

The Influence of the Schools Learning Environment on the Performance of Teacher Trainees on School Practice - A Case of the School of Education, Makerere University, Uganda

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Abstract: “Schools practice” is a learning process through which teacher trainees are exposed to school environment during their internship. The purpose of this study is to identify the nature of the schools’ learning environments prevailing in Ugandan secondary schools and how they influence the performance of teacher trainees. The objectives are to both identify the physical infrastructure and teaching materials in schools, and to examine the relationships between, teacher trainees, and the teachers, administrators, supervisors and students they encounter. A qualitative approach was used to collect data, namely interviews and focus group discussions. The results reveal; (1) The poor infrastructure and sanitary conditions in some schools both government and private. The teaching materials which include textbooks, science equipment, audio visual teaching aids and other essential teaching material are inadequate in a number of schools. (2) The teacher trainees are not effectively supervised. (3) The quality of students in some schools is extremely good while in others wanting. (4) The time allocated to the internship is among other factors contributing to the performance of Teacher trainees.

Key words: Teacher trainees, the learning environment, performance of teacher trainees based on School practice

INTRODUCTION

The concept “school practice” is referred to as internship, practicum, and teaching practice by various teacher education institutions. This means the totality of what goes on in a school environment beyond just in classroom teaching (Hobson *et al.*, 2009). It is based on the philosophy that students learn best through active engagement in meaningful activities (Editorial, 2008; Alonso-Tapia and Pardo, 2006). Work based learning activities guided by the school teachers and administrators as mentors are essential experiences where students are active learners and producers of knowledge (Korthogen *et al.*, 2006; Ralph, 1994; Buitink, 2009). On the other hand, the School of Education supervisors through evaluation and reflection on classroom performance enhance learning.

The “learning environment” concept focuses on the school physical and social environment in terms of the building design, size of the classrooms and the general infrastructure including library facilities, staffroom, toilets, school compound and play ground. The physical environment should be both appropriate and attractive to teachers in the school. A school’s social, cultural and economic context is another important component of “learning environment” that influence the teacher trainees performance (Allen, 2009). The nature of school administration is an aspect of school learning

environment. Actual Performance is measured in terms of what the teacher trainee’s gain. For example, a high quality environment provides cultural, social and spiritual growth (Hofstein *et al.*, 1979). They acquire knowledge of people and situations, know-how, in the form of skills practices and attitudes. Teacher trainees develop personal familiarity with students and a school’s social context. They also learn to design responsive instructional programs, create a classroom learning community and the development of a professional identity. The teacher trainees broaden and deepen their subject matter knowledge for teaching, while they expand responsibilities and develop leadership skills (Editorial, 2008). The teacher trainee understands of the curriculum she/he is teaching is another aspect of the learning environment which will determine her/his success as a classroom teacher. The responsibilities of supervision allocated to trainees are presumed. They include extra curricular activities like games and sports, debates, fieldtrips, wildlife clubs, rotaract clubs, etc. These provide numerous learning opportunities and make a difference to a teacher trainee (Ezati *et al.*, 2010). This interaction help them learn to share information, seek help, experiment with innovative actions and seek feedback at school, they gain the capacity to make appropriate judgments in the new environment in which they find themselves, and therefore influence their performance positively (Allen, 2009). The purpose of this

study is to identify and understand the learning environment in Ugandan schools and how it critically influences the performance of teacher trainees.

Context of school of education, Makerere University:

The School of Education is one of Makerere University largest faculties with six departments highlighting Educational Foundations, Management, Psychology and Curriculum. Education in and Media, Languages, Social Science, Arts and the Science and Technology are featured. Education departments. The School of Education offers the professional teacher education while content for the disciplines is offered in the faculties of Arts, Science and Faculty of Economics and Management. As a consequence of liberalization and privatization of education in Uganda, numbers of both day and evening students increased four times between 2000-2010. The number of teacher trainees increased from 500 in 1970's to 4500 by 2009. Second and third year students and the teacher trainees pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Education go to secondary schools of Uganda for school practice. The number of teacher trainees (T.Ts) on school practice ranges between 2000 and 2800 each year. The number of full and part-time lecturers in the School of Education is approximately one hundred (100). This number of lecturers is inadequate to supervise the teacher trainees. Consequently lecturers with a teaching certificate from other faculties at Makerere University, as well as from other universities like Kyambogo University as well as secondary school teachers with a Masters Degree in Education, are recruited to help supervise teacher trainees on school practice.

