

**EVALUATING THE TEACHING PRACTICE COMPONENT OF THE
TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A
CASE OF KABARAK UNIVERSITY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT: *This study was meant to evaluate the Teaching Practice (TP) component of the teacher training programme at Kabarak University. It sought to determine Kabarak University teacher trainees' perceptions about teaching practice. The specific objectives were to describe nature of teaching practice preparation as perceived by the Kabarak University student-teachers, and to determine the difference on perception about TP based on the areas of specialisation. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. Simple random and stratified sampling was used to select 110 student-teachers who had completed teaching practice. An online questionnaire with open ended and closed ended items was used to collect data. The results showed that both B.Ed Arts and Science students had moderate perception about TP preparation at Kabarak University School of Education while perception about TP was low among the B.Ed Science students but moderate among B.Ed Arts students. The study further found out no statistical differences in perception about TP preparation and actual TP experiences between B.Ed Arts and B.Ed Science students.*

KEYWORDS: Teaching practice, teaching practice preparation, perceptions about teaching, teaching practice, student-teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession provides an indispensable service to every nation. The service provided by teaching seems to be more indispensable to any society than services provided by any other profession. In much respect the teaching profession is sometimes it is referred as the mother of all professions because of its ability to produce well rounded individuals who will in turn promote best practices, unlock many opportunities for our prosperity and attract much needed international investment and expertise. The Kenya government also recognises this by ensuring that it puts in place a robust teacher training program in the universities (Nenty, Moyo, Sello and Phuti, 2015). The success of any education system depends on the quality of its teachers. They are the catalyst of the learning process and on them mainly rest the whole system.

Kabarak University has two pre-service teacher education programmes. These are the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Arts and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Science. All the pre-service teacher education programmes comprise the theoretical and practical components (TP) which are undertaken by the student-teacher at the end of their third year or fourth year of training. The TP lasts for one school term (about 15 weeks), the

period during which student-teachers are expected to prepare, plan, teach and interact with students and teachers in the course of their day to day activities in their TP schools. The organization and management of the programme is as follows; cooperative schools are spotted by the TP coordinators in the various regions, then students are allocated to appropriate schools in light of their preferences and social circumstances (Wambugu, Barmao, Ng'eno, 2013).

After the student-teachers have reported in the schools for the practice teaching, they are frequently followed up and assessed by a team of lecturers specialized in teacher education. Each student teacher is expected to be assessed in four lessons, aside from assessing the education resource project, during the term and assessors provide feedback to the university at the end of every assessment period.

The Problem

TP is an important tool for success in any area of teacher education. It gives the student-teachers the opportunity to plan, teach and evaluate, and practice the art and Science of teaching. A good TP should stimulate student teachers to be greatly committed to the attainment of excellence and the process should furthermore enable them to be more serious and devoted to work to professional expectation. The students of Kabarak University, instead of being stimulated, have expressed various issues informally during TP assessment. Some of these issues evolve around the practice itself in terms of preparation and assessment as well as the experiences in their practising schools. It is against this backdrop that this research was done to describe the TP experiences and how they impact on perceptions about teaching among Kabarak University teacher-trainees coming from the practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to describe the TP experiences and how they impact on perceptions about teaching among Kabarak University teacher-trainees coming from the practice.

Objectives and Hypotheses of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To describe nature of TP preparation and assessment as perceived by Kabarak University student-teachers.
- ii. To establish if differences exist on student teachers perceptions regarding TP preparation based on area of specialisation among Kabarak University student-teachers.
- iii. To determine the differences in perceptions about TP experiences by area of specialisation among Kabarak University student-teachers.

The hypotheses of the study were:

- i. There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions about TP preparation by area of specialisation among Kabarak University student-teachers.
- ii. There is no statistically significant difference on perception about TP experiences by area of specialisation among Kabarak University student-teachers.

