



## Pedagogical Experiences of Student Teachers and Teacher Educators on Teaching Practice in Selected Colleges of Education in Zambia

Kalisto Kalimaposo<sup>1</sup>, Frinah Chidakwa<sup>2</sup>, Kaiko Mubita<sup>3</sup>, Sanny Mulubale<sup>4</sup>, Chivunda Kaumba<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup> University of Zambia, School of Education, Lusaka, Zambia.

### ABSTRACT

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The study investigated the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators on teaching practice in colleges of education and schools in Livingstone District of Zambia. The perceptions referred to the views, claims, beliefs and convictions which trainee teachers and teacher educators held towards teaching practice. The study employed a case study design. A total sample of 26 participants consisting of 16 student teachers and 10 teacher educators was purposively drawn from two government colleges of education and three schools in Livingstone District. Data were collected through focus group interviews with the student teachers and one-to-one interview with the lecturers and class teachers. Analysis of data was done thematically where emerging themes were presented in a descriptive form. The findings from the study revealed that, though student teachers and teacher educators showed positive perceptions towards teaching practice, student teachers were more appreciative of the benefits of integrating teaching practice in their teaching and learning processes. The study further established that student teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions belong to the plethora and constellation of the salient and indispensable components of teacher training such as knowledge, skills, attitudes and educational material. Based on the findings, the study concluded that the positive perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators toward the teaching practice program play a key role in the success of the practicum program. Consequently the study recommended that colleges of education should consider incorporating trainee teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions of teaching practice into the training of prospective teachers at colleges of education and in schools where field experiences are conducted. The study established that such an incorporation is the locus within which trainee teachers can further maximize the benefits derived from the teaching practice practicum. This assertion is predicated on the researcher's claim that only to the extent that theory and practice are yoked together can there be a successfully performative orientation of the training of teachers.

### KEYWORDS:

pedagogical experiences, student-teachers, teacher educators, host teachers, teaching practice, college of education, teaching practicum.

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice is a very important component of the teacher education program. It is during this period that the student teacher gets to translate the skills and theory learnt into reality through actual classroom teaching. Chen and Mu (2010), stated that pre-service teacher training programs cannot be complete without an effective practicum program where student teachers go to the field and face the various classroom related situations and taking responsibility for each

*Corresponding Author: Kalisto Kalimaposo*

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one of them. The teaching practice component aims at improving knowledge, putting theory into practice, learning about student behaviour, testing knowledge of subject matter, receiving constructive criticism, discovering teaching strength and weaknesses and developing a core set of pedagogic values to which a professionally competent teacher should adhere to. Teaching practice in this context is that aspect of the student-teacher's professional training programme where they are exposed to the real school and classroom environment in order to help them develop their skills in the act of teaching and learning (Mubita, Kalimaposo, Mundende, Sikayomya, Milupi, Haambokoma, 2022). In Zambia, and at the University of Zambia in particular, teaching practice is designed to give the student-teachers an opportunity to put into practice the theories

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relating to the principles and practice of education, which they have learnt in their lectures and during their peer teaching sessions. During teaching practice or school experience the student-teacher is also regarded as a part of the school system and thus expected to participate in all teaching activities within the school system until the expiration of the exercise (Mundende, Mubita, Milupi, Kalimaposo, 2023).

Marais and Meier (2004) argued that teaching practice is a challenging but important part of teacher training especially in developing countries where the effectiveness of the teaching practice can be diminished or eroded by a range of challenges, such as geographical distances, low and uneven levels of teacher expertise, a wide-ranging lack of resources as well as lack of discipline among a cross-section of learners and educators. They argued that if these challenges are not adequately addressed, they may affect student teachers' performance during teaching practice and may in the long run form the enduring negative perceptions of the practicum program and the teaching profession as a whole with consequences of great proportions. However, equally important are the perceptions which trainee teachers and teacher educators hold in relation to teaching practice itself because they can affect the outcome of the teaching practice positively or negatively.

In most cases the teaching practice programs are crafted by a group of competent technocrats for implementation by lecturers at colleges, teachers in the schools and student teachers (Kalimaposo, 2022). While this is an important development, it nevertheless often leaves out the inputs of trainee teachers as well as the teacher educators in the colleges of education and schools where field experiences are conducted. However, the personal claims or convictions that trainee teachers and teacher educators hold regarding teaching practice as demonstrated by this study exert enormous influence on the outcome of teaching practice as a whole. Bransford et al, (2000), Butler, (1992), Duffy (2009) and Solomon et al., (2004) agreed that seeking pre-service teachers' perspectives regarding their training is a crucial aspect of their preparation for teaching. They argued that what the pedagogical contents of trainee teachers often lack are the voices of pre-service teachers and teacher educators. According to them the enormity of trainee teachers' and teacher educators' contributions cannot be underestimated in the process of teacher education.

