

Disparities in teaching practice corrective feedback among university teaching practice assessors in Tanzania: Implications on pre-service professional practices

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Abstract

This study examines disparities in teaching practice corrective feedback among university assessors in the Tanzanian context: Implications on pre-service professional practices. A mixed-method research design was employed to bring together different strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods. The purposive sampling technique was used to get 120 undergraduate pre-service teachers from three colleges involved in the study. Questionnaire, interview and documentary reviews were used to collect data and analyzed descriptively to provide summaries in terms of numerical counts and frequencies. The study revealed that teaching practice assessors have conflicting suggestions and non-consensus in supporting pre-service teachers when dealing with similar issues. Conflicting suggestions might pose anomalies on the course of action to be undertaken by pre-service teachers who are trying to grow professionally. The study recommends the formulation of inter-institutional consensual supervisory guidelines that could inform synergy among university teaching practice assessors and supervisors.

Keywords: *Assessors, disparities, teaching practice, corrective feedback, pre-service teachers.*

INTRODUCTION

Quality education is pegged upon many factors that intersect in the whole teaching and learning process (Nilsson, 2008; Blazar, 2015). Predictors of teacher quality have classically included class size, certification, types of qualification, degree earned or years of experience (Blazar, 2015). Less studies indicate pedagogical knowledge of teachers as the quality indicator (Henning, 2000). The notable principle in the context of quality education is the pre-employment training, teaching practice (TP), which is a compulsory requirement for the award of any certificate, diploma or

degree pursued in teacher education (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2009). Teaching requires expert knowledge and specialized skills acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study (Etkina, 2010).

As a pre-service scheme, persons aspiring to become teachers gain the initial exposure to the classroom realities of teaching through information on contents, methods, materials, experiences, models and useful tools (Avalos, 2011; Lee, 2011). Cooperative and interactive guidance from veteran teachers ensure that pre-service teachers conform to prescribed guidelines, rules and standards of teaching profession (Tang & Chow, 2007; Grossman *et al.*, 2009; Aglehart, 2009; Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Kimani, 2014; Jansen & Merwe, 2015). Teaching practice in education is compared with the novices who go through prescribed pre-service training for would-be doctors, lawyers, engineers and pharmacists (Ogonor & Badmus, 2006; Adeoye, *et al.*, 2008; Kimani, 2014; Jansen & Merwe, 2015). Opportunities to practice under the supervision of an experienced teacher help to improve the quality of teaching (Cuenca, 2012). As educational architects, university lecturers, have the role of guiding and assessing pre-service teachers objectively to synchronise their understanding towards professional growth and development (Cuenca, 2012; Ngara, Ngwarai & Ngara, 2013; Ngwenya, 2015). TP assessors are expected to provide confirmative and corrective feedback in their area of expertise in order to flourish in the key curriculum dimensions of teaching (Adeoye, *et al.*, 2008; Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2009). Where specialists in specific subject areas are not available, instructors in other subject areas are subcontracted to serve as TP assessors under instructions of the field guidebook describing the core elements of effective teaching.

At the abstract level, the field guidebook is seen as a starter kit for thinking about effective content and pedagogical skills, presumably designed to guarantee fairness in the delivery of educational services. However, attributes of the field guidebook are open to wide and different interpretations regarding quality teaching observed in the classroom. Corrective feedback which needs to be specific, detailed and informative enough to make TP a quality tool in teacher preparation, calls for attention to areas of improvement (Hooton-Kurtoglu, 2016; Menaa *et al.*, 2016; Ngara & Ngwarai, 2013; Hooton-Kurtoglu, 2016). Despite the presence of the field guidebook describing the core elements of effective

teaching, and concerted efforts to identify characteristics correlated with teaching effectiveness, corrective feedback falls short of the ideal.

