

REVIEW ARTICLE**PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION****Fekede Tuli* And Gemechis File******ABSTRACT**

Teacher education programs are designed to develop professionals who are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century classrooms and workplace. To this end, the teacher education program must aim to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes of pre-service teachers to prepare them to teach effectively in the schools systems. It is, therefore, argued that the academic program of the teacher education should be coupled with an important and integral component called school -based experiences i.e. practicum which provides students with supervised experiences and help the student teachers to understand the full scope of teachers role. Many have also suggested that these experiences are very powerful in shaping pre-service teachers as they are real in contrast to the artificial environment of the tertiary education courses. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to address the need of and justification for school based practicum experience. Attempt was also made to show the current debates and future direction of practicum in teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged in vast body of literature as an essential element in the process of national development (UNESCO, 1997; UNESCO, 2005; TGE, 1993; GCE, 2000; Psacharopoulos, 1985; Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). It unlock human potential and helps individuals to better understand the world in which they live, to address the complexity and interconnectedness of problems such as poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, urban decay, population growth, gender inequality, health, conflict and the violation of human rights that threaten our future and also seeks to empower people to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future.

Today, with a great understanding of the function that education has to the society and to the country as whole, Ethiopia is striving to expand education at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary education) with the intention to transform society through education. To this end, new goals of access, equity, quality and efficiency have been articulated/ formed at national level in Ethiopian education and training

policy of 1994 to reform all aspect of the education system. To achieve these mission due attention was given to teacher education program since the issuance of the Education and Training Policy in 1994, accompanied with educational sector development programs. Because teacher education institutes have the potential to bring changes in the society, have the potential to shape the knowledge and skills of the future generation, and can play a critical role in preparing quality teachers for the 21st century.

There is no doubt that teachers play a significant role to the success of any ongoing educational reform (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1998) and agents for positive societal change (MoE, 2003). Well prepared and well qualified teachers are not only agents of positive societal change but also have a multiplying effect while executing his/her regular duties. In the same vein Muhammad (2006) stated that teachers of the highest quality will lead to education of the highest quality. Correspondingly, UNESCO-IBE (2003) explained that teachers can guide learners in an ever-expanding universe of knowledge, helping them to learn how to access information and communicate

effectively. As teachers have many roles and responsibilities in an education system, it seems that the goal of education is unattainable without them, and someone can boldly say that there is no substitute to having better teachers.

Teacher Education and Preparation

Although, the purpose of teacher education is to produce effective practicing teachers (George, et al., 2000) the question of how trainees can best be prepared to become effective classroom practitioners has been on the minds of teacher educators worldwide for many years (ibid). The teaching profession is currently facing several challenges; the global economy and competitive market place, the changing nature of job and advanced technology, changes in demographic nature of students and the growing bodies of knowledge about how people learn and what makes for effective teaching have caused teacher education to re-examine the basic principles and methodologies of teacher preparation. Research also suggests that the act of teaching is becoming increasingly complex and that highly competent teachers apply a range of practices for varying purposes, incorporate and integrate different kinds of knowledge, build up a

sophisticated pedagogical repertoire, and adapt to learner diversity and shifting contextual forces. It is, therefore, imperative that teaching professionals responsible for teacher preparation must continually find ways to respond to these challenges.

To achieve the goal of training effective teachers, different approaches to teacher education have emerged in teacher preparation program around the world. One of such approach is the introduction of practicum in teacher education which is the most highly valued component of teacher preparation (Hill and Brodin, 2004; High and Tuck, 2000 ; Glickman and Bey, 1990), provide a firm foundation for future professional development (MoE, 2003), and has been a site where students' teachers can practice the art of teaching in real school context (Kennedy, 2006), and has the power of experience to critically shape the student teachers perception of teaching and learning (Gustafson and Rowell, 1995).

The Need for Practicum in Teacher Education

Teacher expertise is the single most important factor in determining student achievement and fully trained teachers are far more effective with students than those

who are not prepared (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997). What knowledge and skills do expertise teachers possess? According to Shulman (1986b), Teaching has been described as a combination of an art, a craft, and a science. Knowing what to teach, how to teach it, and what methods to use with particular topics, particular kinds of students and in particular settings all combine to form the knowledge and skills that define teaching expertise. To this end teacher education programs should aim to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes of pre-service teachers' in order to prepare them to teach effectively in twenty first century classrooms. However, most teacher education programs fail to do so and Ethiopia is not exceptional.

Teachers are ill prepared for the world of work (MoE, 2003) especially, professional competency of teacher is deficient, unsatisfactory content knowledge, weakness at practical teaching, and graduates are not up to the standard. In addition, university course don't duplicate real life (Arnett and Freeburg, 2008). In order to fill these identified gaps the practicum came to its existence, and many literature started to argue that the best way

to educate teachers is to give them real experience of school and students (MoE, 2003) which led to the introduction of the practicum in teacher education- through which student teachers understood the socio-cultural, political and economic factors underpinning education, and also can have first hand experience and knowledge about the public school environment and secondary school students. It also provides student teachers with a frame of reference for the skills they are building. It is a critically important part of initial teacher education. Therefore, practicum experiences among pre-service teachers are often described as the most important part of teacher education program.

