



## University of Zambia Student Teachers' Experiences in the Teaching of Geography during School Teaching Experience

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**Abstract:** Teaching Experience gives student teachers in any University or College a chance to express their personal educational philosophies, theories and understandings. It gives students a chance to experiment and test their knowledge and skills in the profession of teaching and learning, emanating from lessons learnt in university or college. Even so, student teachers face challenges during school teaching experience. This study is an assessment of University of Zambia Student Teachers' Experiences in the Teaching and Learning of Geography during School Teaching Experience. The study employed qualitative approach with an interpretivism research paradigm. 15 geography students were sampled purposively to help give feedback on their experiences in the teaching of geography during school experience. The data was analysed using thematic approach. The study revealed that geography student teachers face some challenges in their teaching practice. This included lack of accommodation, lack of teaching and learning materials, lack of transport for those not accommodated in school compound, differences in geography content taught in university and that of school syllabus, and inadequate teaching methodologies taught in university among others. The study concluded that there was need to enhance a collaborative approach between university lecturers, curriculum developers and other stake holders in order to produce a reliable geography teacher in all teacher training institutions. The study recommends that geography teacher education programs should be inspected and observed to reduce the gap of information between training institutions and secondary schools. More so, geography education pedagogy must be revised time again to suit with needs of schools

**Keywords:** School Teaching Experience, Teaching Practice, Student Teachers

### 1. INTRODUCTION

For any teacher training institution in Zambia, teaching practice forms a big component. Teaching practice is a period that a student teacher spends teaching at a school as part of his or her training. Teaching practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice. Teaching practice is an important component of becoming a teacher. It grants student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003:18; Marais & Meier, 2004:220; Perry, 2004:2). Marais & Meier (2004:221) assert that the term teaching practice represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. 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. In Zambia, and at University of Zambia in particular, teaching practice is designed to give the student-teachers an opportunity to put into practice, the theories relating to the principles and practice of education, which they have learnt in their lectures and during their peer teaching sessions. Moreover, Bolarfinwa (2010) regards teaching experience as a basic professional requirement, the un-fulfillment of which the student-teacher cannot qualify as a teacher.

According to Bolarfinwa (2010: 1) a student-teacher should not just go through the process of teaching practice, teaching practice should also go through the student-teacher such that its aims and

objectives are achieved rather than defeated. 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. Teaching practice exposes the student-teacher to the real school and class situation where he acquires some practical experiences in the art of teaching, as well as get adapted or acquainted with the social settings of the institution.

Although, the primary concern is passing useful educational knowledge over to the pupils using every achievable means until learning takes place in them, they still have to participate in all teaching activities within the school system.

Several studies have been conducted on student teacher's experience and anxieties during teaching practice (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003; Marais & Meier, 2004) to mention but two. However a review of the literature indicates that there are limited studies that shares student teachers' experiences in the teaching and learning of geography as a teaching subject during school teaching practice.

## **2. AIM**

This study aimed at exploring experiences of University of Zambia Student Teachers' in the teaching and learning of geography during school teaching practice experience.

## **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) What are the benefits of School Teaching Practice to a Geography student teacher?
- b) What challenges did students face in teaching and learning of geography during School Teaching Experience?
- c) What should be done to overcome the challenges faced in teaching and learning of geography during your teaching practice?

## **4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The results of this study may help give lecturers and researchers at the University of Zambia and indeed other institutions with a feedback on challenges geography student teachers face during school teaching experience. This could be a feedback on methodological challenges and successes and other realities experienced in a real school setting. The results of this study may also help geography student teachers review their teaching methodologies and approaches in the teaching and learning of geography.

## **5. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **5.1. School Teaching Practice: Definitions**

Teaching practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice. Marais & Meier (2004:221) assert that the term teaching practice represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. Teaching practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in schools to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice. Researchers such as Marais and Meier (2004:220), Perry (2004:2) and Maphosa, Shumba & Shumba (2007:296) describe teaching practice as an integral component of teacher training. In order to achieve the standards required for qualified teacher status, a student teacher is required to do teaching practice in at least two schools. The Tlokweng College of Education teaching practice handbook (2011) defines teaching practice as "the practicum, field experience or internship" (p. 5). Different authors have shared their experiences on the rationale of teaching practice. According to [www.btc.uob.edu.bh/Academic](http://www.btc.uob.edu.bh/Academic) (Retrieved 6, February, 2013) the purpose of teaching practice is to prepare student-teachers for their careers as teachers by incorporating them completely into the school atmosphere so that they feel as if they are part of the school to think and meditate on the practical reality of teaching.

Marais and Meier (2004, p. 221) note that "the term teaching practice represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools." It is an integral component of teacher training and refers to students' placements to schools to practice

lesson planning, classroom organization and most importantly classroom teaching. It is an essential part of effective professional training. Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) view it as "... a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice" (p. 347). Thus, it is time spent by student-teachers in schools to gain practical teaching experience.

