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School Attachment at TTC De La Salle: Trials and Tribulations

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Abstract

School attachment refers to the practical component of teacher training in which a student teacher spends a period of a school term in a school environment, applying theory learnt at college to real classroom situations. During that period, tutors regularly visit student teachers to check on their progress and give feedback, especially on lesson preparation and delivery.

This study investigates what is happening on the ground as far as school attachment is concerned. Problems faced by Year 3 Teacher Training College student teachers on school attachment in Rwandan primary schools will also be explored. Suggestions for improvement will be proffered.

We adopted the phenomenological case study in which we collected data from the natural setting, namely: five purposively selected primary schools. We did our pilot study at the sixth school. We used three methods of data collection namely: direct observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Triangulation). Our participants were TTC student teachers on school attachment, their pupils, school administrators and the school attachment coordinator.

Our findings showed that pupils faced conceptual and communication challenges because most of them were not yet proficient enough to use ESL effectively to learn in class. Student teachers were proficient enough to use ESL as the medium of communication in class albeit they sometimes used broken English to communicate concepts to their learners. When student teachers and their pupils failed to communicate effectively, they code-switched to Kinyarwanda, their L1.

The use of media, which in most cases was absent, could have helped to ease that problem. Pupils and student teachers are encouraged to speak in English when they are in class and outside. Debating competitions in English should also be held frequently. TTC tutors should visit student teachers on school attachment at least three times, and not just once as is the case currently.

1.0 Introduction and Overview

1.1 Background to the Study

The school attachment in Rwandan primary schools is an opportunity for student teachers to be in a school environment where they marry the theory and skills they have been learning about in TTCs (REB 2020:111). It is during this period that the student teachers develop and refine their skills and professional capacity for classroom teaching in their subject specialization, including those involving student management, pastoral care and relationships with parents or guardians and the community as a whole. The student teachers will, among other things, demonstrate the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate effective teaching and learning strategies. They will put into practice theories and principles of teaching by implementing the Competence-Based Curriculum For this to succeed, tutors need to shift from the traditional methods of instruction and adopt participatory and interactive methods that engage student

teachers in the learning process. This learner-centred approach should involve diverse learning experiences, including but not limited to individual, paired and group work, oral questioning, discussions, debates, role-play, presentations, projects, practical work, investigations, problem solving, assignments, field visits, tests and quizzes (REB, 2020:115).

Rwanda National Policy on the use of English

The national policy on English in Rwanda aims to promote the use of English as a global language and a means of communication in international business and diplomacy. The policy recognizes the importance and use of English in accessing information, technology and opportunities for education and employment. Therefore, the policy aims to improve the proficiency of Rwandans in English, through the provision of quality English language instruction in schools and universities. The policy also encourages the use of English in daily life, both in formal and informal settings, to promote its use and relevance in Rwandan society. Furthermore, the policy promotes the integration of English language skills into other subjects and areas of study to enhance the overall quality of education in Rwanda. Therefore, it is crucial that student teachers are proficient in English to effectively teach in the primary schools using it as the language of instruction (REB, 2020:115).

Deployment of Students to Attachment Schools

Initially, 231 Year 3 student teachers were deployed to 111 primary schools dotted in the following provinces of Rwanda: Kigali, Northern, Eastern and Western Provinces. Normally, TTC de la Salle deploys its student teachers to Kigali, Eastern and Northern Provinces only because of their proximity to the college. The Western Province is usually excluded from the list of provinces to which students are deployed because it is far from the college. This year it was included because some parents made a special request to have their daughter deployed there because of health reasons. So, there is only one student teacher in the Western Province. Of the 231 students enrolled this year, 117 are females and 114 were males. But now there are 113 males left after one male student was expelled for thieving. He stole a smart cellphone and a laptop from his colleagues and many other things at his attachment school. The 111 schools in which the remaining 230 Year 3 student teachers are deployed are situated in 78 sectors which are located in 12 districts of the 4 provinces alluded to above.