LITERATURE

Teacher Preparation and Student-Teachers Perception of the Exercise

Teaching in Kenya has been dubbed the mother of all professions and history has confirmed this over the centuries. This aspect is realised in Kenya by universities putting in place a teaching practice (TP) program which the student-teachers must undergo as a compulsory component of their training. A student failing in the practice cannot graduate, and must therefore repeat the whole program. The big question therefore is whether the TP programme adequately prepares student teachers for the teaching profession. Teacher Education involves the policies and procedures designed to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills they require to teach effectively. TP therefore is an integral part in teacher education because it allows student-teachers to put theories into practice. Effective preparation of student-teachers in their subjects could help them teach them efficiently (Mannathoko, 2013).

Teacher training institutions engage student-teachers in TP because it is viewed as crucial part of teacher education. The student-teachers are given the opportunity to practice the techniques of teaching to prepare them for the real world of the teaching profession. Student-teachers also know the rationale for TP; they view it as an important aspect of their preparation for the teaching profession since it provides them with the skills of the real teaching profession. As Major and Mannathoko (2013) observe, the supervisor should hold candid discussions with the students before and after the class observation. However, despite its importance, TP could be very challenging and hence demoralizing and sometimes very frightening experience if students are not well prepared. It is worth noting that students' experiences during TP can influence their perception and attitudes towards the teaching of the subjects they are trained to teach and their teaching profession as a whole.

Other common goals of teacher training, such as developing teachers' ability to reflect and be self-improving, or to increasing self-confidence or self efficacy, have been identified (Gibbs & Coffey, 2014). It is therefore paramount that a teacher training program focuses on making the best of its teachers who can meet the challenges of the teaching profession.

In Kenya, students in secondary schools and those joining teacher training view teaching as a career for the poor. The rich can afford to take their children to expensive schools where they score good grades and enrol in more lucrative careers like medicine and engineering. I have followed media clips on the best performers in the national exams in Kenya and most of the students, when asked about the careers they would want to pursue, their options seem stuck at medicine, engineering, piloting or more recently actuarial Science (Thuranira, 2010). It can be said therefore that students join teaching profession as the last resort. In fact some students already in the teacher training program are not sure if they will be teachers.

Although student teaching is one of the most widely and commonly used teacher preparation components, it remains one of the most difficult experiences to understand (Céspedes & Gutiérrez, 2017). It is imperative to conduct research in an effort to better understand the student teaching phenomenon. In addition it is recommended that TP in

student teaching be examined to determine their relevance in the teacher development process, while Mueller and Skamp (2003) espoused compelling reasons for listening to the student teachers who participate in teacher preparation programs. Therefore, it is important to determine the school activities and experiences student teachers consider important in their development as future teachers.

With regard to the initiation of student teachers into the educational community, core evidence describes it as a dynamic and continuous process of mutual interactions and adaptation amongst the newly arrived teacher and the different members of that community. During this process, student teachers make continuous attempts to acknowledge, interpret and give meaning to rules, values, resources and communication patterns in order to gradually integrate into the school ethos (Caires, Almeida & Vieira, 2012). According to several authors the feeling of 'belonging' and the building of the first foundations of their identity as teachers depend upon the support that is received from the school administration and colleagues for their initiatives and opinions, as well as their professional and personal fulfilment.

Any process to revamp teacher education programs must include a careful study of student TP because it is usually the final education course students take and the most influential field experience in a teacher education program. Therefore, many teacher education programs use student teaching as the primary evaluator of student competencies (Kirk, Macdonald, & O'Sullivan, 2006). Student practice teaching serves as the culmination of the teacher education programs and provides student-teachers the opportunity to put all previous field experiences and pedagogies into practice. Providing student-teachers with a series of experiences such as student teaching, classroom observation, lesson planning, classroom management, student guidance, etc. would make them better prepared agents geared toward in-the-field practice, thereby making them potentially advantageous in becoming teaching professionals. Further, studies reveal that teacher identities are constructed (Gu & Benson, 2015), teachers face a transition from the course content to real field conditions, they get a feel of classroom management (Wright, 2012).

