



STUDENT TEACHERS' PROGRESS IN TEACHING PRACTICE UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF MASTER TEACHERS

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Abstract:

One of the most popular teacher training programmes of study conducted by The Faculty of Education of the Open University of Sri Lanka is the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Programme. One of the aims of this programme is to upgrade student teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills with regard to the Teaching – Learning process. Teaching practice is the most important component of the PGDE programme which is conducted in two stages. The first stage is conducted in the student teachers' schools itself, which has a duration of 10 weeks. During this period, the student teacher has to write 100 lesson plans and teach 100 periods. A Master Teacher (MT) appointed and trained by the department, visits the student teachers' school five times during this period to supervise and evaluate five lessons. The department always strives to improve the quality of teaching practice, through various strategies. The analysis of master teachers' evaluation reports on student teachers' progress is one of them. The stage II of the teaching practice component is the final evaluation and is conducted at a school selected by the University and is evaluated by a different examiner. The main aim of this study is to investigate student teachers' performance during teaching practice stage I, according to the perceptions of master teachers. This paper deals specifically with the progress of lesson plan writing and classroom management. The sample of the study consisted of 400 student teachers. The data collection instruments were the two evaluation reports completed by the MTs. The findings of the study revealed that the student teachers' writing of lesson plans and classroom management have improved according to the MTs' perception. The need to provide proper and timely instructions to student teachers and to further develop the MTs' training capacities also came to light.

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1. Introduction

The Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Programme is one of the major teacher training programmes offered by the Faculty of Education of the Open University of Sri Lanka. The aim of the programme is to create a competent teacher who can work for the maximum benefit of the school and its students with positive attitudes. The Teaching Practice (TP) is a major component of the programme and it is conducted in two stages. The stage I, with duration of 10 weeks, is conducted in the student teachers' own schools. During this period, a student teacher has to write 100 lesson plans and teach 100 periods. Master Teachers (MTs) who are appointed and trained by the department, visit the student teachers' schools five times to supervise and evaluate five lessons. During stage 1, student teachers are supposed to improve their teaching skills under the guidance of MTs who play a major role in that regard. However, the department has experienced many short comings in this process over the years arising from both student teachers and MTs. The department always tries to improve the quality of teaching practice, through various strategies. One is the use of MTs' evaluation reports on TP. This study focuses on student teachers' performance during TP stage I, according to the perceptions of MTs.

2. Literature Review

Over the years, many educationists who conducted research on teacher education found that the outcomes were not up to the expected levels. For example, Huling - Austin, 1992 on a synthesis on teacher education programmes and practices stated that education majors' primary resources for teaching were those things they acquired and learned as a result of student teaching, not from their methods classes. Stuart & Thurlow 2000 have stated that teacher education has relatively little impact on classroom practice. Before that, Kennedy 1999 in his study on the effectiveness of teacher training courses found that ineffectiveness of teacher education was due to the type and design of teacher training being provided

Lekamge 2010 in a study based on the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Programme of the Open University of Sri Lanka, prepared an action plan with the aim of improving the quality of different aspects of teaching practice of the professional training programme for teachers offered by the Open University of Sri Lanka. The

target group consisted of Lecturers, Master Teachers, School Mentors and student teachers who had been involved in the teaching practice component of the programme for a number of years. A variety of methods was used for collecting data which were analyzed and interpreted at different stages of the project. Certain critical problems and issues were identified and suitable strategies to overcome the problems were explored. Further, the experience gained by implementing some of the best strategies was analyzed and possible changes that should be made to improve them further were discussed. It was envisaged that the whole activity would make a strong impact on the professional development of student teachers thereby improving the quality of the programme conducted by the Faculty.

According to Polat 2010, the quality of teaching depends on the quality of teachers in the system. There is research evidence to believe that teacher education has a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of their own teaching competencies. The adoption of the distance education mode for the teacher education programmes has also been recognized as a solution to many problems in the teacher training programmes in developing countries. However, Lekamge 2010 was of the opinion that distance education programmes are questionable because of their ineffectiveness in transferring the required skills and attributes to student teachers. Further, it is believed that the teachers engaged in part-time or distance-mode studies do not spend sufficient time to make maximum use of the opportunity given to them because they are engaged in full-time work and/or other responsibilities. The view of Wanasingha & Nawasdeen 2010 was that the appointment of incompetent personnel as Master Teachers had resulted in rapid deterioration of professional standards.

Danielson 2011 presented a framework for teaching and it included four domains in teaching responsibilities. According to Danielson, the first of the four domains is the planning and preparation for teaching. The planning and preparation includes writing of lesson plans also. The second domain was stated as the classroom environment. The classroom environment includes management of various aspects related to the classroom environment.