During deployment, the college makes sure that students are deployed to schools near their homes so that they stay with their parents or guardians who will provide them with the basic amenities they require during their school attachment term. Examples of these amenities are accommodation, food, and transport. This is necessitated by the fact that student teachers on school attachment do not receive allowances from the government. Another advantage of this practice is that parents will see to it that their children will not engage in promiscuous sexual behaviour like the one-night stand, substance abuse and any other forms of unbecoming behaviour.

It is against this background that the Pedagogical and Research Advisors (PRA) Team went into Rwandan primary schools to find out what is happening on the ground as far as school attachment in Rwandan primary schools is concerned.

1.2 Research Question

What can be done to improve the quality of TTC student teachers on school attachment in Rwandan primary schools?

1.3 Aims and Objectives

1.3.1 Aims

This study aims to improve the quality of TTC student teachers on school attachment in Rwandan primary schools.

1.3.2 Objectives

By the end of this study, students on school attachment in primary schools should be able to:

- write SMART objectives in their lesson plans;
- select suitable strategies, technology, media and materials to use to teach effective lessons;
- utilize suitable strategies, technology, media and materials to teach effective lessons;
- involve their learners in the learning process through learner participation;
- update their pedagogical records timeously for the benefit of their learners; and
- participate in co-curricular activities both at school and in the community.

1.4 Research Design and Methodology

1.4.1 Research Design

To realise the objectives of this study, we employed the qualitative research design in which the "inquirer makes knowledge claims based on constructivist and/or advocacy participatory perspectives," (Galt, 2008:20).

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's point of view. However, qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor's perspective by detailed interviewing and observation. They argue that quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture the subject's perspective because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:9).

As a result of choosing this type of paradigm, my research will develop and construct theory. An inductive approach to research will be used. "Qualitative research primarily employs inductive reasoning", (Kumar, 2011:57). An inductive approach to research uses various forms of interpretative analysis of meaning-making to arrive at non-generalisable conclusions (Trafford and Leshem, 2008:98). Our reasons for using an inductive approach are to:

1. condense extensive and varied raw data into a brief summary format;
2. establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and
3. develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the text (raw data) (Thomas, 2003:2).

The theoretical framework underlying the purpose and focus of this study is the phenomenological case study "that attempts to understand participants' perspectives and views of social realities" (Leedy, 1997:161). Its purpose is "to understand what a specific experience is like by describing it as it is found in concrete situations and as it appears to the people who are living it" (Leedy, 1997:161).

1.4.2 Research method

Fieldwork formed the basis of my data collection methods because "it enables the researcher to engage in informal conversation with the participants and to observe and understand the phenomenon as it is experienced by them," (Leedy, 1997:158). In this study, I observed how the research participants interacted in class during lessons. I observed different lessons conducted by student teachers teaching all subjects taught at primary school level in Rwanda, except French, Kinyarwanda and Kiswahili to ESL

learners. In addition to direct observation of lessons, I also employed the following methods: in-depth interviews and document analysis (Triangulation).

1.5 Participants of the study

Participants of this study comprised TTC student teachers on school attachment at 6 purposively selected primary schools in Byumba and the pupils they taught, mentors and administrators at those institutions as well as the school attachment coordinator.

1.6 Sampling procedures

A sample is defined as a smaller and more manageable representation of a larger group or a subset of a larger population that contains characteristics of that population. A sample is used in statistical testing when the population size is too large for all members or observations to be included in the test (Ravikiran 2023).

Samples for qualitative research studies are generally smaller than those used in quantitative research studies (Mason, 2010: 1; Yin, 1994: 3). If large samples like those used in quantitative research are used in qualitative studies, this does not result in a corresponding rise in data collected by the qualitative researcher because a saturation point will be reached at a certain point. This saturation point is the point of diminishing that manifests itself when the data starts to repeat itself if the researcher continues to collect more and more data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967: 1).

