Assessing Teaching Readiness of University Students in Cross River State, Nigeria: Implications for Managing Teacher Education Reforms

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Abstract

This ex-post-facto designed study was geared towards assessing the readiness of would-be teachers in universities in Cross River State for the teaching profession, and how reforms can be managed to strengthen this. Three hypotheses were isolated to give direction to this investigation. 200 students from the two universities in the state constituted the sample drawn from a population of 1684 graduating education students. Data were generated using "Students' Teaching Readiness Questionnaire (S.T.R.Q.)". Population t-test and Independent t-test statistical techniques were used to analyze data collected. Results disclosed that teaching readiness of university education students is significantly low in terms of possession of communication skills, interpersonal skills, ICT skills and entrepreneurial skills; gender influences teaching readiness of university education students in one hand and in the other, it does not; teaching readiness of university education students does not significantly differ on the basis of institution of affiliation. On the strength of these findings, implications for managing teacher education reforms were articulated.

Keywords: Teaching readiness, Education students, University management, Teacher education, Reforms

1. Introduction

The task of teaching is not a mean feat, and it is not an all comers affair. That is why those who have taken decision to venture in it must be well prepared and ready for it. The degree of readiness is a function of the degree of preparation and the quality of teaching skills acquired by an individual over a given period of time on one hand, and the degree of training and skills imparted on the individual by an institution on the other. It is for this reason that searchlight is beamed continuously on how institutions vested with the responsibility of producing the nations' teachers are carrying out their roles and how the teacher-trainees are aligning themselves to the training provided for them.

Teaching, according to Scheffer (1973), is an activity aimed at the achievement of learning and practiced in such a manner as to respect the students' intellectual integrity and capacity for independent judgment. Readiness on the other hand has to do with attuning oneself willingly to series of training aimed at making oneself well prepared to undertake a given task. Teaching readiness therefore involves students exposing themselves to series of training provided by an institution with a view to imbuing themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective functioning in a teaching job.

Teacher education in Nigerian universities has been the responsibilities of faculties of education. It is regarded as their core function. This function is now being called to question in Nigeria. A closer look at the caliber of graduate teachers being produced nowadays raises some fundamental issues about the training being provided by these faculties, which are expressed in forms of whether they are rightly placed to train high quality teachers; whether it is the curriculum that is wrong or the implementers; what the factors are that led to the present sorry state of teacher training by faculties of education in Nigeria and how they can get out of them and whether the faculties can be strengthened or re-engineered to produce quality teachers for the present era of high technological challenges (Ijaiya, 2008)

It was in 1961 that faculty of education came into being in Nigeria following a decision reached at a National Conference organized by University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The decision had it that three years B.A. (Ed) and B.Sc.(Ed) degree would be better for teacher training instead of the then existing one year Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) course run by the Institute of Education, which required graduates to undergo additional one year in the university after graduation to qualify as teachers (Fafunwa, 2002). The new degree programmes required the undergraduate student teachers to be admitted with A Level results and spend 3 years, taking two teaching subjects in addition to Educational Foundation and Methodology Courses as well as Teaching Practice to qualify as teachers. Another new addition to this is the B.Ed programme which brought in specialized subjects like Educational Management/Educational Administration and Planning; Educational Guidance and Counseling and so on (Ijaiya, 2008). All these point to the fact that reforms are not new in teacher education in Nigeria. However, the reforms have always been in form of expansion by addition of new programmes. These new programmes are supposed to bring in new content especially practical with a view to revolutionalising teacher education. Regrettably, what is in vogue is new programmes with traditional theoretical contents, mode of implementation, evaluation and management structure. For instance, microteaching which is meant to be practical as implied in the curriculum is mostly taught theoretically with 30 minutes or less peer-teaching, which value is very doubtful (Ijaiya, 2008). A research finding by Izumi and Evers (2002) has shown that the quality of classroom teachers has the greatest impact on the performance level of students and it is the key to school improvement.

Inspite of the failure of the faculties of education in Nigerian universities to sustain teacher education reforms which has impacted negatively on the quality of student-teachers being produced, there is palpable apathy among student-teachers towards their education. It has been observed that there is lack of seriousness among them towards their studies, especially in the universities under study. Some are of the view that since the education system no longer attracts high quality teachers due to poor condition of service, working hard is unnecessary. Others see their education as a spring board for greener pastures to other professions other than teaching. More so, some feel that since teaching is a lowly rated job, much attention should be channeled to their teaching subjects such as Economics, English Language etc. which qualifies them for jobs in those fields, than core education courses. It is against this background that this study is focused on assessing teaching readiness of university education students in Cross River State and its implication for managing teacher education reforms.