There are some hints supported by anecdotal evidence that TP assessors have conflicting suggestions and non-consensus in supporting pre-service teachers when dealing with similar issues (Ogonor & Badmus, 2006; Adeoye *et al.*, 2008; Cabaroglu & Tillema, 2011; Jansen & Merwe, 2015). The lack of specificity in comments given by TP assessors reflects a gap in pre-service teachers' conviction on the course of action to undertake. The pedagogical and content knowledge dynamics in the teaching profession pose significant anomalies towards new understanding (Boikhutso, 2010; Frith, 2020; Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Pandey, 2009; Çimen & Komur, 2019; Frith, 2020; Kremer-Hayon & Tillema, 2002; Tillema, 2005; Cabaroglu & Tillema, 2011; Jansen & Merwe, 2015; McIntyre & Hobson, 2016). If the business-as-usual scenario remains in effect without mandated interventions, the anticipated quality of pre-service teachers will not be realized. This study aims at unravelling disparities in corrective feedback that pose barriers for aspiring teachers in the teaching profession.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Social Constructionist Framework by Vygotsky, (1978). Vygotsky asserts that the most fruitful experience in learners' education is the collaboration with more skilled partners who provide intellectual scaffold to the less experienced learners. TP assessors and heads of educational institutions were regarded as more knowledgeable and experienced in navigating through the task of a level of difficulty with the pre-service teachers' zone of proximal development (Borich, 2007). The University of Dodoma through college of education attach pre-service teachers in various educational institutions for continuous 8-weeks liaising with heads of institutions through coordinated partnership between school personnel and instructors.

Mentoring pre-service teachers features mutual support, technical advice and classroom management tips to meet teacher-centered concerns of survival (Henning, 2000; Nilsson, 2008; Lee, 2011; Watanabe, 2013). A good teacher must among other important things, display the four elements of composure; enthusiasm, confidence, warmth, and support (Anderson, & Radencich, 2012). TP assessors as educational lodestars, need to harmonize their comments to pre-service teachers to ameliorate

the subsequent teaching (Harden & Crosby, 2000; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman *et. al.*, 2009; Kimani, 2014; Sethusha, 2014; Ngwenya, 2015; Komorowska, 2016). A frequent criticism of teacher preparation programme is the lack of adequate provision for transfer of training from university to school classrooms though field experience. Developing teaching skills appears to be less a result of practice or experience than a result of instruction and intervention (Anderson, & Radencich, 2012). If TP corrective feedbacks are confused look, pre-service teachers might be frustrated clinging to persistent teaching dilemmas (Khun-inkeeree *et. al.*, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed research approach was used to bring together the differing strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods. The principle of sequential methodological triangulation was applied where the quantitative phase preceded and led to the selection of suitable individuals for participation in the qualitative phase (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Seidman, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009; Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 1998). The combination of two research methods followed the model of dominant-less dominant design, with dominant model being quantitative and findings from the two datasets were merged during the interpretation phase (Guest, 2012).

To ensure the transferability of the findings to other settings, purposive sampling was deemed proper for this study (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Bitsch, 2005). A sample of 120 third-year undergraduate pre-service teachers from the University of Dodoma was selected on the basis of the homogeneity of their degree programmes with educational-related studies. The university offers field placement in educational institutions after the second semester-based instructions and examinations. Eligibility criteria required students who participated in their TP during 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic year from three university Colleges-College of Education (55), College of Humanities and Social Sciences (39) and College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences (26) student teachers. These three groups represented the range of undergraduate pre-service teachers who participated in the TP session. As seniors, these pre-service teachers were in the position to reflect on TP supervision mechanisms. Furthermore, as finalists, were assumed to have freedom of expression of views on TP since they have no room to do again, hence, no blockage of information was anticipated.

Data collection tools

A hybrid of data collection tools was used to attain a valid description of disparities in TP corrective feedback. Data were collected from three sources; questionnaires, structured interviews and document review. Closed-ended questionnaires were relatively free from bias as they had predetermined response categories (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Creswell, 2014). A single-item scale consisting variation or no variation statement about TP aspects was used in detecting differences in TP corrective feedback among supervisors. Interviews were conducted to ten selected TP supervisors at the College of education to produce an alternative set of findings (Brown *et. al.*, 2021). Additionally, interviews were used to get feedback from a different pool of informants to cross-validate the statistical results provided through the questionnaire. Results from the documentary review were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study from the two sets of data.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were subjected to numerical counts and percentages to provide simple summaries. Frequencies and percentages of the respondents according to disparity variables were computed. Subsequently, the analysis yielded disparities in PT corrective feedback differentials concerning categorical variables of variation or non-variation responses.