The (T.Ts) identify secondary schools where they are assured of accommodation, and if a school is acceptable by the School of Education, the trainees are allowed to undertake their school practice at that particular school. For a school to be acceptable by the School of Education School Practice Committee, it has to be registered by the Ministry of Education and Sports.

Statement of the problem: Producing a quality teacher is a function of the quality of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, teacher trainees receive while at university. The School of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports and secondary schools and other educational stakeholders are responsible for producing this quality teacher. However, lack of cooperation and team-work among stakeholders often leads to poor learning environment in schools compromising the quality of young teachers. To some instructor's teacher trainees on school practice are a burden while to others they are a blessing. The School of Education is not certain of the learning environment in all secondary schools. The nature of the co-operating teachers, quality of students the teacher trainees teach, the

teaching materials available, the extra-curricular activities available in each school, and how it impacts on the performance of teacher trainees all have key influences. The product of this education system the teacher needs this school context to become a strong teaching professional.

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the nature of learning environments in Ugandan schools and how they influence teacher trainees' performance'.

Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify and analyze critically the nature of social and physical infrastructure and teaching materials in secondary schools of Uganda
- Identify coping strategies devised by students to deal with the nature of the learning environments they encounter.
- Explain the relationship between teacher trainees and secondary school students and co-operating teachers in secondary schools
- Account for the relationship between lecturers (supervisors) and teacher trainees on school practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in the School of Education, College of Education, Makerere University Uganda, in 2010. The teacher trainees and lecturers were interviewed in the university and the cooperating teachers were visited in their respective schools.

This methodology employed in this study was purely qualitative using focus group discussions with teacher trainees and interviews with co-operating teachers and supervisors. Five (5) supervisors and 10 co-operating teachers were selected randomly. Thirty (30) teacher trainees were randomly selected from 30 rural and urban schools. The schools from which the teacher trainees were selected were a mix of both government aided and private.

Focus group discussions provided real insight into teacher trainees' experiences, their actions and how they understood the real situations in schools. This method was used because saving time for the two categories of trainees-science and humanities, combined into six (6) groups since the number of teacher trainees involved was large,. The six groups helped the researcher not to lose information from the different contexts of schools in Uganda, in that many students participated. Moreover, focus groups provided teacher trainees with a platform to voice their concerns which can be considered when reviewing the teacher education programme in the School of Education.

Table 1: Infrastructure according to 30 teacher trainees

Item	Adequate	Not adequate	Not available	Other comments
Classrooms	13	17		Use tree shades
Laboratories	6	6	8	Use neighboring school's facilities
Library	8	12	10	
Compound	5	7	8	
Toilet Facilities	15	12	2	Use City council toilets

Table 2: Teaching materials according to 30 teacher trainees from 30 schools

Item	Adequate	Not adequate	Not available	Comments
Textbooks	5	5	15	
Science Equipment and specimen	8	14	8	Borrowed
Others (TV's, Computers, etc.)	5	5	20	

The interviews, conducted in person by the researcher, were open ended questions that were designed to provide facts, opinions and attitudes from school practice supervisors, co-operating teachers and head teachers towards school practice.

Of the total of thirty teacher trainees; seven (7) were science teacher trainees of whom two were females and 23 were humanities teacher trainees of whom 8 were female. These were teacher trainees who did their internship in the second year of their programme in the period June-August 2009.

This number represented teacher trainees who undertook their school practice at both rural and urban schools. The teacher trainees were randomly selected irrespective of the background of the school where they undertook school practice. Consequently some had experience in traditional, well established, well facilitated government or private schools. Other teacher trainees went to 'third world' schools which are either government or private schools characterized by poor infrastructure, equipment and other essential facilities. As such the teacher trainees who participated in this study were exposed to students of varying quality owing to the differences in the status and culture of the respective schools. The researcher used only thirty (30) participants, because more information would have made no difference in terms of the nature of responses. This provides a broad accurate profile

Presentation of data: Data is presented under sub-themes developed according to the objectives of the study.