While the technocratically crafted teacher education program undertaken in colleges of education may by-and-large give primacy to mastery over knowledge, attitudes and skills of teacher education, student teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions may indicate the dynamic nature of pre-service teachers' education both of which are necessary for the successful training of teachers. The dynamic thrust of educational training and practices epitomised by student teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions in this study is critical and inherent to the continuous pursuit of progress in

teacher education. The establishment of the legitimacy of the convictions and beliefs of student teachers and teacher educators regarding teaching practice in this study render the technocratic assumptions questionable. It can no longer be simply presupposed or assumed that the technocratic approach is the most compelling one in developing the teacher education curriculum. The views of those involved in the training are equally important and should be brought on board by the technocrats.

It is against this backdrop that the study sought to explore the perceptions of trainee teachers and teacher educators in Zambia to establish the necessary contributions they can make to the success of the practicum program, especially in the areas of knowledge, trainee teachers' attitudes and practical teaching skills. The study established therefore that prospective teachers' perceptions of teaching practice as well as those of the teacher educators form part of and thus belong to the plethora and nexus of indispensable teacher training components such as knowledge, attitudes, teaching materials and practical skills necessary for the success of the teaching practice in its scope, intent and content.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study was guided by Handal & Louvas' (1987) practical theory of teaching which holds that the "person's private, integrated but ever-changing system of knowledge, experience and values is relevant to [teaching] practice at any given particular time" (1987:9). Therefore the interpenetration of the personal experience as well as views and theoretical training mutually enhance each other to produce effective knowledge, teachers' attitudes and practical skills appropriate for transmission of values, learning skills and productive knowledge to learners. Many proponents of educational theories have supported practical theory. Sanders and McCutcheon (1986:54-55) assert that a practical theory of learning and teaching constitutes relevant conceptual and experiential structures and visions that provide teachers with reasons for acting as they do in practical situations. Practical theory is also personal and contextual and so places demands on teachers according to the needs of different teaching contexts. It is practice that works in particular contexts avers Connelly, Clandinin & He (1997).

While formal knowledge acquired from colleges is important, the trainee teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions can provide for perceptual and conceptual change thereby producing concomitant changes in the practices of teacher educators and trainee teachers in line with the expectations of teacher education. In guiding teachers' practices, a practical theory is therefore a set of "guidelines or rules-of-thumb used to guide behaviour and provides reasons for actions in response to practical problems" (Fieldman, 1994:8). Kaumba (2023) noted that the effectiveness of teachers to teach, is dependent on the knowledge and skills they acquire. Since a practical theory refers to a bundle of personal claims pre-

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service teachers and teacher educators embrace, they are crucial to how their pedagogical practices and assimilation of the material relating to teaching practice are shaped and received. It is for these reasons that the study was guided by the above theoretical orientation in exploring the perceptions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators in relation to the teaching practice program in Zambia.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Creswell, (2003) defined a research design as glue-like structure that holds all the elements in a research project together. Kalimaposo (2010) has also noted that a research design involves a set of logical steps considered by the researcher in order to respond to the research questions. Orodho, (2003) defines it as the scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to the research problem. This study utilized a case study approach employing qualitative research design with a descriptive component for the analysis of data collected. The case study design was deemed appropriate because the study involved the collection of detailed, in-depth data collected through focus group discussions with students and one-to-one interviews with the class teachers and college lecturers. The case study design added another advantage in that the study sought to collect the experiential views, attitudes and perceptions of individual trainee teachers and teacher educators on teaching practice so as to generate a case description as well as case-based themes. Creswell, (2007: 74) concludes that “A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases” Since the researcher had specific cases for investigation, the case study design stood out as the most appropriate approach to the research problem given the issues the study was investigating. The study used purposive sampling consisting of 26 participants who were typically sampled and interviewed using focus group discussions for student teachers and one-to-one interviews with lecturers and host teachers. Data was analysed thematically in a descriptive form.

### **FINDINGS ARE RESULTS**

#### **Student Teachers’ Perceptions**

Student teachers participate in teaching practice in colleges of education. Their participation in this study was imperative because their perception towards the teaching practices in the colleges of education and in host schools was the centre of the study.

