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**TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICAL TEACHING
ASSESSMENT**

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TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICAL TEACHING ASSESSMENT

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to find ways of improving current methods of teaching practice assessment with a view to promoting student-teacher development as well as improving interaction between the student, the host-teacher and the supervisor with regard to appropriate and productive teaching behaviours.

One hundred and sixty questionnaires were distributed to teacher training colleges and to members of the University of Zimbabwe's Faculty of Education. A 72% response was received. The results revealed that although most institutions have set guidelines for the assessment of student teachers, these were not often followed and the bases of criteria used varied enormously. It was also revealed that the majority (75%) of the institutions have lists of criteria used for assessment in written form. Despite this, impressionistic, rather than analytic methods for assessing teaching practice are still prevalent.

This study indicates that there are serious weaknesses in the current system of teaching practice assessment and suggestions on how this could be improved are made.

TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICAL TEACHING ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND

After perusing through 100 critiques and grades given to students by teaching practice supervisors from various teacher-education institutions in Zimbabwe, this researcher found it difficult to establish the reliability of systematic observation from these assessments. Elements of subjectivity and the propensity of bias were observed in almost all the evaluation forms. It became obvious that the methods currently used for the assessment of practical teaching are inadequate. If education depends on competent teachers, then the validity and reliability of identifying those teachers become essential.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite several studies in this area, there seems to be no definite criteria set for the assessment of practical teaching.

In 1980, Wassermann and Eggert (cited in Shapiro and Sheehan, 1986) developed an instrument for evaluating teacher competence. The performance-based instrument focused on observable teacher behaviour related to the improvement of pupil learning. It also reflected educational values and emphasised the growth rather than grading; and, it provided the student teacher with a method of self evaluation. This instrument was field-tested at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and was found to be fairly reliable.

Another evaluation instrument was developed by Woolever (cited in Shapiro and Sheehan, 1986) using classroom observation strategies. This instrument sought to identify generic teaching competencies as well as a systematic appraisal of student teachers with reference to established desirable teaching behaviours. The instrument was found to be more reliable and valid when used in a open space or open concept school but had serious limitations when used in more traditional structural classrooms. It was also found to be time-consuming and cumbersome due to its long detailed form.

A new instrument, designated the Shapiro Scale, was designed in 1984 to provide faculty supervisors, host teachers and student teachers with a clearer and more posi-

tive means of diagnosing individual strengths and weaknesses through counselling and support. The instrument designed by Shapiro, Cohen, Wright and Pollock (1984) was an improved version of the Modified Tuckman Form. This instrument although generally regarded as reliable has also been found wanting in some parts.

The pros and cons of the different approaches to teaching practice assessment have been debated since the 1930s (Cattell, 1933; Evans, 1951; Downes and Shaw, 1968; Stones and Morris, 1972). Many of the studies conducted advanced a number of arguments against the use of rating scales in the assessment of teaching practice as they doubted the efficacy of the five - and fifteen-point scales used by many teacher-education institutions. Instead they recommended the use of a teaching profile. Stone and Morris (1972) in particular, recommended five areas of concern with current practices in teaching.

These are:

1. The form of Assessment (e.g. rating scales)
2. Evidence used in Assessment (impressionistic or analytic)
3. The Assessors (including external examiners)
4. Criteria used (e.g. Standardized Appraisal Guides) and,
5. Feedback to Students (e.g. micro-teaching using video or tape recorders).

Other strategies of evaluating teaching such as the Horizontal Evaluation Model that supervisors can use with student teachers which was developed by Gitlin, Ogawa and Rose (1984) and Feedback for Effective Teaching developed by Schempp (1988) have assisted in the refining of student-teacher assessment techniques in current use.

In Zimbabwe, while all teacher-training institutions are engaged in the assessment of teaching practice, the methods they use are open to question as no systematic or standardized techniques are followed by all.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study is to find ways of improving the methods used in the assessment of practical teaching and to recommend the development of a standardized assessment instrument.

METHOD

- (i) **Sample:**
One hundred and sixty questionnaires were sent to principals of sixteen teacher-training colleges and to lecturers in charge of the Graduate Certificate of Education at the University of Zimbabwe. Each institution received ten questionnaires which were distributed to tutors involved with teaching practice. A 72% response (115 questionnaires) was received.
- (ii) **Instrumentation:**
A questionnaire which comprised 24 items and a Lesson Observation Report Form (LORF) which was to be used as a guide to assist respondents in answering some of the questions (see appendix I) were the only instruments used in this study.

