

Challenges of Teachers on Teaching Practice: A Case Study of Students of Freetown Teachers College in Sierra Leone

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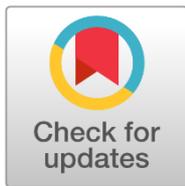
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Abstract: As the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology focuses on the agenda for free and quality education in all stages of teaching and learning in Sierra Leone, It is obvious that Teachers are at the center of all school activities. To ease the challenges of teachers in teaching, it is important to search for the problems of teachers on teaching practices. This study was conducted to find out some of the challenges that teachers on teaching practice experience in schools in Sierra Leone. The result will help to shed light on the aspect of the training exercise that needs to be improved to increase quality in schools. The study investigated the main challenges that teachers on teaching practice from Freetown Teachers College encounter in Social Studies and Business studies. Even though teaching practice teachers do their best to enrich students with their wealth of experiences, yet still, they got their obstacles that hinder their ability for effective teaching. The study employs qualitative procedures with a case study design where the main actor's informant interview, observation focus group discussion and documentary review as the main methods of data collection. The respondents covered, 10 teaching practice teachers, 10 heads of schools, 9 college lecturers and 1 teaching practice coordinator of Freetown Teachers Polytechnic. The result revealed some problems in posting of student for teaching practice to various schools, payment of salaries to teaching practice teachers, school support, teaching methods, classroom environment, and language proficiency.

Keywords: Challenges, Teachers, Teaching Practice, Training College.

1. Introduction

No matter how a teacher is experienced, there are always challenges or obstacles to trample on in the classroom and school. With certainty, expectations from students, parents, department, ministry, and administration are high. Dayna, 2016, listed

three main things that teachers find difficult to overcome in the classroom:

- 1) Balancing the different learning needs of students.
- 2) Respecting expectations from school admins.

3) Helping parents and student meet long-term goals

It is obvious to know that, every student is different from many other students in the class. Some struggle with English and need extra time for improvement. Some learn really well when they read the text and others when they listen to a lecture or when they work the problems out on their own. Besides, the teacher also has to work in line with the goals of the school. Indeed most times, that goal is the same: educating students so that they will enter the "real world" they will be able to make good and appropriate choices. There are other activities the school may engage in sporting activities, student government and lab activities all are relevant parts of the school experience [1].

As a responsibility, a teacher should not only ensure that each student in the class is learning and well engaged but rather to also make sure that students are in line with the goals of the school. Also, a teacher needs to get a better understanding of the community the students are living in. The home of a child plays a very vital part in the life of the students. Children from an educated background have a reflection in their academic work in class. While others come from a deprived home that does not see and experience the benefit of education. As a teacher, it is important to know the environment and its people for the correct determination of the teaching methods that fit those students. As a profession, teaching can be very challenging at times, but as long as a teacher cares about the students and eager to help them with materials in class and their struggles outside the class, it can also be rewarding [2].

In Sierra Leone, presently, there are three Polytechnic colleges: Eastern Polytechnic in Kenema, Milton Margai College of Education, Science and Technology Polytechnic and Freetown Teachers Polytechnic in Freetown. Also, there are four

universities, namely: the University of Sierra Leone comprising of Fouray Bay College [FBC], Institute of Public Administration and Management [IPAM] and College of Medicine and Allied Health Science; Njala University, University of Makeni [UNIMAK] and Earnest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology [EBKST]. All Polytechnics and Universities have sections for the training of teachers in Sierra Leone. Freetown teachers' polytechnic was recently amalgamated with Freetown Teachers College (FTC) and Government Technical Institute (GTI). A teacher needs to understand the founding principles of educational psychology so the efficient development of his pupils takes place that necessitates proper training. The job of the teacher is to make eminent the hidden gem like potentialities in pupils and a much heavy effort to ensure that the [tender pupil] does not destroy children's smiles in the wilderness [3].

