



# Cognition of the role of cooperating teachers during the practicum in Kenya: Teachers of English perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish teachers' cognition of the rationale of teaching practice and the specific duties of cooperating teachers during the practicum. The findings revealed that participants believed that the rationale of teaching practice was: to enable teachers complete their teacher education programmes, to facilitate student teachers to put teacher education theories into practice and to practice how to teach. Participants believed that the roles played by cooperating teachers or experienced teachers during the practicum were: to ensure that student teachers teach, to remind them to give tests as scheduled, mark and submit marks on time and to monitor filling of the record of work covered books. They did not fully understand all roles of cooperating teachers during the practicum. The study is significant to teacher educators who should equip student teachers with knowledge and positive attitudes as future cooperating teachers and look for ways of disseminating the same knowledge to school administrators and practising teachers.

**Keywords:** Cognition, cooperating teachers, Practicum, teachers of English, Kenya.

## INTRODUCTION

English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) in Kenya cannot be complete without the practicum or teaching practice. Student teachers learn all common courses taught to other teacher trainees in other areas of specialization, pedagogy in English Language Teaching (ELT), focusing on the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing and a school based practicum for at least three months. During the practicum, the teacher trainee is expected to carry out all responsibilities of a teacher as stipulated in the school. The practicum is the practical part of teacher education. Student teachers are expected to practice and perfect their teaching skills based on the knowledge acquired during teacher education. All knowledge acquired during teacher education such as theories of learning, theories of language acquisition and learning, instructional planning, instructional methods, teaching and learning resources, should be put into practice. Teacher educators assess teacher trainees once, twice or thrice. Student teachers spent most of their time in schools with trained

teachers; therefore, they can learn a lot from experienced teachers in their areas of specialization. Such teachers who are supposed to advice and guide student teachers during the practicum are referred to as cooperating teachers. They are expected to collaborate, work together or assist student teachers to implement the curriculum following the relevant Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) teaching syllabus, assess students using the valid Kenya National Education Council (KNEC) syllabus, plan for instruction and teach to achieve stated objectives during instructional planning using appropriate available resources. Therefore, there is a significant role to be performed by practicing teachers during the practicum of student teachers for it to be effective. Such a role cannot be appropriately performed unless the teachers know the rationale of teaching practice in teacher education programs and the specific duties to be performed by cooperating teachers to support student teachers during the practicum.

## Objectives

The study objectives were: to establish teachers knowledge of the rationale of teaching practice in Kenya and to find out teachers cognition of the role of cooperating teachers during the practicum.

## Literature Review

### Teachers' Cognition of the Practicum

Teachers' Cognition of Language Teaching Research has been carried out about teachers cognitive (their knowledge and beliefs) of the teaching of English Language. Cognitions are mental or psychological processes (Borg, 2003). Such research was meant to provide insight for people to know what constitutes teachers' beliefs and knowledge about teaching, how the cognitions have developed and how they seem to influence instructional decisions as reflected in classroom practice (Borg, 2006). However, in this study, focus is on what teachers think, know and belief is the rationale of teaching practice in teacher education programs and the specific duties to be performed by cooperating teachers to support student teachers during the practicum.

### Teacher Education

Education is believed to be a social pillar as it shapes the destiny of a society (Gichunuku 2005). The quality of the education system has a bearing on the quality of teachers. Effective teachers are a result of an appropriate teacher education program. *Education is used as a tool for change and for social reform.* In Kenya, education is considered fundamental to the success of vision 2030 (Kenya Vision 2030 Research team 2007). It equips citizens with understanding and knowledge that enables them to make informed choices about their lives and problems facing the society. It is expected to provide skills and attitudes that will steer Kenyans to the economic and social goals of vision 2030

Teacher training in Kenya offers the concurrent model in the main module. Consecutive module is available to first-degree holders through a postgraduate diploma course. The teacher preparation program includes: General studies, Study of philosophy, psychology and sociology as applied to education. Theory and history of education, comparative education, experimental pedagogy, school administration, curriculum development and methods of teaching language are covered. Teacher trainees go for teaching practice for at least three months under the guidance of fully qualified teachers (Maleche et. al 2006). It is aimed at preparing teachers to implement the school curriculum according to

the philosophy of education in Kenya. The underlying assumption is that practicing teachers who guide student teachers during the practicum are aware of the rationale of teaching practice in teacher preparation programs and their role as cooperating teachers.