### **5.2. The Importance of Teaching Experience to Trainee Teachers**

School Teaching Practice is a very vital component of the undergraduate teacher training programme be it at diploma or degree level. During school teaching experience, student teachers translate the skills learnt in university into reality through actual classroom teaching. Teaching practice provides student teachers with an opportunity to learn from experience in the work place. Atputhasamy (2005) asserts that student teachers believe that the practical experience of observing expert teachers, receiving feedback, and practising strategies are the most important factors in their growth as teachers, but there is a widespread outcry about the quality of most of the teachers who have undergone this practice.

### **5.3. General Importance of School Teaching Experience to Student Teachers**

According to National Universities Commission (NUC, 2007) Benchmark and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2015), the following sets of objectives have been established for why teaching practice is a mandatory component of teacher training.

- i. To expose student-teachers to real life classroom experiences under the supervision of professional teachers.
- ii. To provide the forum for student-teacher to translate educational theories and principles into practice.
- iii. To enable student-teachers discover their own strengths and weaknesses in classroom teaching and provide opportunities to enable them address their weaknesses and enrich their strengths.
- iv. To familiarize student-teachers with real school environment as their future work place.
- v. To provide student-teachers with an opportunity for further acquisition of professional skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experience for full-time teaching after graduation.
- vi. To help student-teachers develop a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. vii. To serve as a means of assessing the quality of training being provided by teacher training institutions.

Several studies have been conducted on teaching experience globally. The studies indicate varied results according to the objectives set. First, we need to understand what teaching practice involves and its purpose in the teacher training process. Ngidi and Sibaya (2003) and Marais and Meier (2004) explain that teaching practice grants student-teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment therefore, it is an important component of becoming a teacher. In addition, the University of Botswana which is the Colleges of Education affiliate, has the Faculty of Education Teaching Practice for Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students annually and its handbook stipulates the rationale for teaching practice which tally with those of the colleges of Education. These include: enhancing student-teachers' career potentials and breadth of experiences, clarifying and inter-relating important areas of knowledge in the practical context of developing and nurturing work-related skills, fostering collaboration of all stakeholders in a way that contributes towards the quality teacher preparation, bringing together different supervisors and their varied skills to facilitate the provision of high quality supervision and mentoring and enabling student teachers to critically examine both educational theory and practice within the appropriate contemporary educational framework of Botswana and equipping student-teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills so as to enable them to meaningfully extend their professional role to education and human resource development in Botswana (University of Botswana Faculty of Education handbook, 2011).

Perry (2004:4) shares his experience on teaching practice that, "although student-teachers gain specialized knowledge from class lectures, teaching practice adds value to this knowledge when students come into contact with the real classroom situation. He believes that it is during teaching

practice that knowledge is affirmed.” Of the same view, the University of Botswana Faculty of Education handbook (2011) contends that teaching practice forms an essential component of all the teacher education programs. Thus, teachers' preparation in Colleges of Education needs to be of quality in all the subjects they are trained for, in order for them to provide quality education to learners. It is during teaching practice that student-teachers should practice what they learnt in classrooms to prepare for their teaching profession.

In relation to the foregoing, student-teachers also perceive teaching as their preparation for the teaching profession. Therefore, teaching practice creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the student teachers as they commence their teaching practice” (Manion, Keith, Morrison and Cohen, 2003 and Perry, 2004, cited in Kiggundu and Nayimuli, 2009: 345).

Some studies review that peer teaching is an important component in preparing student teachers for school teaching practice. For example, Mundende et.al (2022), in the study titled, 'Evaluation of the Administration and Management of Peer Teaching at the University of Zambia: Lessons from Geography Education Students' noted that peer teaching was an important component in preparing geography student teachers for school teaching practice.

In a study conducted by Mundende et. al. (2022) the results indicate that teachers have difficulties in teaching and assessing their disciplines and hence the study was taken to investigate the extent to which teachers were prepared during their training (Mundende, Mubita, Kalimaposo, Haambokoma, Milupi & Sikayomya, 2022), with special focus on teaching practice aspect.

### **Objectives of School Teaching Experience at the University of Zambia**

According to the University of Zambia (UNZA) School of Education guidelines, the teaching practice enables students to:

- a) Observe qualified and experienced teachers;
- b) Relate aspects of the university courses to the classroom situation;
- c) Apply the basic sticks of planning, preparing, and presenting suitable materials to meet the needs of their classes;
- d) Develop organizational skills and self-confidence; and
- e) Establish good working relationships with pupils and teachers.