Infrastructure: The teacher trainees were asked to describe the kind of infrastructure they found in the school where they undertook their school practice. Their responses are recorded in Table 1 (30 T.Ts);

One teacher trainee (T.T) responded 'I taught in a school with incomplete classrooms without windows and doors, potholes on the floor/not cemented and dusty as a whole'. Seven (7) other respondents said the classrooms are small, congested, not well ventilated, the desks are inadequate, resulting in some classes being conducted under trees in one of the schools. Ten teacher trainees

reported that there were no libraries in the schools they undertook their school practice from. Others said the libraries were small with no chairs. The rest said the school from which they undertook their school practice had libraries although the books were not relevant to the subjects they were teaching. Regarding toilet facilities, some teacher trainees (4) said there were inadequate toilets at their schools. Others (8) said they were adequate but very dirty and smelly, 9 not bothered by their conditions (9) said they were very clean. "A clean environment is a healthy mind" retorted one T.T.

The laboratories according to some science T.Ts were not well facilitated with equipment-what was there is very old and irrelevant. Others (3 T.Ts) reported that laboratories were restricted for use by the two candidate classes of senior four and six, leaving the rest of the classes to conduct their experiments, if any were conducted in the ordinary classroom.

Most of the newly established private schools do not have enough space especially in urban areas. This explains the following responses of some T.Ts:

- There was a playground", (5),
- The playground is disorganized", (6) "
- There is no playground" (8),
- others did not say anything.

Teaching /learning materials: The T.Ts were asked to identify the teaching materials they found in the schools where they did their school practice. The School of Education normally gives them Manila paper and some markers. Their responses are summarized in Table 2.

The following statements made by teacher trainees: "My school had no textbooks, this was almost in all subjects, literature, geography, biology, history, physics etc"; "I was using my old notes from secondary school"; "I bought the texts and would photocopy pages from literature novels I was teaching" "In my school there were 5 books for 400 students; "I had no money so I used to teach without teaching materials; "I used pamphlets which have little content for my geography students; "Schools have neither televisions nor computers to be used for lesson presentation; Science teacher trainees might have had bigger problems as lamented below:

Table 3: Coping strategies (Response by 30 T.Ts)

Response	No. of respondents
1. I made photocopies	10
2. I bought a personal textbook	03
3. I made my own teaching materials	07
4. I supplemented to what was available	02
5. The school had all the necessary teaching materials	05
6. I used my old notes from secondary schools	03

“There were inadequate scales, essential chemicals, microscopes, beakers, filter papers, test tubes, meter rules, litmus papers, calorimeter or Wheaton bridge”. One of the T.Ts complained that the equipment was too old to be used for experiments. Others (5 T.Ts) said they skipped teaching practical electricity topics and instead concentrated on light and mechanics. Another T.T added that schools simply buy common things like rulers, knives, and wooden blocks. Almost every T.T agreed that the only time school administrators bought science equipment is before the external examinations and this may be irrelevant at the time of school practice.

Coping strategies: Teacher trainees (T.Ts) were asked to tell how they coped with the severe shortage of teaching materials during school practice. Their responses are summarized in Table 3.

Following are some comments from individual teacher trainees;

“I used to draw on manila paper to show students what the equipment looks like; I used masking tape where I lacked “holders; “Where there were no switches, I joined wires directly; “I used office pins instead of optical pins”; “I used Colgate (toothpaste) for experiments instead of ‘Brownian motion’ because what they had was too old”; “I used tissue paper for filter paper, cups for test tubes”; “I used a marked long stick for meter rule”;

The school teachers and administrators (co-operating teachers): The researcher was seeking for an insight into the relationship between the teacher trainees (T.Ts) and the teachers they find in the schools where they undertake their school practice. The responses varied according to the schools and teachers in those particular schools. Ten (12) T.Ts felt they were helped by co-operating teachers and 18 said they were not adequately assisted. Some of their responses are recorded below:

- One T.T complained “The teachers in the school didn’t give me time during orientation week to get familiar with the school culture/context
- I started teaching and marking examinations on the day I reported at school”
- “I had to look after myself, no guidance from the class teacher, no textbook given to me
- I had to pick topics myself to teach” “I was not given a topic to teach