The questionnaire items included different forms of assessment, evidence used in assessment, criteria used, importance of lesson plans and schemes of work, feedback to students and the staff involved in assessing teaching practice. There was also a section which sought to elicit additional information on the assessment of practical teaching in general.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were employed. Table 1 below shows percentages of responses from all the 16 institutions on specific questionnaire items, while Table 2 shows what respondents viewed as the main criteria used in assessing teaching practice. Table 3 addresses the question of methods used by institutions to communicate the criteria used for assessing teaching practice. It reveals that apart from meetings and discussions and the distribution of Lesson Observation Record Forms by a few institutions, not many other methods are used to educate supervisors on how to assess students.

**TABLE 1: RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS
(N=115)**

1.	Do you think that teacher training institutions in Zimbabwe should all use the same criteria for assessing practical teaching?	YES	76%	NO	21%
2.	Is there a need for Lesson Observation Report Form when assessing students on Teaching Practice?	YES	79%	NO	20%
3.	Should supervisors/assessors of teaching practice simply adopt an impressionistic approach instead of an analytic one?	YES	15%	NO	74%
4.	Do you think that several (2 or 3) supervisors should be involved in the assessment of the same lesson instead of just one?	YES	88%	NO	10%
5.	Should supervisors use both impressionistic and analytic methods of assessing teaching practice?	YES	29%	NO	63%
6.	Should students be given a grade after just one lesson has been observed, instead of after a series of lessons?	YES	44%	NO	50%
7.	Should school heads be also involved in supervision of students on teaching practice?	YES	36%	NO	63%
8.	Does your institution use a printed Lesson Observation Report Form?	YES	75%	NO	25%
9.	Should student teachers be given immediate feedback at the end of the lesson instead of several days after?	YES	92%	NO	3%

10. Does your institution use video tape-recorders and/or taped lessons for micro-teaching?
 YES 35% NO 62%
11. Is it better to simply tell student teachers that they have passed or failed teaching practice instead of giving them marks or grades?
 YES 49% NO 51%
12. Should supervisors observe lessons in their subject areas only?
 YES 67% NO 33%
13. Does your institution make provision for some type of formal assessment meeting before supervisors go out to assess students?
 YES 67% NO 33%
14. Are lesson plans for students on teaching practice important?
 YES 95% NO 2%
15. Are schemes of work important?
 YES 93% NO 7%
16. Should students teaching in 'difficult' schools be assessed on an equal footing with those in less difficult schools?
 YES 21% NO 78%
(N.B. difficult schools refers to schools with poor facilities and 'problem' children).
17. When assessing students, do you make allowance for the student's likely development as distinct from his present performance?
 YES 22% NO 72%
18. Do you think there is a need for external examiners specifically designated to deal with teaching practice?
 YES 17% NO 83%
19. Do you think that problem student teachers should be seen by several supervisors?

- | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|----|-----|
| | YES | 82% | NO | 18% |
|--|-----|-----|----|-----|
20. a) Do you think that the present method your institution uses for as
sessing student teachers is always fair?
YES 50% NO 49%
- b) Would you say that your present method of assessing students on
Teaching Practice is subjective?
YES 44% NO 55%
21. Do you think that students who lack confidence in front of a class should be
allowed to continue as trainee teachers?
YES 19% NO 80%
22. Should supervisors take over classes when lessons are poorly conducted by
student teachers during teaching practice?
YES 1% NO 99%

As can be seen from the above Table 1, items 3, 4, 9, 12, 17, 19, and 20 show that the majority of college lecturers are aware that there are weaknesses in the assessment of teaching practice and that it needs improving. Items 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15 and 16 also reflect some of the most important aspects of teaching practice and how the respondents view them.

The majority of respondents think that an analytic approach to the assessment of teaching practice is better than an impressionistic one; several supervisors are better than one; there is a need for immediate feedback; expertise in the subject area observed is essential; and, that the present methods of assessment are not always fair to students.