2. Hypotheses

H1: Teaching readiness of university education students is not significantly low in terms of possessions of:

(a) Communication skills

(b) Interpersonal skills

(c) Information and communications technology (ICT) skills

(d) Entrepreneurial skills

H2: Teaching readiness of university education students is not significantly influenced by gender

H3: Teaching readiness of university education students does not differ on the basis of affiliation.

3. Research Methods

This study was carried out in Cross River State of Nigeria. This state constitutes part of the south-south geo-political zone, lying on the eastern axis of the zone. It is one of the oil-rich states in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. It is conducted on the two universities, located in the state - one owned by federal government, while the other is owned by the state government.

This ex-post-facto designed study had all the final year students in the Faculties of Education in the two universities as its population. They are 1684 in number. The sample for the study was made up of 200 students drawn using stratified random sampling technique. A breakdown of the sample showed that 100 students were drawn from University of Calabar, while the other 100 were drawn from Cross River State University of Technology. The sample was drawn in such a way that male and female students were given equal representation.

One researchers-constructed instrument called "Student Teaching Readiness Questionnaire (S.T.R.Q.)" was used for data collection. It had 2 sections - A and B. Section A contained 6 demographic variables, while section B arranged on a 5-point rating scale had 24 items; 6 of which measured each of the four variables isolated for the study. Altogether, the instrument contained a total of 30 items. The instrument was face-validated by experts in measurement and evaluation, while the trail test yielded a reliability coefficient ranging from 0.66 to 0.83. These figures confirmed that the instrument was reliable in using it to achieve the research objectives. The researchers

handled the administration of the instrument personally and with the help of research assistants. This measure ensured that the sampled subjects completed the questionnaire, and a 100 percent returns rate achieved.

Data obtained were subjected to statistical analysis with the use of Population t-test (test of one sample or single mean) and Independent t-test. Summaries of the results were presented in tables

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Hypothesis One

Teaching readiness of university education students is not significantly low in terms of possession of

(a) Communication Skills

(b) Interpersonal skills

(c) Information and communications technology (ICT) skills

(d) Entrepreneurial skills

The only variable in this hypothesis is teaching readiness of university education students. Population t-test (test of one sample mean) is used to analyze the data collected. Summaries of the results are presented in Table 1.

The results presented in Table 1 indicated that teaching readiness of university education students is significantly low in terms of possession of communication skills (t = -4.719, p < .05); interpersonal skills (t = -4.059, p < .05); ICT skills (t = -2.127, p < .05) and entrepreneurial skills (t = 2.543, p < .05). The null hypothesis is by these results, rejected because the obtained t-values are found to be higher than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 level of significance and 199 degrees of freedom.

Further examination of the result in Table 1 showed that the observed mean teaching readiness of university education students is lower for 3 of the teaching skills than the expected mean teaching readiness of 18.00, whereas in the remaining 1 it is higher. Statistical comparison of these observed mean values and the expected mean value of 18.00, using Population t-test (test of one sample mean), negative t-values were obtained for the former, while positive t-value is obtained for the later. This means that university education students in Cross River State have low teaching skills, an indication that their teaching readiness is low or poor.

4.2 Hypothesis Two

Teaching readiness of university education students is not significantly influenced by gender. The independent variable is gender while the dependent variable is teaching readiness of university education students. Independent t-test statistical technique is used to analyze the data from the two variables. Summaries of the results are presented in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 showed that teaching readiness of university education students is significantly influenced by gender in terms of possession of communication skills (t = 2.477, p<.05). In contrast, the results also indicated that teaching readiness of university education students is not significantly influenced by gender in terms of possession of interpersonal skills (t = -0.646, p>.05); ICT skills (t = -1.361, p>.05) and entrepreneurial skills (t = 0.976, p>.05). The null hypothesis is by these results, rejected in 1 teaching skill and retained in 3 others because the obtained t-values are found to be higher than the critical t-value of 1.972 in one variable and lower in 3 others (teaching skills) at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom.

Further examination of the results disclosed that male education students have higher mean teaching readiness in communication skills ($\overline{x}$ = 18.72) and entrepreneurial skills ($\overline{x}$ = 16.89) than their female counterparts. However, female education students have higher mean teaching readiness in interpersonal skills ($\overline{x}$ = 17.21) and ICT skills ($\overline{x}$ = 15.87) than their male colleagues. By implication, this means that male and female education students in universities are equal in their teaching readiness. That is, male education students possess some teaching skills better than their female counterparts, while female university education students also possess some teaching skills better than their male colleagues.

4.3 Hypothesis Three

Teaching readiness of university education students does not differ on the basis of affiliation. The independent variable is affiliation, while the dependent variable is teaching readiness of university education students. Independent t-test statistical technique is used to analyze data from the two variables. Summaries of the results are presented in Table 3.