The teacher teaching practice is a traditional training mandate for all students of teacher training college in Sierra Leone. This activity in many students in the teacher education program exposes teachers in teaching a real classroom which allows implementing theoretical knowledge and potentials, previously learned in the teachers training college. Teaching practice indeed generates many challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, students at the various understanding level. Classroom discipline, assessing students work, the organization of classwork, relationship with parents, and insufficient and /or inadequate teaching materials [4].

An effective school is a school that fulfills the academic and social potential and needs of the learners. The effective school has identified characteristics such as the attributes and actions of the administrators and teachers, rather than the wealth or family background of students. Teachers are frontline assistances, they assist learners to identify their skills and

develop strengths. Nothing at the end of every lesson delivered that teachers are aware that in some small way they have assisted someone. The result of a teacher transforming the life of a child successfully is indeed a lendable achievement. Teachers are at pivotal positions where they can exhibit a significant contribution to the lives of young people on a daily bases. As a teacher the profession allows the individual to serve others [5].

2. Methodology

As the researcher was on a two months internship exercise at Freetown Teachers College, he opted to participate in the supervision of students on teaching practice within the East end of Freetown. The researcher had the opportunity of visiting students on teaching practice in various secondary schools. This study covered a better understanding of the problems that teaching practice teachers experienced during their exercises in schools.

2.1 Coverage

The study area covered East End of Freetown and its environs- most importantly, Calaba town and Wellington areas. The researcher used information from school heads, teachers on teaching practice, and supervisors from Freetown Teachers College. Their experiences revealed were directed to the subject of the research. Freetown Teachers College was selected due to its Programs offered as a Teacher Training College-Based and Distance Education modes of delivery as follows:

- 1) Teachers Certificate (TC)
 - i. College Based Students
 - ii. Distance Education Students
 - iii. Lower Distance Education
- 2) Higher Teachers Certificate Primary (HTC)P
- 3) Higher Teachers Certificates (HTC) JSS (Junior Secondary School)

All three programs with the exception of the Lower Distance Education run a duration of three years. The Lower Distance Education Program runs for a year and trains teachers for teaching at lower Primary School level. The TC and HTC Primary Program specialize in methodology.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised of principals of all secondary schools, Teaching Practice Teachers and college lecturers. The Sample comprised of 10 principals, 10 teaching practice Teachers (one teacher from each school), 10 lecturers from Freetown Teachers College.

2.3. Instrumentation

The instruments that was used in this investigation study included questionnaires, interview guide, observation, and discussion of specific issues.

The use of this interview guide was justified for the researcher to probe into issues for more clarification. With the interview method, (face to face) it is possible for the researcher to probe or go into getting the required information and to rephrase the questions where they create any doubt.

Observation was used to assess the geniality of the interviewee 'responses. The facilities in the school and as well as the students was observed by the researcher. The researcher also witnessed the teacher's methods and class participation of students in some classes.

A questionnaire guide will be meant for the principals, teaching practice teachers, and lecturers who could share viable information at their convenient time. The researcher used the list of 10(ten) schools submitted by the Teaching Practice coordinator of Freetown Teachers College.

2.4 Data Collection Methods

The researcher administered the exercise directly to the respondents. The questionnaires were protected or gauged its feasibilities. The questionnaires were adjusted for final administration based on the pretest results. The questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents (principals, student teachers, and college lecturers. The completed questionnaires were collected and collated for analysis.

2.5 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was treated or analyzed by quantitative and qualitative way. The data produced from questionnaires, interview and observation was carefully assembled, collated and thoroughly observed. Developments that were revealed from these study was thus analyzed through quantitative and quantities expressions.