## **6. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH**

This study is situated in the interpretivism paradigm whose endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et. al., 2007). According to Creswell (1994) interpretivism is directed at understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective and at investigating interactions among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts that people inhabit. Therefore, interpretivists argue that only through the subjective interpretation and intervention in reality can that reality be fully understood. Therefore, in relation to School Teaching Practice, there are many interpretations of reality and these interpretations are in themselves a part of the knowledge being pursued in this study. Students themselves have a way of perceiving School Teaching Practice. Its' benefits and misgivings, if any are perceived differently by students. The study utilised descriptive survey research design that mainly used qualitative research methods. Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were used as data collection methods. Using purposive sampling technique, a sample size of 25 students were targeted. The sample comprised students who took geography as their teaching subject whilst in the university. In analysing the data, thematic analysis was utilised for this study.

## **7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **7.1. Benefits of School Teaching Practice (STP) to a Geography Student Teacher**

- a) What are the benefits of School Teaching Practice to a Geography student teacher?

The geography student teachers had varied responses to the benefits of school teaching practise to a geography student teacher as follows:

**Participant A:** *Teaching practice helps us to put theory into practice. What we learn in university geography teaching methods is put into real practice, in a natural environment.*

**Participant D:** *Teaching experience helps me learn from the already serving teaching. They help us settle and concentrate on the realities of teaching geography in a secondary school.*

**Participant F:** *In the ever-changing education environment, effective teaching practices are helping educators enhance their instructional style. Using these teaching methods allow them to adjust their teaching strategies to fit both the students and the material, recognizing that different students learn in different ways.*

**Participant H:** *Enables student-teachers discover their own strengths and weaknesses in classroom teaching and provide opportunities to enable them address their weaknesses and enrich their strengths*

**Participant I:** *Provides student-teachers with an opportunity for further acquisition of professional skills, competencies, personal characteristics and experience for full-time teaching after graduation*

**Participant M:** *To serve as a means of assessing the quality of training being provided by teacher training institutions.*

## 7.2. Challenges Students Faced in Teaching and Learning Geography during STP

- b) What challenges did students face in teaching and learning of geography during School Teaching Experience?

The challenges that students faced during teaching and learning of geography during School Teaching Experience were as follows:

(i) *Lack of accommodation:* In this study, the results show that lack of accommodation is the major difficulty facing student teachers during field teaching practice. This is because during field teaching practice majority of student teachers were not given accommodation by school administrations. One student expressed concerns about lack of accommodation during STE as follows:

*My colleagues and I were not accommodated within the school premises during school experience. Therefore, we had to look for alternative accommodation from other compounds outside the school. This gave us difficulties in terms of transport as we had to be walking long distances every day to and from school. This made us reach the school tired and could somehow affect our lesson delivery.*

These findings agree with the studies conducted by Hzekial (2014) and Ogumogu (2013). Hzekial (2014) and Ogumogu (2013) observed that the difficulty which student teachers face mostly during field teaching practice is lack of accommodation. Therefore, this study recommends that field teaching practice allowance should be provided on time to enable student teachers to find accommodation for their own if the school cannot accommodate them.

(b) *Lack of teaching and learning materials:* The students also complained of lack of teaching and learning aids in geography. Mostly, students had to improvise. However, improvisation has limits as some of the teaching aids were too technical and complicated to be locally made. One student expressed concern on lack of teaching and learning materials in geography and put it as follows:

*Our school did not have the much needed materials for teaching and learning geography. As much as we could improvise, some topics required teaching aids that were too complicated to improvise and make locally. Some teaching materials were too expensive to be bought by a student teacher like me. This may have affected the quality of teaching and learning of geography during school experience.*

With reference to the foregoing problem noted by geography student teachers, students found it problematic to apply different teaching approaches they had learnt in the class effectively, this lead to ineffectiveness of the teaching practice. This is in tandem with the study by Susan (2003) who also observed that most schools did not have enough teaching and learning materials to facilitate the teaching and learning process.



From the foregoing, it can be noted that some topics student teachers taught in geography needed teaching materials that needed buying. Some topics needed models of physical features like gorges, water falls, maps, compasses, weather instruments and so on. Some of these teaching and learning aids cannot be easily made by student teachers on school experience. They have to be bought by the school. However, due to competing need for other school pressing issues, coupled with lack of money in schools, the school administrations may not buy teaching and learning materials. This is in tandem with Mubita (2016) who noted that poor funding in schools is a factor in prioritising certain competing needs in schools.