Results in Table 3 revealed that teaching readiness of university education students does not differ significantly on the basis of affiliation in terms of possession of: communication skills (t = 0.333, p>.05); interpersonal skills (t =

1.025, p>.05); ICT skills (t = 0.352, p>.05) and entrepreneurial skills (t = 1.743, p>.05). The null hypothesis is by these results, retained because the obtained t-values are found to be lower than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom.

Further examination of the results in Table 3 disclosed that education students in federal university have higher mean teaching readiness in terms of possession of the 4 teaching skills than their state counterparts, but these were not high enough to warrant a significant tangible difference. Therefore, this means that education students in federal university are more favourably disposed in teaching readiness than their state colleagues.

5. Discussion of Results

The analysis of hypothesis one produced a significant result which is, teaching readiness of university education students is significantly low in terms of possession of: communication skills, interpersonal skills, information and communications technology skills and entrepreneurial skills. This necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis and retention of the alternate hypothesis.

This result by implication means that education students in universities in Cross River State possess low communication skills, interpersonal skills, ICT skills and entrepreneurial skills, and as such are found wanting in their teaching readiness. A plausible explanation for this finding is the low regard accorded to the teaching profession by successive governments at the Federal and State levels on one hand, and the society on the other. This manifests in forms of poor treatment meted to them by governments and poor societal recognition. This creates the impression among university education students that the teaching profession does not portend a bright future for them and as such, working hard to make a career in it is a fruitless venture. It is therefore not surprising to observe that these students perform better in their respective elective courses where they feel holds greener pastures for them.

University education students procession of low communication skills as is evidenced from this result collaborates the outcome of Adeosun and Maduekwe's (2008) study that higher education students in Nigeria are falling short of standards in writing and communication skills, a development which prompted Akere (1998) earlier, to note that the need to improve English Language proficiency in our tertiary institutions has become very critical.

Furthermore, this finding is in consonance with that of Aniebonam's (2008) which confirmed that vast majority of students in Nigerian Universities lacked basic computer resources, equipment or skills. This severely impacts on their ability to get most out of their university learning experience. In the same vein, this finding corresponds to that of Akuegwu and Udida (2008) that students' orientation towards entrepreneurial studies in universities is significantly low, which manifests in their acquisition of poor entrepreneurial skills. With this low possession of essential skills necessary for a would-be teacher to prepare adequately for the callings of the teaching profession, it therefore follows that the extent of teaching readiness of university education students is far from being ideal.

Results of hypothesis two had a mixed outcome. That is teaching readiness of university education students is significantly influenced by gender in the aspect of possession of communication skills, while in the aspects of possession of interpersonal skills, ICT skills and entrepreneurial skills, teaching readiness among them is not significantly influenced by gender.

This finding suggests that male and female university education students differ in their possession of communication skills and as such are not the same in their teaching readiness. Male university education students posses better communication skill than their female counterpart and as such are more ready to teach, judging from their higher mean score ($\overline{x}$ = 18.72) than their female colleagues ($\overline{x}$ = 16.59).

A plausible explanation for this outcome is that males by virtue of their nature are usually breadwinners in their respective families and as such are likely to work harder towards achieving the things that enables them meet up with this demand. The females on the other hand are made to depend on their spouses. This explains why some of them go to school, acquire the necessary skills and knowledge and yet decide not to work.

In contrast, this finding also had it that teaching readiness of university education students is not significantly influenced by gender with regards to possession of interpersonal skills, ICT skills and entrepreneurial skills. That is, both sexes possess these skills equally. This finding in part contradicts that of Adedeji (2008) from a review of literature that girls in developing countries lack access to technologies and that gender disparities exist among male and female students in ICT skills acquisition, which is in favour of male students. Following a similar pattern of results, the findings of Akuegwu and Udida (2008) posit that male and female university students in Cross River State differed significantly in their acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. From the main finding of this hypothesis and the ones enumerated, it therefore follows that gender disparities or similarities in skills acquisition, either for

teaching readiness or other employment purposes is circumstantial in nature. That is, results follow a pattern of what is in vogue at the time of the investigation.

Results of hypothesis three disclosed that teaching readiness of university education students in Cross River State does not differ on the basis of affiliation. That is, teaching readiness of would-be teachers in universities does not tow the line of the type of university they are receiving their training. This implies that the teaching readiness of these students is the same irrespective of whether they are studying in a Federal or State University. The reason for this finding may hinge on the fact that the students under investigation are exposed to the same curriculum for teacher education, study under lecturers with similar qualifications and operate under the same prevailing learning environment in the universities located in the state. Following this situation, university education students in the state, whether in Federal or State owned, have the tendency of not differing in their possession of communication skills, interpersonal skills, ICT skills and entrepreneurial skills, and as such reflect the same pattern of teaching readiness.