Student teachers were asked to give their perceptions on teaching practices in colleges of education. The findings of the study revealed that student teachers indicated that teaching practice was very important in the teaching career of every teacher as it facilitated the understanding of imparting knowledge and skills in the learners. One student teacher commented during a Focus group discussion that:

*Teaching practice is key as far as teaching is concerned because it is a path through which each and every teacher has to go through in order to understand teaching and be able to deliver a lesson diligently in the classroom (Student Teacher A, college 1, 2022).*

Another student teacher stated that:

*For me.....my view about teaching practices is that it is an engine for teaching as it prepares teachers for future challenges of teaching. It is very interesting to be taught to teach and be exposed to all the pertinent aspects of classroom arrangements so as to have a feel of what it means to be teacher (Student Teacher J, college 1, 2022).*

The study further revealed that, student teachers indicated that through teaching practice, a novice teacher is exposed to teaching strategies that are required in understanding the learning abilities of different learners. One student teacher stated that:

*Teaching practice is good in our teaching career as it equips us with extraordinary knowledge and skills far beyond just teaching in understating our clients in this case...learners who happen to come from different backgrounds. Therefore, it is not easy for them to learn without that teaching skill and knowledge that comes through teaching practice (Student Teacher O, college 2, 2022).*

Further, another student teacher echoed that:

*Teaching practice is a strategy that has been put in place to prepare and equip novice teachers with the necessities of the teaching and learning process. With teaching practice at our disposal, we feel privileged because it makes things easier and straight forward for us during our lifelong teaching practicing in the service (Student Teacher D, college 2, 2022).*

Accordingly, the study findings show that teaching practice was helpful as it availed student teachers with the necessary knowledge of interpreting the school curriculum content which is very vital in the teaching fraternity. One student teacher reiterated that:

*Having the knowledge and skills of the school curriculum’s content is not a joke. This requires one to be trained on how to go about it and this is a product of teaching practice that bakes and makes a teacher to have a general and specific understanding of what it entails to be prepared for a teaching career without which it would be very difficult to teach (Student Teacher H, college 1, 2022).*

The study further revealed that student teachers indicated that teaching practice in colleges of education acted as a channel of instituting student teacher’s courage and experience into the real world of teaching and learning. This shows that teaching practice provides novice teachers with hands-on teaching techniques as they practice their teaching skills and knowledge in schools through the preparation of school syllabi. This finding was supported by the verbatim reported by one student teacher who stated that:

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*All of us trainee teachers value the training skills we gain from teaching practice because they shape us into the better teachers we are prepared to be in the future. Teaching practice has been helping us to make necessary adjustments in order to perfect our teaching skills. We can only be competent and effective teachers of the future if teaching practice impacts us positively. Therefore, I for one would say teaching practice is a good preparation for us to be great teachers in our nation* (Student teacher F, college 2, 2022).

The study found that teaching practice was perceived as a spring board to the actual teaching process as it brings into reality the pertinent issues of scheming and lesson planning in schools. Student teachers who were interviewed indicated that the issues of scheming and lesson planning were key components in the teaching and learning process because they viewed them as drivers in giving an organized direction of teaching and learning to the learners. One student teacher commented that:

*Both schemes of work and lesson plan are the backbone of the teaching and learning process as they depict one's readiness to teach and deliver in class. This knowledge of scheming and lesson planning comes as a result of one being exposed to the teaching practice. It is mandatory for teachers to prepare lessons derived from the schemes of work. Teachers are not expected to teach without a lesson plan.* (Student teacher P, college 1, 2022).

Another student teacher added that:

*Before I entered into the college, my perception of teaching practice was largely influenced by the belief that it is only knowledge of the content of teacher education which was fundamentally important in the preparation of trainee teachers. However, having gone through the teaching practice practicum at college and school, I have realized that my perceptions of the teaching practice are necessary prerequisites to the success of the practicum program. As a trainee teacher I should pay much attention to my own perceptions and examine how they impact my teaching because they have been my guiding propositions and views which have shaped and influenced my decisions and actions regarding the practicum. Furthermore, they should be incorporated into the teaching practice course because they are valid views which we hold as student teachers toward teaching practice* (Student teacher K, college 2, 2022).

The study of student teachers' perceptions regarding teaching was viewed by some trainee teachers as a moment of enlightenment. One student teacher stated that:

*Now that I know the importance of my own perceptions in relation to the teaching practice practicum, I have become acutely aware of the power of knowledge that lies within me which I can add to what I learn from the college and the school environment. The integration of my perceptions with the knowledge acquired from training will be sources of self-motivation in the way I prepare the teaching lessons and undertake the teaching profession. Although this is happening*

*at the personal level, it may be even more beneficial if our personal views were incorporated into the teaching practice course at the college* (Student teacher B, college 1, 2017).