In addition to the key quantitative variables described and analyzed, TP assessors were interviewed about opinions in relation to disparities in TP corrective feedback among supervisors. Because qualitative research is labour-intensive, a small sample of 10 participants was invited for structured interview (Shah & Corley, 2006). The responses gathered were screened and categorized in various themes for analysis. Qualitative data analysis involved scrutinizing and transcribing interview responses into statements that belonged together around the major themes of the interview (Keppel & Wickens, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Stangor, 2011). Provision of quotations drawn from participants' original data and correct interpretation of views add to the credibility placed in the truth of the study findings. Systematic analysis of the content of relevant documents - lesson plan, schemes of works, lesson notes and portfolio records were used as the evidence of comments by TP supervisors. Furthermore, assessment kits were utilized to get feedback on what needs intervention for improvement. Ethical clearance approval was sought

from the Research, Publications and Consultancy authority. Participants remained anonymous in the presentation of the research findings to ensure non-traceability to anyone with dishonest intentions. Participation was voluntary, therefore; the participants had the option to opt out of the study with no consequence whatsoever.

FINDINGS

In this study, TP components were sieved out of various factors affecting the quality of the teaching and learning process. 15 aspects were infiltrated around specific instructional dimensions and expounded for in-depth analysis. Redundant items were knocked out for lack of merit meaning or found interwoven in such a way that they were likely to threaten the internal validity. The 15 coded questions on corrective feedback aspects were: supervisor's directives on the format and components of the lesson plan, comments on stages of the lesson plan, formulation of specific objectives in terms of components; audience, behavioural change, conditions and the degree of performance and in terms of objective characteristics; specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound.

Other aspects were suggestions on the innovation of teaching and learning aids, the improvisation on teaching and learning using locally available resources, remarks on schemes and records of works, amount of time devoted to supporting pre-service teachers, frequency of visits made by supervisors, supervisor's expertise in the area of subject taught, grading procedures and indications of performance. Furthermore, portfolio records, reflection about teaching, recommendations on statement of evaluation and remarks, settings for TP and relevance of materials and teaching notes were scrutinized. Key domains in terms of variation and no variation were classified.

The findings are presented in the light of 15 deduced TP components. Responses to supervisor's directives on the format of the lesson plan were distributed unevenly. Data on pre-service teachers 96 (80%) had a common view that there were variations in corrective feedback. Only 24 respondents (20%) were appreciative that there were no variations characterizing this aspect. In the next domain of practical variations on stages of lesson plan, 90 respondents (75%) opined that variation existed among supervisors and the rest 30 respondents (25%) felt that there was no variation. Formulation of specific objectives based on SMART criteria

results suggested that 63 (52.5%) of respondents opined variation in corrective feedback. There were consistently keeping the value almost balanced judgements tapering this aspect. 69 pre-service teachers (57.5%) admitted that there were no considerable variations in terms of corrective feedback on the formulation of specific objectives.

Data related to reflection on teaching revealed that 80 respondents (66.6%) favoured variation response. But no consistency was seen in the opinion, as 40 respondents (33.4%) favoured no variation response in this domain. These findings are consistent with those reported by Underson and Radencich (2012) who observed that pre-service teachers need reflection with feedback to learn from key aspects of their field experience. The distribution of opinions on grading procedures revealed that most of the respondents, 81 (67.6%) were confirming the opinion of variation among supervisors. The discrepancy of 39 respondents (32.4%) opined no variation in corrective feedback among supervisors. Corrective feedback related to the indication of excellent performance, a high percentage of the feedback (65.9%) with 78 respondents was evidence-based remarks made by supervisors and the remaining 42 individuals (34.1%) pinpointed no variation among supervisors. Based on portfolio records, most of the pre-service teachers 81 (67.5%) were stable on the opinion of variation response and the remaining 39 respondents (32.5%) were held up at response of no variation.