4. Result

The researcher received 100% of the questionnaires distributed to all respondents, the interview was conducted, and some observation was made. The research objectives of the study focused on;

4.1 Posting of Students

The posting of students to school was done by the teaching practice coordinator, 70% of student teachers agreed that they selected the schools according to their choice. 30% agreed that they were posted by the choice of the teaching practice coordinator. Some students complained that they were posted to schools that were too far from their locality which incur the huge amount of expenditure on transportation to and from the school every day. The coordinator clarified this by mode of selecting a school that, indeed students are given the first option to select a school, but that school should be a recognized and approved school of the Ministry Education, Science, and Technology. Usually,

the student is given a chance to make the second option if the first is rejected. Yet still, some students will only appear at the last point to show that they do not get schools. The coordinator will have no option but to select for them schools that meet the standards of the teaching practice conditions within their locality.

4.2 Payment of Salary

It is expected that teachers are paid for their service. The study revealed that 100% of the teaching practice students are not paid salaries. They offer their full dedication for academic credit from the college. It's important to note that such teachers suffer a lot since they have families, expenditure on transportation, food, lunch, and other problems. Lack of monetary support affects their quality and performance in their teaching activities.

4.3 School Support

For the school authorities, participants 90% of them are happy to have teaching practice teachers, but 10% are not happy to have them. The reason they indicated was that the teaching practice teacher did not receive proper guidance from their college supervisors, so as such, they teach very poorly. As for the support, 100% of the teaching practice teachers received teaching materials from their school authorities. The heads of subjects usually provide them with textbooks, notebooks, school syllabus orientation of the school environment.

4.4 Teaching Methods

Teaching practice teachers used more of the talk and chalk method. 100% of them accepted that they write on the board and explain to the pupils what is written. The pupils will copy in their notebooks. 70% of teaching practice teachers could not teach using some means of technology due to a lack of knowledge in technology and the affordability of computers. Besides, almost all

the schools do not have or make provisions for teaching with the use of other forms of technology due to the lack of electric power systems and computers in school. As such teaching practice teachers focused on theoretical knowledge more than applied knowledge.

4.5 Classroom Environment

Classroom management is a big concern that 95% of students practicum find difficult to maintain. Through observation, some teachers shout at the students. Besides, the pupils speak and play a lot to each other while classes are in progress. Some are busy talking to boyfriends or girlfriends with their mobile phone, computer or tablet while teaching is in progress. The pupils in some classes in some school are too overcrowded that make the classes too difficult to control. Teaching practice teachers complained that they hardly completely deliver the knowledge as determined by their scheduled lesson notes. They spent more time in class management and control of learners. TP teachers realize real classroom atmospheres are indeed different.

4.6 Language Proficiency

TP teachers encounter challenges in language proficiency. The researcher realized it is too common for teachers in the staffroom, school principals and students to be very frequent with the use of Krio to each other in school. In classes, students speak more of Krio than English. TP teachers observed that some teachers speak Krio in their teaching processes. The researcher also observes red this problem of too much use of Krio language in schools.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Education is one of the most vital instruments for human resource development and a prospective organ for the sustainable source – economy development of society, as it can nurture economic growth under the

canopy of a wider manipulation of knowledge, skills and the inventive power of a society. The positive result of education in the long term takes with it the reduction of poverty and inequality, improvement of public health and effective governance in the application of sauce – economic policies [6].

The reason behind the education and professional training of teacher educators in Sierra Leone is to provide qualitative instruction by well- a designed program of professional education. Freetown Teachers Polytechnic is one of the teachers training institutions in Sierra Leone. To effectively train teachers, student's teachers are introduced micro-teaching or teaching practice in various secondary, primary and pre-primary schools within the Freetown municipalities. To effectively provide the learners with quality education, it is necessary to know the challenges that teaching practice teachers experience during their exercises in schools. This research was directed to certain challenging parameters such as the posting of a student, payment of salaries, school support, teaching methods, classroom environment, and language proficiency. The result exhibit challenges that needed special attention for improvement. It is good to know that, trust concerning the statement of Rabindranath Tagore that: "A teacher can never truly reach unless he is still learning himself, fast like a lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its flame" [7].

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