### Cooperating Teachers

These are experienced teachers who give professional guidance to student teachers during the practicum or school based teaching practice (Maleche et. al 2006). Supervisors; who are usually teacher educators, assess student teachers once or twice while cooperating teachers are expected to guide them for the three months in school. The effectiveness of cooperating teachers depend on their knowledge of the rationale of teaching practice in teacher preparation programmes and the role of cooperating teachers in guiding student teachers during the practicum. They should avail to teacher trainees copies of relevant syllabuses to be used during instructional planning; both the teaching syllabus (KIE Syllabus) and the KNEC testing syllabus and monitor their appropriate usage. They ought to monitor student teachers' professional documents to ensure that there is no omission in the coverage of syllabus content. Appropriate schemes of work should be prepared using the correct format and it should be relevant to the syllabus. Teaching and learning activities should be appropriate to the learning objectives in lesson plans. Student teachers should prepare up to date record of work covered and enter progress records. They should have complete and current lesson notes, prepared according to relevant available teaching and learning resources. Cooperating teachers ought to explain to student teachers the preferred teaching policy in their school. Most schools in Kenya use vertical teaching policy so that a teacher can account for his or her work although it becomes difficult when there is a shortage of teachers. Where team teaching is preferred, teacher trainees ought to comply. They are also expected to adhere to the school's testing policy, how it is scheduled in the term, inform and test students with clear objectives. They need support on how to set, moderate, proof read and ensure standardized exam according to KNEC standards.

*Instructional Planning* is another area that cooperating teachers should assist student teachers to master. The teacher is expected to start with a plan, handling of external environmental factors should be considered. Attention should be paid to the potential of every learner. Each lesson activity should be designed in a way that it adds something to the objectives of the lesson. Rules and procedures should be established. Several methods should be used to coordinate the flow of activities according to the content. The teacher should

provide opportunities for learners to work and research beyond the classroom. The language teacher should be aware of available resources for teaching and learning. Planning ahead is good because it gives a teacher time to make new resources. The teacher can know before hand if there are sufficient textbooks, the teaching aids available, and how he or she can use the school library or the teachers' resource centre. They also get ample time to prepare to use a variety of teaching methods and activities. Teacher should plan on how to make assessments of both their lessons and the learning of the learners. Teachers' personal principles concerning how they plan their teaching of language should enable them to plan, showing how the language syllabus can be covered within a year in the time allocated (Richards 1996). This can be realized through preparation of schemes of work and lesson plans.

When preparing *schemes of Work* The teacher should consider: The individual learner differences, the number of learners in the class, available resources, administering of examinations and interruption may be due to; half-term breaks, co-curricular activities or holidays such as the long Easter holidays. After planning for a term or a year through the preparation of schemes of work, language teachers ought to bring order into their practice by preparing a *lesson plan* for each lesson. A lesson plan guide teachers on how to systematically present the content to learners, using appropriate methodology within the given period of time. A lesson plan's layout includes the name of the class, time topic, sub-topic, objectives to be achieved and resources to be used. The second section shows how the teacher will introduce the lesson. The next stage is the lesson development stage. Most of the activities or tasks during the lesson are developed. i.e. the teaching and learning activities. The teacher later concludes the lesson them evaluates himself/herself. (Richards 1996).

### The Practicum

This term is synonymous with school-based teaching practice. The important aspect of school-based teaching practice is that it provides trainee teachers with the opportunity to integrate different types of knowledge and use them in specific school contexts. In other words, in order to achieve the desired educational *aims, objectives* and *values*, the trainee teachers must teach *contents* by applying their *general pedagogical knowledge* and their *specific knowledge* of each *subject*. At the same time, they must also take into account the characteristics of the *students* who are recipients of this teaching as well as the knowledge of the *educational context* in which teaching

takes place (Vogel and Avissar, 2009).

During the teaching practice, the students learn to understand problems in teaching as *curricular* problems. They become familiar with *curricular planning* in specific school contexts and can analyse the different levels of interpretation that teachers in the school provide of the curriculum. They can also become aware of the influence which textbooks and other pedagogical materials have on teaching.

Another level of analysis of school-based teaching practice is that of *classroom teaching*. It is important that student teachers connect the teaching which they observe with the school's curricular plans (Walkington, 2009). The analysis of teaching, as opposed to focusing exclusively on the activities carried out by the teacher, must also concentrate on the social and relational structure of the classroom, as well as on the academic structure and task procedures.

A further dimension of learning during teaching practice is that of the *class teacher* in terms of his or her initial and continuing professional development, although, as we have previously indicated, it is important that our perspectives are not entirely influenced by a single teacher.

Teaching practice also represents an opportunity for student teachers to socialise, and learn to "behave" like teachers (Kumaravudivelu, 2003). In this sense, it is important that student teachers should analyse different aspects of the state of the teaching profession with the guidance of cooperating teachers. This includes areas such as professional culture, autonomy, involvement, commitment, teaching as a career, among other aspects.