Kabarak University has a comprehensive TP as a component of its teacher education program. In order to become effective, teachers must be professionally trained by the university. Teachers therefore need to be trained and must experience continuing professional development so as to become more effective (Harris, 2002). One of the ways to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools is through professional development. For teachers who are not yet in practice, TP is one of key elements in their training the university incorporates into their training, which aims to provide student teachers with experience in teaching and learning in and outside the classroom as well as to enhance the development of their character so as to become ethical and professional, as observed by Kennedy (2006).

TP for teacher trainees is also aimed at providing social experience to student teachers within an actual school situation, and is considered an avenue for determining whether the trainee is able to translate theory into practice.

During TP student teachers have better discussions with lecturers and mentors, and thus managed to help them to determine the approaches to use and their implications in

teaching (Botha and Reddy, 2011). Apart from teaching in classrooms, student-teachers also gather experience related to the areas of school management and administration, as well as the management of co-curricular activities. Taking these factors into account, TP is a fundamental program for the improvement of teaching quality among student-teachers as it provides them with skills, attitudes and responsibilities that are different from what they experience as students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive survey research design. It is always necessary that before any progress can be made in solving a problem, a description of the phenomena be done. Description helps in making improvement of a situation. In the present research the researcher wanted to assess student teachers' perception of TP after undergoing that experience, with a view to identify aspects of the programme that need to be improved and make recommendations for the same to the University management.

Research Location

The research was conducted among Kabarak University student teachers who were returning from TP during the January-April 2020 semester. Kabarak University is found in Nakuru County. The University is a private higher learning found in Rongai Sub-County of Nakuru County. It is a Christian institution offering education in Biblical perspective. The University has a student population of slightly more than 10,000 and a staff population of slightly greater than 1,000. The university is endowed with various teaching and learning facilities hence making learning a successful task. During the January-April 2020 semester, the university is projected sent out about 224 student-teachers on TP across the Kenya. The previous TP period (May-August 2019 semester) had about 185 students on TP.

Sampling Methods

A formula by Yamane (1967) was used to determine the sample size as shown:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where, N is the population size and e is the level of precision (for 95% confidence level and $p = 0.5$).

In this study, $N = 224$ with .05 precision. Therefore,

$$n = \frac{224}{1 + 224(0.5^2)}$$

$$n = 144$$

Simple random sampling and proportionate stratified random sampling will be used in this research to get 144 student-teachers who will be currently on TP based on categories of Arts and Science areas of specialisation. A formula by Kathuri and Pals (1993) will be used to obtain the number of members from each stratum (area of specialization) which will be arrived at as follows:

$$n_i = N_i/N * n$$

Where;

n_i = Number of members in the sample from stratum i
 N_i = Number of members in the population from stratum i
 N = Number of members in the entire population
 n = Sample size
 $i = 1, 2, 3$ number of specializations

Table 1. Sample of Student-Teachers Based on Area of Specialisation

Area of specialization	Total number of student-teachers	Sample size of student-teachers
Science	96	62
Arts	128	82
Total	224	144

Instrumentation and Data Collection

An online questionnaire consisting of two sections will be used to acquire relevant information from the respondents. The questionnaire will be constructed using Likert scale. Closed-ended and open-ended items were used to collect information relevant to the objectives.

The student-teachers were identified from the TP list compiled by the TP coordinator. The respondents were identified and the purpose of the research explained to them upon which they will be given 1 week to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The collected data was first cleaned up and then coded and recorded to reduce mass for ease of analysis. Data was then entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences Version 22. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used in describing nominal data for this research. Data will further be analysed and presented using measures of central tendency (means). The hypothesis was tested by independent sample t-test at .05 significance level and 95% confidence level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Seventy-eight questionnaires were duly filled and returned giving a return rate of 54%. The results are as described below.