This finding is contrary to the outcome of studies conducted by several authors. For instance, Adeosun and Maduekwe (2008) reported that students from University of Lagos and Lagos State University differ in their acquisition of communication skills. Akuegwu, Nwi-ue and Aguba (2009) found that students' perception of ICT education and their acquisition of ICT skills are significantly influenced by their technology-based tertiary institution of affiliation. Bassey, Akuegwu, Umoren, Ekpiken, Egbona and Uche (2008) revealed that state universities had a higher provision of entrepreneurial studies' skills than their federal counterparts. All these point to the fact that federal and state university students differ in their acquisition of functional skills.

6. Conclusion

Arising from the results of this investigation, the conclusion drawn is that university education students' teaching readiness viewed from their possession of the four teaching skills is inadequate and far from meeting the ideal expectation. Under this condition our educational system especially at the primary and secondary levels, where these students are likely to ply their trade upon graduation is likely to continue to suffer setbacks.

7. Implications for Managing Teacher Education Reforms

The outcome of this study has made it imperative for effective management of teacher education reforms. As a result, the following implications are put forward.

i. Management of universities should ensure that communication skills of student-teachers during the practical teaching exercise are properly monitored by periodically reviewing it in line with the demands of the moment. This will enable them correct any observed lapses either by introducing new method of teaching it or strengthening it by introducing new textbooks to teach it or allotting more time to it in the timetable.

ii. Management of universities at the faculty levels should promote micro-teaching among the students by ensuring that adequate time is allotted to it in the timetable and students participate actively in it. Moreover, students should be encouraged to correct the observed shortcomings of one another in the class. This will enable them develop proactive working relationships and improve their interpersonal skills. Through this measure university education students will learn how to relate well with their pupils or students in primary and secondary schools, which is an essential ingredient in result-oriented teaching and learning.

iii. Management of universities at the institutional and faculty levels should give top priority to the acquisition of ICT skills by students, by ensuring that the teacher education curriculum is ICT-compliant. To this end, modalities should be set in place to provide a well equipped computer laboratory in the faculty where lecturers and students can have the opportunity of acquiring ICT skills and be abreast with new developments in it. This has become imperative because ICT has taken a centre stage in virtually every human endeavour in the world today.

iv. Management of the universities at the institutional and faculty levels should work towards education students offering entrepreneurial studies compulsorily throughout the duration of their programmes in the university. This will place the students on a better pedestal to master the concepts and acquire the requisite skill in it which is very essential for decision-making. By this, students are placed on a better position to decide what to teach and how to teach it to achieve better results when they become full-fledged teachers.

v. University management at the faculty level should provide intellectual leadership by ensuring that new, but relevant courses are introduced from time to time by monitoring events in the world. For instance, climate change which can be viewed from deciphering its implication to educational development and how education can be used to tackle it.

vi.　University management at the institutional and faculty levels should prioritize academic staff development by sponsoring them to local and international conferences. This will enable them to keep in touch with recent developments in educational programmes and as well apply new knowledge to their classroom teaching. Moreover, they should ensure that entitlement of education lecturers are paid to them as at when due. This has become absolutely necessary because an essential practical way of managing teacher education reforms to achieve tangible results is by making those whose onus it is to impart the requisite skills and knowledge to the students happy.

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Table 1. Population t- test (test of one sample mean) of the level of teaching readiness of university education students **(**N=200)

Variables	Expected Mean μ	Observed Mean $\overline{x}$	SD	T
Communication skills	18.00	15.31	8.16	-4.719*
Interpersonal skills	18.00	15.93	7.97	-4.059*
ICT skills	18.00	16.83	7.80	-2.127*
Entrepreneurial skills	18.00	19.45	8.16	2.543*

*Significant at 0.05; df = 199; critical t-value = 1.972

Table 2. Independent t-test statistical analysis of the influence of gender on university education students' teaching readiness

Gender					
Males, N=100			Females, N=100		
Variables	$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD	t
Communication skills	18.72	6.46	16.59	5.74	2.477*
Interpersonal skills	16.68	4.76	17.21	6.63	-0.646
ICT skills	14.74	5.96	15.87	5.74	-1.361
Entrepreneurial skills	16.89	4.96	16.06	6.92	0.976

*Significant at 0.05; df = 198; critical t-value = 1.972

Table 3. Independent t-test statistical analysis of the difference in teaching readiness of university education students on the basis of affiliation

Institution of Affiliation					
	Federal, N=100		State, N=100		
Variables	$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD	t
Communication skills	20.16	8.46	19.78	7.66	0.333
Interpersonal skills	18.72	9.07	17.51	7.54	1.025
ICT skills	17.44	6.61	17.12	6.29	0.352
Entrepreneurial skills	19.01	5.17	17.72	5.35	1.743

*Significant at 0.05; df = 198; critical t-value = 1.972