.

The Partner Schools Model

The third model is where students teach in neighbouring schools (partner schools) under the mentorship and close eye of experienced teachers found in these schools (mentors). Stanford University is one of the universities in the USA using this model. This is the model that was implemented in Zambia between 1997 and 2014 with the support of the Danish Government under the Zambia Teacher Education Course (ZATEC). In Zambia, this model was organised along the line of a one-year college-based preparation and one-year field-based experience. It is close to what is known as ‘work-integrated learning’ in which educational programmes combine and integrate learning and its workplace application regardless of whether it takes place in industry or university and whether it is real or simulated (Atchison *et al.*, 2007) cited by Allen *et al.*, (2007).

Unfortunately, like most donor-funded programmes it wound up when the Danish withdrew from the project and the Zambian Government could not afford to pay the allowances that were being paid to student teachers.

The Side by Side Model

Closely related to this model is the ‘side-by-side’ teaching model. In this model, two teachers, the student teacher and the school-based mentor co-plan a lesson and co-teach it. This arrangement goes on for some time until later on, the student teacher takes over the teaching fully, while the mentor provides necessary backup, feedback and support. Tennessee, Knoxville and St Cloud universities in the USA are among the universities using this model. This model has hardly been used in Zambia.

The Parallel Model

Another model is the ‘parallel’ model. In this setup, interns co-teach with clinical

teachers in schools known as professional development schools, which work closely with universities in supporting the interns. The model involves aligning theory courses with internships. That is, students learn then later, observe and apply in the classroom. Similarly, this model has not been used in Zambia. This model is similar to the work-integrated learning that combines theory and practice.

The University/College Lab-School Model

Last but not the least model is the one which takes place in what is known as 'university lab'. The University of Illinois in the USA uses this model. It has on its campus, a fully-fledged secondary school (lab-school) in which students first observe lessons before they begin to teach. University lecturers (teacher educators) work with teachers in this school to support the students. This kind of setup can be likened to a university teaching hospital used to train medical doctors. The model was at one time used in Zambia, where all the teacher preparation institutions had what were known as 'demonstration schools.' Unfortunately, these are no longer in existence.

Having closely evaluated the different models presented, the authors recommend for Zambia and indeed Africa, the school-based model. This preference for the school-based model is anchored on the fact that it is a much better model because, by attaching students to schools right from the first year of the programme, they will have adequate time for combining theory and practice and for developing professional dispositions.

Conclusion

This article has critically described the purpose and importance of initial teacher education. Specifically, the focus was on the coursework and the practicum. With reference to Zambia, it is clear that the country is using the practicum model known as the 'Applied Science' model in which, student teachers merely implement what they learn in the methods course. It is also true that the practicum is not effective (Mweemba *et al.*, 2015; Manchishi & Mwanza, 2013). The literature reviewed, seems to also suggest that the same is true in sub-Saharan Africa (Zeichner, 1996) cited by Cobbold (2011). From the discussion, it seems logical to infer that the partnership that exists between the sending universities/colleges and the schools where the student teachers are attached for the practicum is very weak.

To enrich the practicum, this study proposes that while on the practicum, student teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their experiences (the teaching-learning process). This is in tandem with what is known as a reflective pedagogy or inquiry-orientation. The authors of the article, therefore, advocate for a practicum, which will prepare an innovator, problem-solver and critical thinker. This calls for a participatory teacher education in which, student teachers play an active role in the training process; they should become participants as self-directed and self-taught. Every aspect of training should be based on reflection and introspection (Akinpelu,

1998 & Pong, 2003 cited in the Concept of Teacher Education, <https://archivemu.acmyweb-testsTeacherEdpdf>). In this vein, the school-based practicum seems to be the answer for the preparation of teachers for the 21st century.

Currently, teacher preparation seems not to be preparing a reflective teacher. However, it must also be noted that the model adopted strongly influences the quality not only of the practicum but also of the teacher education programme as a whole. The authors suggest that if school practicum is to make any meaningful contribution to the successful preparation of teachers, the length of the practicum/school experience should not be less than a full school term.

Clearly, considering the current form of the practicum, the quality of the graduates from some institutions within the country is likely to be questioned because it appears the activity is treated as a ritual to be fulfilled and not as a key part of teacher education. This explains why in some teacher preparation institutions in Zambia, the practicum is not graded and does not contribute points to the classification of the degree that a student is awarded. This affects students not taking the practicum seriously and not putting their best into the exercise. The authors have shown that the practicum is key, regarding the quality of teacher education and this shows in the impact it has on the quality of education in our schools.

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