Creswell (1998) recommends 5-25 interviews for a phenomenological study. But Bekele and Ago (2022) point out that sample size for 1 qualitative research is persistently controversial among qualitative researchers in Social Science. These authors contend that “it depends”. They go on to explain that it depends on several factors ranging from the nature of the selected group; whether it is homogeneous or heterogeneous; the scope of the study; the nature of the topic; quality of data; type of research design; type of research questions; available resources, time availability; to the experience of the researcher with qualitative research.

To choose the school, class and participants, I used ‘purposive sampling’ because in purposive sampling the researcher is able to select “information-rich cases for study in depth when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing to generalise to all such cases,” (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:378, as cited in Siwela, 2013:8). Furthermore, “the units selected are especially qualified to assist in our investigations,” and “population parameters found in the population can be represented in the sample” (Du Plooy, 1995:63).

I purposively selected 6 primary schools within walking distance from TTC de la Salle. Permission and mission orders were obtained from the principal of TTC de la Salle.

1.7 Data Collection Techniques

In this study, I was a non-participant observer when I collected my primary data. I observed lessons taught by TTC de la Salle student teachers. My observations were not concealed (covert) but were open (overt). I analysed my data as it came. Leedy (1997:158) explains why: “It is important that a case study researcher analyses data while also collecting it because what is learned from data collected at one point in time often is used to determine subsequent data collection activities.”

1.8 Data Presentation and Analysis

1.8.1 Data Presentation

- **Direct observation**

The first method that I used to collect data to enable me to answer my research questions was the direct observation method. I observed teachers delivering lessons to their pupils. Use of a video camera to capture what transpired during the lessons would have been the most ideal thing to do. But since I did not have one, I relied on my field notes.

- **Face-to-face in-depth interviews**

To collect more data that could help me to answer my research questions, I also interviewed selected pupils, teachers, school administrators and the TTC de la Salle school attachment coordinator.

- **Document analysis**

I also analysed pupils' written exercise books and TTC student teachers' pedagogical documents.

1.8.2 Data Analysis

Steps in analysing the data

The data that was in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and pages, was subjected to three concurrent flows of action as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994:10 – 12, cited in Walliman 2011:131 - 132) namely: data reduction, data display and conclusion. I analysed data as I collected it for the reasons that I have already alluded to above.

I compiled together all my field notes. I then organised all the data. I gave codes to my first set of field notes drawn from observations, interviews, or document reviews. I sorted and sifted through the materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups and common sequences. I identified these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences and took them out to the field in the next wave of data collection.

I began to elaborate a small set of generalisations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database. I examined those generalisations in light of a formalised body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.

1.9 Observations

Positive

- I received a warm welcome at all the schools that I visited;
- I witnessed cordial working relationship between student teachers and mentors and administrators;
- All the student teachers were smartly dressed and all of them had very clean white overcoats, like the trained teachers and one would not be able to differentiate between a student teacher and a qualified teacher;
- Most lesson plans had clear objectives. The student teachers clearly stated the goals and objectives of the lesson at the beginning and pupils were aware of what they were supposed to achieve by the end of the lesson;
- The material that student teachers taught was interesting and relevant to the learners' lives and it was presented in a way that captured their attention and interest. In other words, pupils were intrinsically motivated;
- Student teachers encouraged pupils to participate actively in the lesson through discussions, hands-on activities and other interactive methods;
- Many student teachers were able to adapt the lesson to meet the needs of different learners, including

those with special needs;

- Many student teachers were able to use a variety of formative assessment methods to evaluate students' understanding and progress throughout the lesson, and provide feedback to help them to improve;
- Student teachers were proficient in the English language;
- Student teachers were able to adjust their level of English to that of their classes;
- Student teachers encouraged pupils to speak in English and not in Kinyarwanda;
- Student teachers used ESL as the medium of instruction in class;
- Student teachers sometimes code-switched to Kinyarwanda when pupils failed to comprehend information in English;
- Student teachers also code-switched to Kinyarwanda when they failed to express themselves coherently in ESL;
- Student teachers sometimes accept and encourage chorus answers from time to time;
- Some classes were very well disciplined;
- Objectives of most lessons seen were achieved;
- All Science lessons (SET) that we saw were activity-based. Student teachers were facilitators in the learning process (REB, 2020:115);
- In all the Mathematics lessons that we saw, pupils were active participants and the student teachers used media.