Notable among these precepts, emerged the corrective feedback on the supervisor's expertise in the area of subject taught. 85 respondents (70.9%) had reservations that there is association between expertise in the area taught and supervision. There was considerable variation in respect of the innovation of teaching and learning aids where by 75 (64.5%) and no variation in the responses of 45 students (35.5%). Remarks on schemes and records of work had a variation of 86 (71.7%) and a non-variation of 34 (28.3%). Under the domain a written evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses remarks, a significantly higher proportion of respondents 95 (i.e., 79.2%) indicated variation in corrective feedback while the rest 25 (20.8%) illustrated the nature of the feedback in the domain did not vary. Therefore, pre-service teachers indicated little correspondence between marks and remarks made. Settings for TP which had 82 (68.4%) variation and 38 (31.6%) of no variation. In the final part of the survey respondents were asked to indicate whether remarks on the relevance of materials and teaching notes existed. Regarding this item, 82 respondents (68.3%) out

of 120 expressed their views that variation existed among supervisors while 40 (31.7%) seem to hold the opinion that there was no variation in comments regarding the relevance of materials.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis, the general picture that emerges is that pre-service teachers were strongly oriented in the belief that supervisors lacked consensus in dealing with similar issues. Overwhelmingly, TP featured a supervisor-dominated feedback pattern with greater variations. Only four aspects of TP including frequencies of visits made by supervisors, reflection on teaching practice, statement of evaluation and remarks and setting for TP indicated a significant relationship among categorical variables. Findings in this study are in general confirmatory by K  pyl   et al., (2009), Bishop et.al., (2011) who observed that pre-service teachers have inadequate content and pedagogical knowledge about teaching. Pedagogical knowledge has been characterized as piecemeal, less structured and having more inaccuracies (Nezvalov  , 2011). Furthermore, pre-service teachers might transfer their misconceptions to their students during classroom instructions. This fieldwork dilemma requires informed decisions to avoid negative implications for students' learning as expressed by Cranton (2009). This was a significant factor in the common failure of service delivery at TP centres.

Drawing from qualitative interviews with 10 supervisors, variation results stemmed not only from the quantitative aspects. A common view amongst interviewees was that TP supervisors had a belittling nature of comments. Lack of commitment to TP directives and instructional mechanisms designated might lead to low efficiency, equitable service delivery and accountability. Furthermore, informants expressed the belief that TP supervision reports were illegible and biased compromising on the quality of teaching and so were of little help to pre-service teachers. Documents provided rich information which was not revealed through interviews and questionnaires, especially marks and remarks disparities. Documents reviewed included institutional report from regional coordinators, assessment forms, guidelines from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) and TP committee members' reports. Moreover, the study evaluated pre-service teachers' lesson plans, schemes of work and assessments as commonly used classroom artefacts in the teaching and learning process.

Scrutinizing from the documents, it appears that no universal guide for various schooling levels such as primary schools, secondary schools and teachers' training colleges. The documentary reviewed revealed variations in different aspects including the language to be used in writing reflection reports between Kiswahili English subjects. From the examination of additional qualitative remarks provided, it is apparent that there was little correspondence between marks in various TP aspects and remarks made. These results imply that TP supervisors applied independent judgement and relied on their discretion and there is a need to change the asymmetrical power relations between supervisor and supervisee.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chief concern of this paper was to identify the implications of disparities in TP corrective feedback among pre-service teachers. Corrective feedback among supervisors significantly attracts a disjointed teaching and learning output. Uncertainty expressed by supervisors in making judgments points to the importance of developing a shared assessment criterion within the community of supervisors. Recent studies have reported that teachers working collaboratively in content and pedagogical knowledge is the panacea of enhancing supervisors with limited pedagogical practices. Central to the entire teaching profession standards is the concept of formulating the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (Brown et. al., (2021). Given the conclusions drawn from the study objectives, inter-institutional consensual supervisory guidelines to inform synergy among supervisors is vital.

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