Futures of Quality Practicum

Practicum has been considered as a site where student teachers practice the art of teaching in real school context with student teachers assigned to one teacher and class for specific block of time (Zeichner, 1996) and allow students to investigate current work place conditions, internal and external factors influencing current structural / organizational features and the impact of school planning processes on classroom practices in relation to curriculum, evaluation and pedagogy (Groundwater-

smith, 1996). Eyers (2004:1) stated that the practicum provides a flexible linkage and focus across the three learning domains in the teacher preparation programs at the higher education level – content knowledge, professional knowledge (‘what to know about schooling, schools and the people in them’), and the knowledge and skills needed to function as capable and caring professionals in those schools (sometimes called the ‘how to teach’ part).

Quality practice within the practicum component of pre-service teacher education programs were high related to the preparation of quality teaching professionals. With regard to quality practicum program Eyers (2004) identified the desired characteristics of quality practice within the practicum component of pre-service teacher education programs as follows:

A high quality practicum program:

- integrates theoretical knowledge and professional practice across the three domains of a teacher education program; ‘content’ knowledge gained through a liberal education, professional

knowledge, pedagogical skills and insights.

- is designed and implemented within a partnership involving teacher education institutions (TEIs), schools, school systems and relevant professional bodies
- articulates clear and progressive stages for the development of the acquired knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions of beginning teachers
- provides diverse experiences in a range of school contexts and with a variety of students
- assesses against clear delineations of purposes, roles and expectations of TEI student activity and performance
- includes an assessment of resource needs and implications
- is flexible and encourages innovation
- involves ongoing evaluation and response.

With regard to how is the practicum planned and implemented the same author summarized the general nature and planning and operation of a quality practicum as follow:

- The practicum is devised as a clearly identifiable part of a program to prepare beginning teachers. While from its legal responsibilities a TEI takes a leading role in developing a plan in concept and in detail for the practicum as part of the whole program, it does this in active partnership with the schools, school systems and other relevant professional parties.
- The practicum typically consists of ‘on-campus’ and in-school components/units which are closely related or integrated with one another, and which progressively lead the TEI students towards developing and demonstrating a set of well-regarded knowledge-based skills, capabilities and dispositions that the profession agrees are essential for a teacher at the beginning stages of a professional career...
- The TEI practicum staff are well-qualified and capable professionals who can work across both campus and school settings, earning and enjoying a high standing both with their academic colleagues and with their counterpart teacher colleagues in the schools.
- TEI administrators acting in cooperation with schools and school-systems locate schools willing and capable of providing quality places and support for the school-based professional experiences required of its students.
- Selected teachers in those schools have the knowledge, skills, dispositions and time to work in collaboration with their TEI colleagues, and together they support, mentor and evaluate the activities of the TEI students through progressive stages towards their goal of gaining an initial qualification as a teacher.
- Led by the mentor teachers, collaborative reports are prepared which clearly and reliably document the practicum-related attainments of the students, enabling the TEI to confidently certificate their achievements.

Implication of Current Trends for the Practicum in Teacher Education

Despite the fact that Practicum is the most highly valued component of teacher education program, there has been much discussion and debate in the literature (Zeichner, 1996; Segall, 2002 cited in Schulz, 2005) of what form it should take by questioning the educative value of the traditional approach to practicum. According to Schulz (2005) the traditional approach to practicum emphasize technical knowledge which is small part of teachers knowledge and not sufficient to the preparation of teachers for the professional role of teaching. This type of experience according to Darling-Hammond (1999) can socialize the pre-service teacher in to maintenance of status quo rather than developing critical inquiry approach in which teaching as a profession is underpinned by lifelong learning.

Teacher educators (e.g. Schulz, 2005; Zeichner, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1999) provide an alternative view and promote the importance of relevant practical experiences as a critical components of

effective teacher education program. They suggest the need for change from the traditional, skill and technical model of practicum experience to one with a broader educative focus: a practicum experience that provides teacher candidates with opportunities for inquiry, for trying and testing new ideas with in collaborative relationship, and for talking about teaching and learning in a new ways. In addition, viewing the practicum as an important opportunity for growth and learning rather than demonstrating things already learned Zeichner (1996) contended that a practicum is educative if it helps teacher candidates to understand the full scope of a teacher's role, to develop capacity to learn from future experiences and to accomplish the central purpose of teaching.

CONCLUSION

Today's schools face great challenges ever than before. At the times of most profound social, political, economical and educational changes and challenges, schools are asked to educate the most diverse and complex student body. To respond to these challenges and meet contemporary challenges that face schools, it has been recognised that teaching

professional must continuously find ways and adequately prepare teacher for the complexities of today's classroom and work place. One of such approach is to give students adequate school based practical experience. Therefore, the academic component of teacher education program must incorporate practicum so that the students can understand the socio-cultural, political and economic factor underpinning education, and learn in context from firsthand experience. Accordingly, practicum is considered to be the most highly valued component of teacher education program that aim to prepare teachers who are thoughtful, reflective and inquiring.

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