TABLE 2
MAIN CRITERIA MENTIONED AS USEFUL FOR TEACHING PRACTICE
ASSESSMENT (N = 115)

CRITERIA	NUMBER OF MENTION
Lesson Plans/Schemes of Work	112 (97%)
Teaching Performance/Lesson Presentation	114 (99%)
Class Control/Discipline/Rapport with pupils	98 (85%)
The Pupils' Learning	59 (51%)
Communication skills/voice clarity	77 (67%)
Lesson Evaluation	5 (4%)
Appearance	18 (15%)
Personality of student	5 (4%)
Student's attitude	7 (6%)
Teacher/Pupil interaction	38 (33%)

Table 2 above shows the frequency of responses to the question on what respondents viewed as the main criteria used in teaching practice assessment. Teaching-performance and Lesson presentation were viewed as the most important while Lesson evaluation and student personalities were the least important.

TABLE 3: METHODS USED TO COMMUNICATE CRITERIA USED FOR ASSESSING TEACHING PRACTICE (N = 115)

<u>METHOD OF COMMUNICATION</u>	<u>NUMBER OF PERSONS MENTIONING THE METHOD</u>
Meetings and Discussions	67 (58%)
Letters and Memoranda from Head of Dept.	29 (25%)
In-service Training/Workshops	16 (14%)
Notice Board	7 (6%)
Distribution of Lesson Observation Record Forms by Heads	62 (54%)

Table 3 above shows how respondents communicated with each other and how they developed the skills and criteria they used for the assessment of practical teaching. Most of the methods adopted for teaching practice assessment came from meetings and discussions at the colleges (58%) while only 6% of the respondents picked up their assessment criteria from notice boards.

ADDITIONAL VIEWS FROM RESPONDENTS

In general, respondents were equally divided on whether or not to adopt a standardized instrument for the assessment of practical teaching. Most institutions, felt that one college of education may have a different approach and emphasis on what it expects from students because of the different subject areas and the levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) taught. A standardized instrument, they argue, will not be able to address all these differences as different disciplines may need different criteria and different approaches.

Through a qualitative analysis of the additional comments, 74% of the respondents also felt that apart from general competence in teaching skills, students should also be assessed in appearance, attitude towards their work and personality as these elements are also important if a teacher is going to be good and effective.

But how does one measure such traits accurately without the use of psychological tests? It seems therefore that even those respondents who claimed that they only use analytical methods for assessing students still depend to a large extent on impressionistic approaches when it comes to assessing appearance, attitude and personality.

57% of the respondents also commented that school heads and college supervisors should have a greater say in matters that involve teaching practice rather than external assessors and that the decision to pass or fail a student should rest with the college supervisors. There was a general resentment for external examiners with 62% of the respondents expressing the view that these were a waste of both time and resources.

However the idea of having more than one supervisor per lesson in order to get a balanced view on the assessment of individuals was accepted by 76% of the respondents.

The idea of general guidelines on how to assess teaching practice was accepted by 66% of the respondents who felt that many supervisors were not objective enough. Some supervisors were accused of being influenced by their own personality differ-

ences with familiar students which they use to down-grade, victimise or fail otherwise passing students.

Most respondents (87%) expressed the desire for colleges to organise staff development sessions on teaching practice. They also felt that the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Zimbabwe should be involved in organising training workshops for all colleges of Education in Zimbabwe in order to bring about a certain degree of uniformity.

97% of the respondents agreed that a Lesson Observation Report Form (LORF) was essential for every institution even though the criteria for assessment may vary.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals that if practical teaching assessment is going to serve as a way to improve teaching in schools, it must therefore strike a balance between expected standardized performance and teacher-specific needs.

While it is difficult to advocate a plan that has a specific set of standardized performance expectations that can be applied by all teachers, the study suggests that for a teacher to be competent a certain amount of specific guidelines applicable to all institutions of education must be adopted as evidenced by most respondents' desire to adopt specific criteria in some aspects of teaching practice. These, of course, must be adjusted to suit individual circumstances, different disciplines, levels and stages of the teacher's professional development and the different levels of students taught.

The study also showed a common focus for evaluation and a mutual understanding of how teaching practice could be improved. Key areas common to all institutions such as schemes of work, lesson plans, lesson presentation, learning aids, class control, communication skills and lesson evaluation show that almost all colleges of education in Zimbabwe have the same competency clusters which they use to assess teaching practice.