Negative

- Most lessons seen had no lesson introduction;
- No distinct sections of a lesson plan, viz: lesson introduction, lesson development and conclusion.
- Dearth of charts on walls in classroom;
- The few charts seen were dirty and carelessly done.
- Most of the lessons were taught without media. It was just talk and chalk;
- Most of the lesson introductions were not stimulating. It was always recapitulation of the previous lesson;
- Many pupils do not follow when the teacher speaks exclusively in English;
- Many student teachers used group work. However most of the groups were too large to allow all pupils to contribute. Some groups were as large as 7 – 10 pupils;
- Discipline was lacking. Some student teachers competed with pupils when giving instructions in class;
- Some student teachers preferred to use lecture method instead of activity-based methodologies;
- Some student teachers copied notes from the text book and asked pupils to read after them. Questions were written next to those notes and pupils just copied the answers;
- Group discussions were held in Kinyarwanda and not in English;
- When greeting teachers and visitors, some classes were shouting instead of talking;
- Some student teachers addressed their classes while they were writing on the chalkboard;
- Some student teachers used the 'telling method' instead of asking pupils to attempt to explain, e.g. how do you rearrange numbers in ascending or descending order?
- Student teachers should avoid use of blue chalk when writing on the chalkboard;
- Some student teachers brought suitable media to class, but they used the media themselves instead of letting pupils to do so, e.g. arranging numbers on cards in ascending or descending order;

- For Science lessons, student teachers have no time to check if all pupils' laptops are functional since the laptops move from class to class at the end of each lesson;
- All Science lessons observed were practical lessons in which the student teacher gave simple straight forward instructions which pupils could easily follow;
- In RSR Unit on 'Economy', Sub-unit on 'Money', lessons, student teachers just used the chalk and talk method without media. Some bank notes could have been brought to class. Pupils could have dramatized buying and selling, reasons for lack of money in the family, etc.;
- Some student teachers clashed with the TIC because they were disobedient. As a result, they were sent to the school head for disciplinary action;
- One TIC complained that the student teachers spent too much time on their cell phones and they were not punctual for lessons. She lamented that all the student teachers must change their behaviour;
- Some student teachers were said to be very lazy. They copied and pasted lesson plans and other pedagogical records from previous students' work;
- Some students do not take advice. They are very defensive.
- Some student teachers stopped planning the day they were supervised by their tutors.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Student teachers

Student teachers should know what a lesson plan is and its importance.

What is a lesson plan?

A lesson plan is a teacher's detailed guide for conducting a particular lesson. Therefore, no lesson should be conducted without a lesson plan. The following sections of a lesson plan should be clearly stated in the lesson plan:

Sections of a lesson plan

An ideal lesson plan should typically include the following sections:

1. **Objectives**

This section outlines the specific learning goals for the lesson. It should clearly state what students are expected to be able to do by the end of the lesson. Objectives help guide the design of the lesson and provide a way to assess whether the learning goals were achieved.

2. **Materials**

These are the resources needed for the lesson, such as textbooks, handouts and multimedia, and any other materials that will be used. The materials should be relevant to the objectives and support the learning activities. It should be stated how the materials will be used during the lesson and by whom.

3. **Introduction**

This section outlines how the lesson will be introduced, including any review of the previous lesson. The introduction should engage students and activate their prior knowledge to help them connect new information to what they already know. It should be motivating.

4. **Instruction**

This section describes the methods and strategies used to teach the lesson. They may include lectures, discussions, dramatisations, group work, hands-on activities and other instructional approaches. The

instruction should be aligned with the objectives and designed to engage students and promote active learning.