3. Material and Methods

The design of the study was survey descriptive. In order to find the perception of student teachers' progress two mostly similar instruments were used. They were the evaluation forms prepared for the purpose of evaluating the performance of the student teachers. The evaluation form 1 was used at the beginning of the TP stage 1 to gain information on their states at the start while the evaluation form 2 was used at the end

of the 10 weeks of TP stage 1. While the evaluation forms sought data on several aspects of student teachers' development this paper deals with the progress of lesson plan writing and classroom management only. The comparison of the data in the 2 evaluation forms would provide information on the progress of student teachers on those two dependent variables of the study.

4. The Objectives of the Study

1. Find the improvement of the lesson plans written by student teachers as per the perceptions of Master Teachers.
2. Measure the improvement of classroom management of student teachers as per the perceptions of Master Teachers.
3. Make suggestions to improve lesson plan writing and classroom management of student teachers.

The population of the study was the group of 1800 student teachers who followed the Post Graduate Diploma in Education programme in the Sinhala medium during the academic year of 2015/2016. The sample for the study consisted of 400 student teachers who were randomly selected from the evaluation reports submitted by 100 MTs on the performance of student teachers. The sample of student teachers included 123 males while the rest were females. Two evaluation forms one at the beginning and the other at the end of the teaching practice stage 1, submitted by the master teachers on their student teachers, were used as the main data collection instruments. Those evaluation forms consisted of 12 items.

The items were statements for which MTs had to respond on a 5 point Likert scale according to their perceptions of the capabilities of the student teachers as appropriate. Items number 1-5 were about information on student teacher's background and the item number 6 was on number of student teachers' completed lessons, as well as master teachers' lesson evaluation patterns. The items number 7-9 inquired about the use of teaching aids, teaching methods and asked for suggestions to improve them. Items number 10 - 12 were on the development of student teachers' personality, classroom management, writing lesson plans and teaching. The table No 1 below indicates the items and what they were intended to measure more clearly.

Table 1: The items in the evaluation forms and what they measured

Item number/s	The variables addressed	The variables addressed in this paper
1 - 5	Background information	
6	The number of completed lessons & MTs evaluation patterns	
7 - 9	Use of teaching aids, teaching methods & suggestions	
10 - 12	Personality development, classroom management, writing lesson plans & teaching	Writing lesson plans Classroom management

5. Results and Discussion

Data obtained from the evaluation reports of master teachers for the start and end of teaching practice stage 1 are presented in table No 2 below.

Table 2: Student teachers' lesson plan writing and classroom management at the start & at the end of teaching practice stage

Aspect Key	Lesson plan writing				Classroom management			
	At the start		At the end		At the start		At the end	
	frequencies	%	frequencies	%	frequencies	%	frequencies	%
5	0	0.00	8	2.00	7	1.75	18	4.50
4	15	3.75	33	8.25	19	4.75	23	5.75
3	127	31.75	184	46.00	168	42.00	198	49.50
2	219	54.75	141	35.25	179	44.75	143	35.75
1	21	5.25	16	4.00	14	3.50	5	1.25
Not responded	18	4.50	18	4.50	13	3.25	13	3.25
Total	400	100	400	100	400	100	400	100

Key: 5 - very good, 4 - good, 3 - average, 2 - poor, 1 - very poor

The table No 2 gives the frequencies and the percentages for responses to each category in the Likert scale. It indicates that the large majority was at the average or poor categories. The table No 3 below indicates the differences in percentages in the 5- point Likert scale at the start and the end in respect to the two variables under investigation. In order to simplify the results the categories of very good and good responses were treated together as Good and the categories of poor and very poor responses were treated together as Poor.

Table 3: Percentage differences for lesson plan writing and classroom management at the start and the end

Aspect Key	New response categories	Lesson plan writing		Difference in % – for lesson plan writing $y - x$	Classroom management		Difference in % - for classroom management $q - p$
		At the start - x	At the end - y		At the start - p	At the end - q	
5 + 4	Good	3.75	10.25	6.50	6.50	10.25	3.75
3	Average	31.75	46.00	14.25	42.00	49.50	7.50
2 + 1	Poor	60.00	39.25	- 20.75	48.25	37.00	-11.25

Key: 5 - very good, 4 - good, 3 - average, 2 - poor, 1 - very poor

From the analysis of data, it is clear that there was a considerable increase in the percentages for student teachers writing of lesson plans and their classroom management towards the positive direction. It is seen that the Good category percentage increase between the start and the end of the teaching practice stage 1 for writing of lesson plans was 6.5 while the decrease in the Poor category percentage between the start and the end of the teaching practice was – 20.75. In the meantime the Average has shown a percentage increase of 14.25 between the start and the end of the teaching practice stage 1.

6. Conclusion

A considerable improvement occurs in lesson plan writing and classroom management during the teaching practice stage 1 under the supervision of master teachers in lesson plan writing and classroom management.

7. Recommendations

1. To conduct more theoretical and practical sessions to improve the capabilities in writing lesson plans and classroom management.
2. Setup a small team in the school to support the student teacher during the teaching practice stage 1. The team can comprise of one or two senior teachers and one or two peers.

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About the Author

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