- I looked at the work covered in the students exercise books and then picked on a topic to teach”
- “I was given topics to teach and I never knew what syllabus I was implementing”. Others complained;
- “They gave us complicated topics which they themselves fear to teach, for example, electricity and magnetism, statistics for mathematics
- These are topics which are abstract in nature and use a lot of imagination,” added another science T.T. Another one added
- I was given boring topics like classification in senior one biology, where the scientific terms in Latin are used which are too abstract to the learners”
- “We science teacher trainees were given senior one and two only to teach, not upper classes, which we would have loved
- “I felt overloaded with 18 lessons a week” (The School of Education suggests to head teachers to give T.Ts at least 12 lessons a week, however some T.Ts get as low as 6 lessons and others as high as 30)

Other T.Ts had positive comments:

- “The teacher was very helpful; she gave me the textbooks, her scheme of work, register, and information about the school and introduced me to the rest of the members of staff”. This response was echoed by at least 12 T.Ts who participated in the study.
- “Teachers never allowed us to set examinations and yet they expected us to develop marking guides for examinations we never set as well as filling in report sheets/cards.”
- “The Director of Studies never respected us. We were given heavy work like extra classes, assigned us duties any time even if we were not prepared to teach especially topics in General Paper”

Supervisors: The T.Ts were asked to describe the nature of supervisors from the School of Education and a summary of their responses is presented in Table 4.

Below are some statements made by some teacher trainees;

“Supervisors expect you to learn students’ names in two weeks; if not you receive this remark “You don’t know student names”. One even threatened to cancel my school practice because I called a student the wrong name.”

“I planned an experiment of a double period (80 minutes), the supervisor sat in my class for 20 min focusing on teaching aids only and then left.

“Supervisors arrived at school at their convenience, and expected us to fix lessons outside the timetable. This is a big problem because the students being taught do not have notebooks for the fixed lesson. “Fixed lessons are not well prepared, because of the state of panic one has to

Table 4: Teacher Trainees Assessment of their supervisors

Response	Number of Respondents
1. My supervisor was friendly	12
2. We were always in agreement during conferencing.	10
3. Supervisors did not know what we were teaching	13
4. The supervisors were not interested in the content of the lesson,	9
5. Some supervisors were not serious	9
6. Some were sleeping in the class or receiving telephone calls continuously	8
7. They sat in my class for few minutes	12
8. I Was frustrated by the supervisor. I was disappointed and lost interest in school practice	7
9. Supervisors expected us to fix lessons outside the timetable	20
10. Supervisors intimidate us and the students we teach.	15

Table 5: Teacher trainees' responses

Response	No. of Respondents
"I didn't agree with my supervisor on many points but he forced me to conform"	7
"Some supervisors point out weaknesses only and this does not motivate them at all."	19
"some supervisors are not ready to listen to us"	12
"They don't give us a way forward after pointing out our weaknesses"	8
The supervisors didn't say anything about this issue."	

Table 6: Teacher trainee description of students' behavior

Description	No. of Respondents
1. My school has 80-85% international students, from Kenya, Tanzania and Sudan who were not yet used to Ugandan environment	5
2. The language of instruction is a big problem. Many are not fluent in English	25
3. Some student are serious, disciplined and ready to learn, they are not pushed	8
4. Some students take drugs or alcohol, are militant, and not serious in class	5
5. Some students have a lot of liberty, a laissez faire type of life	5
6. The students looked at us as young people without content to give them.	5
7. At night during prep older boys would call me 'nice baby'	5 T.Ts (2 female)
8. Students in school were graded according to their intelligence, I was given the poorest class	4
9. Some students used to dodge class, fall asleep in class, and were not involved in class activities	7

go through. For example you have to design a teaching/learning aid there and then.

Some supervisors' responses follow: "It is not economical to visit a school to supervise only one teacher trainee and only one lesson of 40 minutes. What I do is to ask the teacher trainees to prepare special lessons the day I visit the school to enable me use little money for transport. I am frank with you, I have to be realistic regarding the cost of living which is very high today. It is economics therefore lecturers have to fix those lessons as and when demanded by the supervisor.

"Some students are not well prepared. They lack methods of teaching especially second years. They are not properly grounded in their subject's content. They lack books with which to prepare lessons, and they do not have enough time in the field"

"Some T.Ts fear of the students they teach. The classes in secondary school are large and yet at the School of Education, T.Ts are not prepared to teach such large classes. This makes them tremble in front of a class of 70-100, when they were expecting 40-45 students as trained.

"Some T.Ts regard school practice as a punishment, therefore they hide from supervisors'. This is supported by another supervisor who said "Some T.Ts don't care if they are not supervised, in fact they feel they have escaped the process. Only later, do they realize they need a mark for this exercise.