Age of Respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their ages and the results are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age range	Frequency	Percent
19-20	3	3.8
21-22	54	69.2
23-24	12	15.4
Older than 24	9	11.5
Total	78	100.0

From the results, it can be seen that 3(3.8%) of the respondents were in the age category of 19-20 years, 54(69.2%) were in the category of 21-22 years, 12(15.4%) were in the 23-24 years age category while 9(11.5%) of them were older than 24 years. It can be said therefore that majority of the respondents attending TP were in the age range of 21-22 years old.

Respondent's Gender

With respect to gender, the results are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	42	53.8
Female	36	46.2
Total	78	100.0

From the Table, it can be reported that majority (53.8%) of the respondents were male while 46.2% were females. This could have the implication that there were more males than females willing to take part in the study.

Programme Type

The participants were asked to identify themselves based on the programme of study and the results are as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondent's Programme of Study

	Frequency	Percent
Full-time	78	100.0
Part-time	0	0.0
Total	78	100.0

It can be seen that all the respondents who took part in the study were full-time, meaning that they attended their studies in full-semester basis. No part-time student took part in this study.

Type of Sponsorship

The participants were asked to indicate the type of sponsorship and Table 5 shows the outcome.

Table 5. Sponsorship Type

Options	Frequency	Percent
Self	9	11.5
Government	69	88.5
Total	78	100.0

Majority (88.5%) of the respondents were under government sponsorship while a small number (11.5%) were funding their education from own sources. This means that most of the respondents attending TP during the time when the study was done were government-sponsored.

Area of Specialisation

The TP students were asked to identify themselves by the area of specialisation and the outcome is as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Area of Specialisation

Options	Frequency	Percent
B.Ed. Arts	57	73.1
B.Ed. Science	21	26.9
Total	78	100.0

In the study, 57(73.1%) of the respondents were in the Bachelor of Education Art area of specialisation while 21 (26.9%) of them were specialising in the area of Bachelor of Education Science. This implies that there are more arts than Sciences students.

Respondent’s Subject Combination

After establishing the area of specialisation, the study went further to seek to know the subject combination of the respondents. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Subject combination

Options	Frequency	Percent
Mathematics/Chemistry	3	3.8
Mathematics/Physics	3	3.8
Mathematics/Biology	3	3.8
Mathematics/Business Studies	9	11.5
English/Literature	18	23.1
Kiswahili/History	9	11.5
Kiswahili/Christian Religious Education	12	15.4
Kiswahili/Geography	6	7.7
Biology/Chemistry	3	3.8
Biology/Agriculture	3	3.8
Physics/Chemistry	3	3.8
Total	72	92.3
System	6	7.7
	78	100.0

From the results, it can be seen that Mathematics/Chemistry, Mathematics/Physics, Mathematics/Biology, Biology/Chemistry, Biology/Agriculture and Physics/Chemistry combinations each had 3 respondents (3.8) while Mathematics/Business and Kiswahili/History each had 9 (11.5%). On the other hand, English/Literature had the highest number (23.1%) of the respondents. Kiswahili/Christian Religious Education had 15.4% of the respondents while Kiswahili/Geography registered only 7.7%. Six (7.7%) of the respondents chose not to answer this questionnaire item.

Respondent’s Perception about the Teaching Profession

The study sought to determine if the respondents like the teaching profession and the results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Perception about Teaching

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	69	88.5
Maybe	6	7.7
No	3	3.8
Total	78	100.0

Most of the respondents (88.5%) indicated that they like the teaching profession while 7.7% were not sure if they like the profession. Further, 3.8% showed that they did not like the teaching profession. The implication is that majority of Kabarak University Teacher-education students are positive about the profession they are taking.

Description of the Nature of TP preparation received at Kabarak University

The student-teachers were asked to indicate their opinion based on how well they are prepared for TP by the School of Education. The responses are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Opinion on TP Preparation

Options	Frequency	Percent
Adequate	48	61.5
Moderate	27	34.6
Inadequate	3	3.8
Total	78	100.0

As Table 9 indicates, more than half (61.5%) indicated that the preparation they receive is adequate, 27(34.6%) showed that the preparation they get is just moderate while 3.8% had the opinion that the preparation given to them is inadequate. The implication is that the trainees are well prepared but the dissenting proportion is too significant to be ignored.