The practical situation in the classroom is one which is full of complexity, uncertainty, instability, singularity and one where conflicting values exist. For this reason, the skills and capacities required to act in this type of situation cannot be uniform, mechanical, nor, indeed, totally pre-established as in the paradigm of technical rationality. The quality of school-based teaching practice does not depend directly on those circumstantial aspects upon which a great deal of emphasis is often placed; instead, quality depends on the extent to which educational *theory and practice* are joined and integrated in teaching. This is essentially what makes teaching practice necessary and useful (Williams, 2009). School-based teaching practice is significant to obtain immediate knowledge of educational reality in terms of personal, material and functional elements, to acquire real experience that compensates the theoretical training, to provide an encounter between pedagogical knowledge and school reality in order to develop the future teacher's sense of security which derives from contrasted, useful and applicable knowledge, to provide knowledge of the

motives and conditioning factors (social, personal, economic, etc.) which sometimes require the teacher to adapt pedagogical norms to the school reality (kafu, 2006; Walkington, 2005; Tsang, 2004).

While it is true that teaching requires a number of base skills, these skills can be improved with guidance and practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Ricchards, 2009; Williams, 2009). To gain an insight into the students' interests, needs and individual differences (Vogel and Avissar, 2009). In addition, it helps student teachers : to understand the school as a collective enterprise that arises as a result of the positive relationship between its members, to complete routines, such as organizing, classifying material, applying classroom management techniques, to learn from experienced teachers and to contrast academic knowledge with the school reality. They are expected to judiciously put the profession of teaching into practice.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative research methodology. The qualitative method investigates *why* certain things happen and *how* they happen (Mason, 2002). It is a flexible approach that seeks to generate and analyze holistic data on an issue ensuring trustworthiness in the research process and observing ethical considerations (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). It uses a relatively small number of cases considered in terms of details. The paradigm was appropriate for the study because the researcher could gather in-depth understanding of teachers of English cognition of the rationale of teaching practice in teacher education programs and the specific duties to be performed by cooperating teachers to support student teachers during the practicum. Due to their real – life setting, qualitative research is more reality based hence the researcher found out the reality as concerns experienced teachers' cognition of their role during school based teaching practice.

*Ethnography method* was used during the study. It is a qualitative method in which the researcher describes and interprets shared and learnt patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs and language of a speech community (Creswell, 2007 ; Yin, 2009). It emphasizes the importance of studying at firsthand what people do and say in particular contexts (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). It involves a researcher participating in people's daily lives for an extended period of time observing, listening, asking questions through formal and informal interviews (Hammersley and Artkinson, 2007). The method has different time modes. A researcher can choose to use a *compressed time* mode where the researcher inhabit a research site almost permanently for a given period of time, usually up to three months. The second time mode

is referred to as a *recurrent time mode*. The researcher visits and observes social issues in phases, usually when the particular social issue occurs. The study used the third type of time mode, which is the *selective intermittent time mode* (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004). Selective intermittent time mode calls for a longer time of the researcher's visits, three to two years. However, it is a very flexible approach; the frequency of the research site visits is determined by the researcher's own programs (Pole and Morrison, 2003).

Qualitative researchers use *non-probability sampling*. The aim is not to make statistical generalization but to create knowledge by understanding the particular in depth. It uses small samples that do not have to be representative of a target population (Cohen, 2007; Lichtman, 2006). The researcher therefore used purposive sampling to select thirty trained teachers of English in secondary schools in Kenya with four and more years of experience. Teachers Service Commission return forms were used to select schools with the most number of trained teachers of English and literature with the most years of experience. Setting being important in qualitative studies, one national school, two county and two district schools were selected to vary setting then teachers in those schools formed the sample size.

*To observe research ethics*, the researcher requested the participants' consent before recording interviews. There was no inducement of participants to participate in the study. The researcher did not ask participants questions that would annoy or demean them.

In qualitative research, data is made up of words. The technique used to generate data was informal interviews. Yin (2009) asserts that qualitative researchers ought to analyze data by looking at it, assigning categories, and coding merging social issues into themes relevant to the research questions. Data was analyzed qualitatively and reported in narration according to emerging themes as per the research questions formulated from the study objectives.