Certainly T.Ts suffers from anxiety during school practice as noted. They do not know what to expect from their supervisors whose actions at times reflect lack of professionalism, intimidating behavior, and little desire to help the T.Ts develop professionally.

Conferencing: What goes on during conferencing is rather undesirable in light of some of the responses from both teacher trainers and T.Ts (Table 5).

Teaching methods: The researcher wanted to find out the nature of teaching methods used by teacher trainees. Their responses in this regard are presented (Table 6);

"It is difficult to vary methods of teaching because of big classes of 80 and above. Most students just want notes" (20 T.Ts). They went on to say; "A person teaches the way she/he was taught", "Why do supervisors teach us using lecture method and expect us to teach differently (using other methods) in secondary schools?", "They talk about 'other teaching methods' theoretically using lecture method without demonstrating to us how each method is used.", "We want to learn from our lecturers. They should use those other methods when they teach us at the university. They ask us for schemes of work, lesson plans, etc, but they themselves don't have anything to show us".

The lecturer in response said, "The way T.Ts were brought up in secondary schools, the lecture method, is the only one they were exposed to!". "T.Ts will hate you

Table 7: Teacher trainees responses regarding the positive aspects of school practice

Response	No. of Respondents
I Developed self confidence, I learned public speaking	20
I Learned working under crisis and pressure	8
I developed suitable dressing code for teachers	9
My behavior changed. learnt how to relate to other people	10
Learnt how to deal with students problems, tried to solve them I regarded myself as a mentor to them"	10
I gained confidence, expressed myself freely in the staffroom	6
I realized that each person had a role to play in a school	5
School practice shaped my problem solving skills	4
I learned to be a leader since I was a house-leader. Right now I can start and manage a school effectively	4
I changed my behavior religiously and politically. I learnt that students have different characters and girls try to seduce men (me)"	8
I learned to budget my money in order to survive away from home	9

Table 8: Teacher trainee responses with respect to classroom teaching

Response	No. of Respondents
I realized I could not vary teaching methods because students are just interested in copying note	15
I realized that I have to be creative and improvise where possible	10
I got to understand the role of motivation in the teaching/learning process	6
I realized one has to treat students in a special way if one has to pass school practice with a good grade.	8
I realized students do not always understand in class so extra time has to be organized for discussions.	3
I learned to make teaching aids using local materials and I affirmed teaching skills	12
I felt grown up and responsible	5

Table 9: Response by teacher trainees regarding their performance

Response	No. of Respondents
We didn't perform well	20
We didn't deliver our best level because of limited literature and teaching materials	26
The co-operating teachers were rarely available to help us improve our performance	15
I felt what I was giving to the students was inadequate	10
The poor infrastructure and bad food affected my performance	5

if you use any other method. Secondly we do not have facilities to use other methods; no books; lecture rooms are small; no computers. Give us time, facilities, money and we will perform better".

Quality of students in secondary schools:

Learning points as positive aspects of school practice:

The T. Ts, however, realize that school practice helps them to grow personally and professionally. This is demonstrated in the explanations they gave and are presented in Table 7.

In the area of classroom teaching, the teacher trainees had a number of experiences which have been summarized and presented in Table 8.

Performance: A successful teacher is one who knows thoroughly what he/she is teaching and those whom he is teaching and has the ability to link the two through appropriate communication skills. Table 9 is a summary of the T. Ts reflections on their performance on internship.

These responses were elicited while the students had not seen the marks awarded to them by their supervisors. The researcher interviewed them well before their marks were known to them.

DISCUSSION

There are two categories of secondary schools in Uganda. Firstly, the urban/rural schools which are well

established with all the facilities needed in a school: adequate classrooms; well equipped science laboratories; well stocked, up to-date books in the library and modern computer laboratories. These schools also have adequate sanitary facilities like flush toilets or pit latrines. They offer a variety of functional extra-curricular activities such as football/netball, wildlife clubs, debating clubs and others. The students in these schools are disciplined and all the teachers are qualified.

The second category of schools is the opposite. The school may be set in a residential house, under a tree, with classrooms built using papyrus stems, cardboard or soft wood. They may not have a library or adequate toilet facilities. A playground and compound where students can relax is normally absent.