Suggested Areas of Improvement in TP Preparation

The respondents were asked to suggest the areas of improvement in TP preparation. Only one respondent responded to this and the concern was as follows:
“Eliminate the burden of writing lesson plans and schemes of work in future.”
This respondent was categorical that lesson plans and schemes of work preparation are burdensome and should be eliminated completely.

Level of Professionalism as Displayed by the Lecturers Who Prepared You for TP

The study sought to establish the level of confidence that the student-teachers had in the lectures who prepared them for TP and the results are as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Professionalism Displayed by Lecturers

Option	Frequency	Percent
Very Confident	48	61.5
Confident	30	38.5
Not confident	0	0.0
Total	78	100.0

It can be seen that most (61.5%) of the respondents were very confident with their lectures as far as TP preparation is concerned while 38.5% were just confident. No respondents lacked confidence in their lectures.

Sufficiency of the Three Months of TP

It sought to know if the respondents thought that the length of TP period is sufficient and the results are as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Adequacy of 3-months TP Period

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	72	92.3
No	6	7.7
Total	78	100.0

The results show that most (92.3%) of the respondents thought it was adequate while only 7.7% thought that it was short and needs to be reviewed.

Opinion on the Length of TP

The respondents who thought three months were not enough for TP were required to suggest how long TP should be. The results from the 6 respondents are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Suggestions on the Length of TP

Options	Frequency	Percent
2 School terms	3	50.0
A Whole year	3	50.0
Total	6	100.0

It can be seen that half (50%) of the respondents wanted the TP to be extended to 2 school terms while the other half (50%) wanted it reviewed to last a whole school year.

Opinion on When Student-Teachers should Attend TP

Table 13. When Students Should Attend TP

Options	Frequency	Percent
After year 2	3	3.8
After year 3	27	34.6
After year 4	48	61.5
Total	78	100.0

It can be seen that 3 (3.8%) of the respondents wanted TP to be attended immediately after Year 2 of the study while 27 (34.6%) wanted it to be done after year 3 of study. The rest, which formed the majority (61.5%), felt that this component of teacher training should be done after year 4 study. The implication is that majority of student-teachers are not contented with the idea that they have to go for TP after year three, but after year 4 probably when they are through with the rest of the studies.

Level of Importance Attached to TP

The respondents were asked to indicate the level of significance they attach to TP in their teacher training programme and the results are indicated in Table 14.

Table 14. Level of Importance of TP

	Options	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very important	60	76.9
	Important	12	15.4
	Not important	3	3.8
	Total	75	96.2
Missing	System	3	3.8
Total		78	100.0

Most (76.9%) of the respondents showed that TP was a very important component of teacher training while 15.4% felt it was important. Another 3.8% felt it was not important in their training programme. A further 3.8% did not indicate the level of importance.

Description of TP Experience

The participants were asked to give a general opinion concerning their TP experiences and the results were as shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Opinion Concerning their TP Experiences

	Options	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Dealing with school admin	6	7.7
	Managing students was a difficult task	15	19.2
	Some teachers were difficult to work with	36	46.2
	It was generally a difficult experience to get used to	6	7.7
	Total	63	80.8
Missing	System	15	19.2
Total		78	100.0

From their interaction during TP, it can be reported that 7.7% had challenges dealing with the school administration, 19.2% had challenges in student management. Almost half (46.2%) had problems interacting with teachers while 7.7% indicated that TP was just an experience too difficult to get used to. The remaining 19.2% did not mention the challenges.

Voluntary Choice of Teaching as a Profession

The study focused on determining how the respondent made decisions to choose teaching as a profession and the results are shown in Table 16.