Qualitative researchers advocate for naturalistic generalizations where similarity of contexts or cases is a major factor. Findings can be generalized to other cases that are similar with the ones in the study (Stake, 2005). However (Bassegy, 1999) says that such studies can lead to 'fuzzy generalizations.' That if something happens in one place, it may happen elsewhere, especially if the different cases have similar characteristics. It is a logical argument in cases that are representing schools such as the ones in the study because of a number of similarities revealed by the generated data. All cases have a similar curriculum, similar recommended course books to be used, similar teaching and testing syllabus to be implemented, and similar teachers with regard to training. Generalization is left to policy makers and other researchers to decide whether issues discussed could be

of value to what they might be dealing with.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Rationale of Teaching Practice in Kenya

Teachers knowledge of teaching practice; what they believe is the rationale or justification of the need for student teachers to carry out school based practice in teaching has a significant bearing on how they interact with the teacher trainees during the practicum. Participants were asked what they thought was the rationale of school based teaching practice for student teachers. Participants' responses were repetitive but their responses were as summarised below:

- ✚ It is important to enable teachers complete their Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) or Bachelor of Education Degree (BED) programmes.
- ✚ Enable student teachers to put teacher education theories into practice.
- ✚ To practice how to teach.

One of the participants who was also the Head of Department Languages commented about accepting student teachers in the department for teaching practice,

*"I do not recommend them because the last time those who came misbehaved, they did not complete the syllabus, marking of books was a problem and they did not know how to mark compositions."*

The above reasons are some of the justifications for teacher students to attend school based teaching practise so that they can learn from experienced teachers. It is part of the teacher preparation process. If they knew all that, there would be no need for the practicum. Other justifications for the practicum were not known such as: To provide knowledge of the motives and conditioning factors (social, personal, economic, etc.) which sometimes require the teacher to adapt pedagogical norms to the school reality (kafu, 2006; Walkington, 2005; Tsang, 2004).

While it is true that teaching requires a number of base skills, it is also the case that these skills can be improved with guidance and practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Ricchards, 2009; Williams, 2009). To gain an insight into the students' interests, needs and individual differences (Vogel and Avissar, 2009).

### Teachers' Cognition of the Role of Cooperating Teachers during the Practicum

Teachers were asked about the role played by cooperating teachers or experienced teachers during the practicum. The responses were:

- ✚ To ensure that student teachers teach.

- ✚ To remind them to give tests as scheduled, mark them and submit marks on time.

- ✚ To monitor filling of the record of work covered books.

The responses revealed that experienced teachers did not fully understand their role as cooperating teachers during the practicum or teaching practice of student teachers. There was no mention of induction exercise for trainees to acclimatise themselves with the school environment, vision, mission and values that should guide them as members of staff during that period (Tsang, 2004; Williams, 2009). They did not know that it is their responsibility to avail the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) teaching syllabus. (Vogel and Avissar, 2009) have argued that cooperating teachers ought to guide student teachers during instructional planning after availing to them learning resources such as students' books and teachers' reference books. They should explain to them the school teaching policy, whether it is vertical or team teaching.

Respondents did not know that they should avail the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) syllabus to trainees to be used for testing students. They did not guide them on how to set valid tests and mark examination objectively, instead they complain about student teachers over awarding marks. Practising teachers of English did not know that it is their role to involve teacher trainees in relevant support clubs such as debating and journalism club. They did not make student teachers understand the school as a collective enterprise that arise as a result of positive relationship among members. Benjamin (1986) says that student teachers should learn from experienced teachers who should team up with them to make their practicum effective as a learning exercise from professionals. Teachers can pin point trainees' weaknesses with a view of making them aware and guide them on how to improve on them, assist them to adapt to the school reality in totality.

## CONCLUSION

To cooperate means to collaborate, help, assist, lend a hand, work together or combine forces. Instead of collaborating with student teachers to implement the curriculum according to the school teaching and testing policies, experienced teachers of English lack knowledge about their role in supporting student teachers during the practicum or teaching practice. They were concerned with fault finding, listing mistakes committed by teacher trainees instead of supporting them: to link content to practice in the classroom, to perfect their teaching skills through guidance, to provide them with learning and teaching resources, to avail to them the teaching and testing syllabus, to link their instructional documents such



as the schemes of work, and lesson plans to the syllabus and learning objectives and provide a warm working environment. Their negative attitude towards student teachers to the extent of some saying that they no longer allow trainee teachers in their departments revealed that they do not understand the rationale of the practicum in teacher education and the role they should play as cooperating teachers. They do not seem to realize that it is a learning process; therefore, student teachers need guidance and support from them as professionals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that:

✚ Teacher educators should design a course about 'the role of cooperating teachers during the practicum' to equip student teachers with knowledge and positive attitudes as future cooperating teachers. It would also empower them to take the initiative to request for help from experienced teachers in their areas of specialization.

✚ Teacher educators should seek for forums to disseminate knowledge to school administrators and practising teachers about their role in making teaching practice; a significant component of the teacher preparation programme, effective. They can talk to administrators during the Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KSSHA) conferences and to teachers during seminars in different counties in Kenya.

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How to cite this article: Manyasi N.B. (2014). Cognition of the role of cooperating teachers during the practicum in Kenya: Teachers of English perspective. *Educ. Res.* 5(2):52-57