Hammer (2001) also observed that teachers in well resourced schools have better opportunities and are more likely to learn from the information technology resources than those in poorly resourced schools. In other words, the category of the school determines the availability of a good learning environment for teacher trainees and students.

With the severe shortage of teaching materials, poor classrooms and lack of laboratories, etc., the T. Ts did their best during the internship period. The T. Ts displayed their individual characteristics that promoted their motivation to learn in their different school contexts. They demonstrated skills of creativity and initiative, a passion for learning, self-efficacy, interest and commitment to

their work, a nurturing personality peculiar to teachers and a socially an outward looking personality. Lohman (2006) observed that such personal dispositions play a key role in individual learning in a workplace.

Teacher trainees used a number of educational strategies. The teachers of humanities either bought the textbooks or made photocopies of the books needed. The science T.Ts often had to compensate for what was missing yet essential to the science lesson. The school teachers and administrators the researcher talked to explained that science equipment is very expensive and yet gets 'wasted' for every experiment the students perform. It is regarded as waste because the chemicals cannot be re-used, test tubes are normally broken by students, etc. Consequently it is reasonable to suggest that this kind of attitude by school administrators does not provide a supportive learning environment for T.Ts undertaking school practice.

The teacher trainees' personal histories influence their classroom practice; particularly their confidence and their relationship with the students. The history referred to here includes their prior skills, beliefs and styles which are not valueless. They pose a certain craft and knowledge which the teacher trainees apply in situations they encounter. This confidence is the ability to create classroom and learning environments that are conducive to learning (Hawkey, 1998).

Human interactions are critically important to creating sustainable and significant interpersonal relationships in the workplace learning as observed by Mitchel and Sackney (2000). T.Ts often need help, feedback and reflection on what they try out and adopt from their past experience. With the experiences of the above T.Ts regarding their interactions with school administrators and co-operating teachers, they are not likely to have learned much from their school practice. This is a negative experience for T.Ts.

In a situation where T.Ts are abandoned by the teachers and the supervisors are rarely seen, cooperative learning/teaching could not have taken place in the field. Most of the schools had at least 4 T.Ts and this would have provided an opportunity to practice cooperative teaching/learning. There proved to be little teamwork in teaching, lesson preparation, and materials development for the lessons to be taught by T.Ts. This method could have been helpful where the classes are big, assuming the T.Ts have different gifts and can therefore complement each other. It also helps students to receive greater attention especially those with learning difficulties (Putnam, 1998). Putnam (1998) also argues that co-operative learning leads to enhanced student outcomes in the area of academic achievement, peer relationships and self-esteem. The T.Ts who participated in this study did not mention at all whether they used any cooperative approach to teaching in the classrooms.

The head teachers, directors of studies and classroom teachers ideally are supposed to work as a team to instill teaching and demonstrate in the professional ethics and demonstrate career ideals of a teacher, in the areas of content and teaching methods. Johnson's approach to cooperative learning as cited by Udvari-Solner (1995) emphasizes this point:

"teachers must learn the essential elements of positive interdependence, face-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills, and group processing and then apply the concepts to their unique instructional circumstances".

This model can be used across content areas, across grade levels and across students with very divergent social and academic skills (Udvari-Solner, 1995). However, as observed by Little (2001), traditional top down leadership and hierarchical structures instead of horizontal relationship with peers, are authoritarian in nature. Instead of collaborating in learning and decision making endeavors and this does not promote learning at school.

Relationships in schools, differed from one school to another as described by the T.Ts on internship in Ugandan schools. Teacher trainees were supervised by a variety of supervisors who were not necessarily subject specialist of the lesson they evaluated. This explains the responses like "The supervisor didn't know what I was teaching". In addition, well trained teacher educators in the aspect of school practice are few. There is a very large number of teaching assistants, assistant lecturers and supervisors recruited from secondary schools and other faculties who are not effectively orientated to school practice assessment and are likely to make mistakes. Secondly, the sheer number of T.Ts on school practice is overwhelming leading to robot-like behavior of supervisors in the field. Thirdly, the amount of money given to supervisors will directly affect their behavior in the field. However, Gore *et al.* (2004) observed that there are many factors that undermine the teacher educators' best efforts such as funding, large classes and school cultures of secondary schools. This explains the attitude of some of the supervisors who complained of financial difficulties leading them to ask students to fix lessons improtu.