However, a minority of respondents (15%) said that they use impressionistic methods of assessing while (29%) said that they use a combination of both impressionistic and analytic methods. The respondents who use impressionistic methods expressed the view that since teaching is an art and not a science, an impressionistic approach is sometimes essential. However, they all agreed that it is impossible to eliminate sub-

jectivity if this method alone is used. Some of them (56%) suggested that final assessment of practical teaching should be incorporated with the student's entire performance in other areas as opposed to the 20 to 25 minutes of lesson observation alone.

If an attempt is to be made to design a standardized instrument for teaching practice, only the broader organizational aspects of the operation would be sketched with confidence since different assessors use different criteria to come up with the student's final teaching mark.

While there is a clear pattern of criteria used as the basis for assessment as evidenced by the aspects mentioned to be useful by almost all respondents (see Table 2) the conceptual strain involved in identifying the common elements in factors such as the details required in lesson plans, use of aids, appearance and dress, personality, attitude, class control and management, and communication skills makes it difficult to get objective conceptual unity in the assessment of different students by the same supervisor.

It is debatable whether or not this extreme variety of criteria used to assess students should be allowed to continue.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to be drawn from the above survey is that individual institutions are assessing different behaviours and qualities in their students. Because of these disparities and due to the lack of standardized criteria used by all institutions, it seems that teacher preparation programmes are not able to influence the final behaviour of the student teacher. The student is expected to meet certain criteria during teaching practice which will make him/her pass the course. After that it is the schools which will shape and influence the final behaviour of the new teacher when he/she meets other professionals on completion of his/her training. Since these teachers are all coming from different backgrounds where different criteria were used for assessing their suitability as teachers, a new culture of teaching methods influenced by the school and not the training institutions is what most of the professionals will follow. There is therefore a need to forge closer ties between the teacher education institutions and the schools or districts that end up employing these teachers if teaching skills are to be improved. A standardized teaching practice instrument also becomes necessary although it must be accepted that colleges should have a certain amount of freedom to design within certain guidelines and parameters, their own teaching practice criteria in

order to meet their own specific needs.

The importance of staff development programmes, workshops and seminars by all institutions on teaching practice cannot be overstated.

In order to foster true professional growth and improvement in the assessment of teaching practice financial support, systematic instructions and guidance by teaching practice experts are essential.

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APPENDIX I
UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Lesson Observation Report Form (LORF)

Student:

School:.....

Subject:

Topic:

Class:

Programme of Study:

Date:

Time:School

Observer:

University Observer:.....

External Examiner:.....

A. SCHEME OF WORK PREPARATION

- . Aims
- . Objectives
- . Division of content
- . Teaching methods
- . Learning Activities
- . Teaching-learning aids/materials
- . Source of subject matters
- . Weekly remarks

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

B. LESSON PLAN PREPARATION

- . Instructional objectives
- . Teaching-learning aids materials
- . Introduction
- . Development
- . Conclusion
- . Home work
- . Lesson notes

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

C. ARRANGEMENT AND NEATNESS OF FILE RECORDS

- . Scheme of work
- . Records of work
- . Lesson plans
- . Self-evaluation form

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

D. LESSON PRESENTATION
Introduction

- . Presenting Instructional objectives
- . Linking previous experience/knowledge of new ones
- . Pupils' Participation
- . Pupils' application
- . Questioning
- . Use of re-inforcement techniques

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Development

- . Adequacy and mastery of subject matter
- . Logical presentation of content
- . Relevance and variety of activities
- . Pupils' participation
- . Pupils' application of content
- . Use of re-inforcement techniques
- . Questioning
- . Checking/correcting class work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Conclusion

- . Linkage to lesson objectives
- . Pupils' participation
- . Pupils' application
- . Clear summary
- . Checking/correcting work
- . Assigning home work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

E. TEACHING-LEARNING AIDS/MATERIALS

Systematic writing
Ligible writing
Division of the chalkboard
Clear illustrations
Appropriate use of other aids

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

F. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND CLASS CONTROL

Classroom tidiness
Handling of noises and other disturbances
Supervision of class activities

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

G. STUDENT-TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

Interest in the subject
Enthusiatic and enjoys teaching
Mannerism
Sense of humour
Dressed and groomed
Confident and calm

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

H. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Speaks clearly
- clear questions
- Good voice
- Skilled in presenting materials
- Appropriate use of non-verbal communication skills

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

39 and
Below 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80 and

Above

Fail/

Repeat Fail

Supp. Pass Credit Merit Dist.

The highest mark is 100 whereas the lowest is 0



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