Another student teacher echoed it by stating that:

*If I did not know the influence that my own perceptions exert on the success or failure of the practicum program, I would have been blaming the external forces such as lecturers, host teachers or the inconsistencies in the practicum program. The focus on perceptions has brought into the centre the personal responsibilities that I need to bring to the success of the teaching practice experience. Our personal perceptions are important aspects because we usually fall back on them in some practical classroom situations* (Student teacher M, college 2, 2022).

### **Teacher educators' Perceptions**

Teacher educators were also asked to state how they perceived the teaching practice in colleges of education. The findings of the study revealed that teaching practice was a cardinal element in the teaching profession as it gives students teachers a chance to be the actual drivers of their own teaching process. One teacher educator commented that:

*Having teaching practice in schools for our novice teachers is interesting and beneficial because student teachers are involved in the actual preparation of their own teaching procedures.* (Teacher educator I, College 2, 2022).

The study findings revealed that, lecturers pointed out that teaching practice was good and encouraged in colleges of education as it prepared student teachers for more complex work in the actual teaching in the world of work. The study also found that teaching practice motivates the student teachers because every student teacher has an opportunity to perfect his or her teaching skills through peer to peer teaching at the college and their actual teaching in schools during field experience. This finding was supported by one teacher educator who observed that:

*Teaching is a noble calling that comes from above, actualized through training and is strengthened through teaching practice that is enshrined in the education system that each and every novice teacher has to undergo in order to be fully grounded teachers who the nation can depend upon for positive educational contributions. Arguably the training should not only focus on the knowledge content of the course but also on the views, convictions and claims which they hold toward teaching practice* (Teacher educator A, College 1, 2022).

The findings of the study also indicate that teaching practice was key in the teaching and learning process because it helped the student teachers to interact with the more experienced teachers during the their teaching practice period to share teaching ideas before one became fully fledged teacher. To support this, one teacher educator stated that:

*All of us at one point in time were student teachers but introducing us to the teaching practice, we became the better*



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*teachers we are today. In my own words, I can say having teaching practice experience in schools by students from the colleges of education is a great training undertaking and should be encouraged and supported by all well-meaning teacher educators in the system to continue (Teacher educator G, College 2, 2022).*

To underscore the importance of perceptions one teacher educator stated that:

*The content of the teaching practice in its current form does not pay attention to the perceptions student teachers and teacher educators hold regarding the teaching practice practicum. In my view the exploration of the perceptions is of critical importance because they are valid personal views that both trainee teachers and teacher educators hold about teaching practice. Experience shows that these have a capacity to influence the outcome of the practicum positively or negatively. From my personal experience I have seen the influence that my perceptions exert on my teaching. They either maximise or diminish my capabilities and commitment of teaching the course. Equally the student teachers who hold positive perceptions benefit more from teaching practice than those who hold negative ones (Teacher educator D, College 2, 2022).*

Another teacher educator emphasized the necessity of including student teachers' and teacher educators' views by stating that:

*The current teaching practice content is developed by educational technocrats who focus mainly on the technical practices of the course. What the content lacks are the views of student teachers and teacher educators and mostly this causes conflicts at the implementation stage because some student teachers and teacher educators hold that what works out in a particular practical situation are their personal views and not necessarily those of the technocrats. This aspect raises credible reasons of the necessity of including the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators in the teaching practice practicum. (Teacher educator C, College 1, 2022).*

### **Perceptions of host teachers in practicing schools**

Asked about host teachers' perceptions of teaching practice, one host teacher noted that:

*Perceptions of student teachers have had huge influence on the success or failure of the practicum program. Student teachers who held positive perceptions of the program demonstrated a high level of commitment than those who did not. Perceptions have been critical and in some cases decisive components of the success of the practicum program by some students. As a host teacher I found out that student teachers who openly spoke about their positive perceptions of the program turned out to be more successful in classrooms than those who did not (Host teacher R, school 1, 2022).*

Another host teacher expressed that:

*Because of the important role that student teachers' perceptions play in the success or failure of the practicum program, it becomes imperative to integrate them into the teaching practice course at college as well as the practicum program at schools. This will not only benefit trainee teachers in enriching their teaching competences but it will also provide useful insights to the Ministry of General Education in Livingstone District which can be used to include trainee teachers' perceptions among the most important components of teaching practice. (Host teacher V, school 3, 2022)*

Asked about the importance of student teachers' perceptions, one host teacher's further commented that:

*Having supervised student teachers for five years, I have consistently observed that even if student teachers acquire knowledge and positive beliefs regarding teaching practice during their training, and even if the teaching practice is well organized, as long as prospective teachers' perceptions are not addressed the implementation of the skills acquired could still be adversely hampered and seriously weakened (Host teacher J, school 2, 2022).*

Another host teacher furthermore observed that:

*Most student teachers regardless of the training they undergo at college still present some deficiency in the way they plan their lessons. From my own experience this is largely due to the perceptions they hold toward the teaching practice. Dealing with student teachers over the years has shown that they are mostly driven by their own views and beliefs in various practical matters. This demonstrates a conflict between the student teachers' views and the stipulations of the teaching practice in colleges. In the end what prevails are the views which they hold and not what is prescribed in the teaching practice practicum.*

He concluded that:

*To this effect their perceptions need to be incorporated into the teaching practice course to produce the desired outcome of teaching practice because teaching practice itself is dynamic. There has to be harmony between teaching practice stipulations and the views of student teachers at least in most areas. The consequence is that if they are not harmonised with teaching practice, they are likely to impact negatively on teaching practice as a whole as I have observed over the years. The student teachers who show negative perceptions lack enthusiasm and commitment than those who hold positive views of teaching practice during their field experience (Host teacher Q, school 3, 2022).*

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The study found that teaching practice was perceived as a stepping stone to the actual teaching process as it brings into reality the pertinent issues of student teachers and teacher educators concerning teaching practice. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Kane (1991) in his book entitled 'The first year of teaching', Real world stories from American teachers and discovered that teaching practice is

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one of the most important undertakings that empowers trainee teachers with well-roundedness of information concerning the lesson planning, scheming and assessment of learners. He maintained that for the trainee teachers, he does not expect them to start teaching the class straight away but expected to spend some of their time in the first two weeks observing the class teacher so as to have the acquaintance levels of teaching. The implications established were that student teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions of the teaching practice can influence the outcome of teaching practice positively or negatively. Given the assumption that teaching practice is geared to produce positive results in student teachers, it is incumbent that they be incorporated into the teaching practice program because as the study established they have the potential to negatively impact the outcome. The student teachers and teacher educators who held negative perceptions of teaching practice demonstrated little commitment and enthusiasm than those who held positive perceptions. Jegede et al., (2000) observed that what the teacher training programs often lack though they are rich in pedagogical content are the voices of pre-service teachers [and teacher educators]. One way of responding to this need is to incorporate the views of trainee teachers and teacher educators into the teaching practice course.

Further Murphy, (2003) added that the practicum is an important yardstick in teaching as a profession and career pathway and is central to all teacher educational programs. The implication for this assertion should be that for the practicum to attain its degree of being a yardstick in preparing student teachers, it should include the views of pre-service teachers and teachers who are the implementers of the teaching practice course in its entirety. Since teaching practice is key as far as the learning of student teachers is concerned, it should address include all the necessary aspects which undergird it.

If the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators are included in the teaching practice, it is noted that they can contribute substantially to the practical preparation of student teachers which is the main focus of the teaching practice course. On the other hand if they are left out, the outcome will be subjected to the positive or negative views of student teachers and teacher educators. Given that the educational approach cannot be left to chance or ambiguity but must be definitively clear, the perceptions of student teachers and teacher educators have to be brought into the mainstream of the components necessary for the success of the teaching practice.

### CONCLUSION

Perceptions of trainee teachers and teacher educators constitute the personal views, claims, beliefs and convictions which trainee teachers and teacher educators hold toward teaching practice. They are thus personal conceptual structures and visions that provide pre-service teachers and

teacher educators with reasons for responding to the teaching practice program in the way they do. Such personal claims or views are crucial to the success or failure of the teaching practice which, by and large trains pre-service teachers into the practical ins-and-outs of their future work as teachers. Although the theoretical part of teaching practice was stressed, noteworthy was the emphasis that trainee teachers and teacher educators placed on the inclusion of their perceptions into the teaching practice course and practicum. To them perceptions undergird and guide their decisions and actions regarding the success or failure of teaching practice course and practicum. Therefore the teaching practice that includes trainee teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions in Zambia is most likely to lead to the success of teaching practice course and practicum at the colleges and in the schools. The researcher also argues that a technocratically crafted teacher training program which leaves out the concerns and input of student teachers and teacher educators in its training program negatively impacts upon the benefits student teachers can derive from teaching practice. To this effect the incorporation of the views, claims, beliefs and convictions of student teachers and teacher educators into teacher training can maximize the benefits gained from the training.

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