The research implies that T.Ts suffer from anxiety during school practice as observed by Ezati (2010). They do not know what to expect from their supervisors whose actions often reflect lack of professionalism, intimidating behavior and poor commitment to help the T.Ts develop professionally.

In the area of teaching methods, most T.Ts have experienced exclusively the lecture method in both secondary and university classes in Uganda. This is mainly due to the large classes at both levels of education, 60-80 and 200-300 learners per class respectively. Consequently, T.Ts do not have at their disposal a variety

of teaching methods which they can confidently apply during school practice. The lecturers' defensive response is a testimony of what goes on at the School of Education with regard to some courses, particularly, the Foundation of Education and Humanities courses. Benoit (1982) recommends that teachers need to have at their disposal a number of teaching methods in order to choose those appropriate to the topics being taught and invigorate teaching through a variety of approaches. Teaching methods for large classes were not included in T.Ts training. Nacino and Desmond (1982), similarly observed that crowded classrooms make it difficult to use certain teaching materials as well as teaching methods. Korthogen *et al.* (2006) argues that teacher education is theoretical and concerned with transfer of knowledge to teacher trainees in the form of lectures, explaining the use of that method in teacher education institutions. This, he continues to argue, is counterproductive to teacher trainees learning on school practice since knowledge is created in a context as experienced by the teacher.

The relationship between teacher trainees and students differed from one school to another according to the school culture and the background of the students. Students in secondary schools lie in the age bracket of 13-20 years. This is an adolescent period when they live more and more in their own society and rely less and less on their parents/adults for their psychological satisfaction and problem solving (Omona, 1998). They are in a period of sexual development and wish to exercise their sexual capacities with the opposite sex. They have their own culture, values and norms. Omona (1998) notes that-

“they strive for approval, admiration and respect from their peers, a situation which wears out the parental and teacher's motivation leading to disapproval. Their values in most cases are at variance with the school activities or values of adult community”

Although the T.Ts reflected on the challenges they face while teaching students some of whom are undisciplined, they do not mention how they cope with such situations. Although weaknesses are highlighted among some students, it is also true that there are well behaved students especially in well established high class and religious based schools, as well as in some private schools in Uganda.

CONCLUSION

The learning environment in secondary schools, affects T.Ts differently according to the context of each school. The infrastructure in some schools, both government and private, is poor. There are few classrooms in some schools, resulting in congestion in

classrooms. Libraries are not available in some schools while science laboratories are poor in others and inadequately equipped. The socialization process into the school context by co-operating teachers is not well done in some schools. This makes trainee's feel isolated, consequently having a negative attitude towards directors of studies and some teachers. The secondary school teachers and directors of studies in some schools do not offer as much help to teacher trainees as expected. Mentoring to some teacher trainees did not take place.

It is clear that when evaluating T.Ts supervisors place emphasis on classroom observation as a means of judging the performance of T.Ts, ignoring other learning attributes that influence performance. T.Ts faces many challenges during school practice, yet they do not get adequate guidance from their supervisors as well as from the schools where they are posted. T.Ts do not practice cooperative learning among themselves, such as peer teaching, criticizing each other, preparing lessons together, etc which would otherwise help them improve on their performance.

The School of Education supervisors, are often in a hurry to ensure that all T.Ts are supervised, making it impossible for them to provide adequate guidance and assessment. The supervisors are not adequately financed to do a good job in the field.

About 70% of the T.Ts rent rooms or in a few cases, the school provides accommodation. However, due to limited funds provided by their parents/guardians, they do not feed well, even if the schools provide them with lunch. This has an impact on their performance during school practice.

RECOMMENDATION

Considering the responses of the teacher trainees, the co-operating teachers and supervisors, it is critical for a favourable learning environment to be created for the teacher trainees. While this is not always easy to implement, the following recommendations if taken up would improve considerably the learning environment in Ugandan secondary schools.

- The School of Education needs to reduce the number of teacher trainees so that schools with good learning environments are used during school practice. This implies better training approaches relevant to teacher education today, will be effectively applied with small numbers.
- Teacher trainees need to be exposed to life skills and communication skills while at university to enable them cope with the difficult conditions encountered in the field.
- Co-operating teachers in secondary schools of Uganda should be sensitized and taken on board by

the School of Education in the process of training teachers since they are key stakeholders in teacher education.

- The School Practice supervisors should be given an induction course on the pedagogy of teacher educators for them to do a good job.

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