The geography student teachers also bemoaned the lack of proper use of Information and Communication Technologies (ITC) in the exploitation of geography teaching and learning in schools. They felt that some topics and learning practices in secondary school geography can best be approached using ICT gadgets. These included access to computers and internet for research engagement. This should be for both pupils and teachers. Because schools were not equipped in terms of ICT equipment, student teachers felt that a component of research could have been affected in one way or the other. The use of ICT in geography helps pupils learn by providing access to large quantities of information on people, places and environments. It also provides the framework for analysing data to investigate patterns and relationships in a geographical context. This use of ICT in teaching and learning of geography was also encouraged by Chirwa and Mubita (2021) in their study titled 'The use of ICT in teaching of Geography in selected schools of Petauke district in eastern province of Zambia.' In this study, Chirwa and Mubita noted that ICT can be used to exploit geography lessons. ICT can also be used in research on international network, reading geography e-books. Lako and Mubita (2021) in their article titled 'Geography Teachers' Perspectives on Research Engagement in Selected Secondary Schools in Serenje District of Central Province of Zambia' also noted that ICT can help teachers of geography be research engaged.

(c) *Lack of transport*: Another difficulty encountered by geography student teachers during teaching practice is the transport problem. Due to lack of accommodation in most of the field teaching practice stations, most student teachers stay far from the school and they may spend more than thirty minutes at the bus station waiting for the bus especially in the morning. These results are in line with the results observed by Nwanekezi et al. (2011).

(d) *Differences in geography content learnt in university and school syllabus*: The students bemoaned variations in the geography content learnt in university with the demands of the secondary school syllabus. Geography student teachers noted that the content they learnt in university was not similar to the topics in the geography syllabus for secondary schools. They noted that the university content was in a way not responsive to the needs of secondary school geography. This finding is consistent with, Mundende (2015) works that student teachers were not exposed to their areas of interests once in the field practicing, causing a disjoint in their implementation process, in line with what they learnt in the university One student teacher expressed her concern as follows:

*The geography content we learn in university has no direct link with the geography for secondary school syllabus. Some courses we learn in university are alien and have no direct application to geography in schools. For example, courses like remote sensing and others are not directly applicable to secondary school geography. This makes us readjust by reading ahead before teaching.*

With reference to the foregoing, it is noted that most courses done in university training like 'Remote Sensing' had no direct application to teaching and learning of geography in schools. This made it difficult to adjust to 'new topics' in school syllabus. The foregoing challenge is in agreement with Sahin (2003) who noted that geography teaching programs prepared by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) is not consistent with university geography teaching programs. Secondly, the subject matters of geography teaching programs have been taken into consideration according to the interest areas of instructors instead of the real needs of the programs.

(e) *Inadequate geography teaching methods covered in university*: The students noted that the geography teaching methods covered in university were inadequate. The real classroom situation demanded more than they covered in university. This affected their lesson delivery. They noted that

some classroom situations needed more attention in terms of lesson delivery. What was taught in university was not adequate and applicable in all situations during the teaching of geography in real classroom situation.

More so, the methodology course was taught in third year and students went for school experience in the fourth year. Therefore, students expressed concern that they may have forgotten the methods they learnt ago. This could bring about a gap in application of what they learnt. This is in tandem with Mwanza and Manchishi (2013) who noted that methods courses at UNZA were done in the third year of one's program, but only implemented the following year. This is a disadvantage in that students might forget what they were taught in their methodologies. Inadequacy in methodology was also seen in the short time allocated to peer teaching.

Students in this study narrated that they had benefited from the school teaching experience. However, all they felt that in as much as the theory acquired during university lectures provided them with enough information on how to teach, it was the teaching practice that introduced them to and gave them the exposure into the experiences of the real teaching world. This was also expressed by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) who noted that teaching practice in schools gave students a real world of practice.

(f) *Review of Teaching Experience:* After students are back from school experience, there is need to review their experiences. This helps in reviewing experiences geography student teachers underwent and share possible solutions. Nyaume (2001) and Chikunda (2005) also stress the importance of post-supervision conferences with student teachers.

### **7.3. What should be done to Overcome the Challenges Faced in Teaching and Learning of Geography during your Teaching Practice?**

From the foregoing challenges faced by geography student teachers during school teaching experience, the following solutions were proposed:

- (a) The findings from this study suggest that all the efforts spent in geography teacher training should be evaluated in terms of academic achievement criteria and lecturers should be encouraged to educate skilful teachers.
- (b) In geography teacher education and training, a lot of changes have been made without careful planning. Geography teacher education programs should be inspected and observed problems should be solved.
- (c) The geography education pedagogy must be revised time again to suit with needs of schools
- (d) Peer teaching in the university should be given more time. Each student should teach peers at least three times.
- (e) Teachers and mentors should be in interaction with the trainers so as to be up to date with societal needs
- (f) The geography content learnt in university should be a reflection of the secondary school geography syllabus.
- (g) There is need for students and lecturers to have a critical review of school teaching experience after the exercise is done.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The study noted a gap of information between training institutions and curriculum developers in terms of geography content and pedagogy. The study concluded that there was need to enhance a collaborative approach between university lecturers, curriculum developers and other stake holders in order to produce a reliable geography teacher in all teacher training institutions.

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