Table 16: Voluntary Choice of Teaching as a Profession

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	60	76.9
No	18	23.1
Total	78	100.0

It can be seen that majority (76.9%) of the respondents voluntarily chose the teaching profession while the rest (23.1%) did not. The implication is that this percentage could have been influenced by a third-party.

What Prompted You to Join Teacher Training

The 18 respondents who did not voluntarily choose teacher-training were further required to indicate what influenced their choice of this profession. The results are shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Respondent's Reasons for Choice of Teacher Training

Options	Frequency	Percent
Parent/guardian	9	50.0
It is the only training I qualified for	6	33.3
It is the only training that offers immediate employment	3	16.7
Total	18	100.0

It is clear that of the 18 respondents, half (50.0%) were influenced by their parents/guardians to get into the teaching profession while a third (33.3%) were prompted by the fact that they did not qualify to join any other training at the University. The rest (16.7%) argued that they joined teacher training because they believe it offers immediate employment. This implies that a good number of trainees do not join teacher training due to the passion for teaching but are greatly influenced by other reasons.

Willingness to Choose Teaching Profession a Second Time

The respondents were asked to indicate their willingness to join teacher training if they had another chance to do choice of training. The results are as shown in Table 18.

Table 18. Willingness to Join Teacher Training Given another Chance

Option	Frequency	Percent
Yes	54	69.2
Not sure	15	19.2
No	9	11.5
Total	78	100.0

It can be seen that most (69.2%) of them were willing to choose teaching if they were granted a chance to do that again. About a fifth (19.2%) was not sure while 11.5% said they would not choose teaching again. This implies that most of the respondents enjoy teaching and would still choose it as their profession.

Overall for Perceptions about TP Preparation and Actual TP

The overall group means in perceptions about TP preparation and TP experiences are shown in Table 19.

Table 19. Overall Group Means

	Specialisation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Average of perception about TP preparation	B.Ed. Arts	57	1.8289	.31749	.04205
	B.Ed. Science	21	2.0357	.21339	.04657
Average of perception about TP	B.Ed. Arts	54	1.2222	.29673	.04038
	B.Ed. Science	21	1.4762	.35857	.07825

It is shown that the Arts group had a moderate perception about TP preparation ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 0.32$). On the other hand, the Science group also had a moderate perception in TP preparation ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.21$). For the perceptions regarding TP, Arts group had a low perception ($M = 1.22$, $SD = 0.30$). On the other hand, the Science group had a low perception in TP ($M = 1.48$, $SD = 0.36$). The implication of this could be that the Science group were more prepared for TP and that they enjoyed the actual exercise.

Testing of Hypotheses

This study was guided by two hypotheses: there is no statistically significant difference in perceptions about TP preparation by area of specialisation among Kabarak University student-teachers and that there is no statistically significant difference on perception about TP experiences by area of specialisation among Kabarak University student-teachers. Independent sample t-test was done to test these hypotheses the results are shown in Table 20.

Table 20. T-test Results for Perceptions about TP Preparation and Actual TP

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
Average of perception about TP preparation	Equal variances assumed	-2.758	76	.007	.07497
	Equal variances not assumed	-3.295	53.270	.002	.06274
Average of perception about TP	Equal variances assumed	-3.136	73	.002	.08098
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.884	31.236	.007	.08805

As can be seen from Table 20, it can there was enough evidence to conclude that the perceptions about TP preparation was different between the B.Ed. Science and B.Ed. Arts, $t(53.270) = -.3.295, p = .002$. Similarly, there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions about TP between the two groups, $t(31.236) = -.2.884, p = .007$. It can be said therefore that the two groups had differences as far as their perceptions regarding TP preparation at the University and actual TP were concerned.

CONCLUSION

From the results of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- i. Student-teachers coming from TP had mixed perceptions as far as TP preparation and actual TP.
- ii. The two groups (B.Ed. Arts and B.Ed. Science) had differences with regard to perceptions on TP preparation and TP in general.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher recommends more studies to be done to find out why B.Ed. Arts students had lower perception on TP preparation and TP in general

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