5. Assessment

These are the ways in which students' learning will be evaluated, such as through quizzes, tests, or class participation or other forms of assessment. The assessment should be aligned with the objectives and provide a way to measure whether students have met the learning goals.

6. Closure

This is the way the lesson will be concluded, including summarizing the main points and providing any additional resources for further learning. The closure should reinforce the key takeaways from the lesson and provide a clear transition to the next lesson or unit.

7. Differentiation

These are the strategies for accommodating students with diverse learning needs and abilities. This may include providing additional support or challenges using different instructional support or challenges, using different instructional approaches, or offering alternative assessments. Differentiation is important for ensuring that all students can access the learning and achieve the objectives.

8. Reflection

This is the teacher's reflection on the effectiveness of the lesson and areas for improvement. The reflection should consider factors such as student engagement, the success of the instructional strategies, and the effectiveness of the assessment. The reflection can inform future lesson planning and help the teacher to continually improve their teaching practice.

Students should know that for them to succeed in their school attachment programme, they should be present at school when school starts until it ends and they should be punctual all the time. When they are not teaching, they should observe mentors teaching and learn from them. They should also use this time to prepare thoroughly for their lessons. they should listen and follow advice they are given. They should also take part in co-curricular activities.

Mentors

A mentor can play a crucial role in assisting a student teacher during their attachment by providing guidance, support and feedback. Here are some ways a mentor can assist a student teacher:

1. Guidance on lesson planning

Mentors can help student teachers design effective lessons that align with curriculum standards and learning objectives. They can provide tips on creating engaging activities and incorporating diverse teaching methods

2. Classroom management techniques

Mentors can share strategies for managing classroom behaviour, organizing the physical space, and creating a positive learning environment. They can offer practical advice on handling disruptions and fostering student engagement.

3. Instructional strategies

Mentors can demonstrate and explain various instructional strategies, such as differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and use of technology in the classroom. They can help student teachers understand how to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all students.

4. Feedback and reflection

Regular, constructive feedback is crucial for a student teacher's growth. Mentors can provide specific co-

mments on lesson delivery, classroom management and instructional effectiveness. They can also encourage reflective practices, helping student teachers to evaluate their own performance and identify areas for improvement.

5. Modelling effective teaching

By observing their mentor, student teachers can learn effective teaching techniques, classroom management strategies, and how to engage students. Seeing a skilled teacher at work can provide invaluable insights into what makes for successful teaching.

6. Support and encouragement

Teaching can be stressful and challenging. Mentors can offer emotional support and encouragement, helping student teachers to build confidence and resilience. They can also provide a safe space for discussing challenges and successes.

7. Networking professional development

Mentors can connect student teachers with valuable resources, such as professional development opportunities, educational literature, and professional networks. This can help student teachers stay current with best practices and continue their professional growth beyond their initial teaching experience.

8. Assessment and evaluation

Mentors can guide student teachers in developing and implementing effective assessment tools. They can provide insights into how to assess student learning accurately and fairly, and how to use assessment data to inform instruction.

9. Cultural competence and diversity

Mentors can help student teachers understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds of their students. They can provide guidance on culturally responsive teaching practices and how to create an inclusive classroom environment.

10. Goal setting and planning

Mentors can assist student teachers in setting realistic and achievable goals for their teaching practice. They can help them develop a plan to achieve these goals and provide support and accountability throughout the process.

11. Conflict resolution

Mentors can offer advice and strategies for resolving conflicts with students, colleagues, and administrators. They can provide insights into effective communication and conflict management techniques.

12. Encouraging lifelong learning

Mentors can inspire a love for lifelong learning by sharing their own passion for education. They can encourage student teachers to seek out continuous improvement and to stay curious and open to new ideas and methodologies.

By providing this comprehensive support, mentors can significantly enhance the learning experience of student teachers, helping them to become effective and reflective educators. Mentors should know that they are partly to blame for the failure of student teachers on attachment.

College Tutors

College tutors can assist student teachers on attachment in a number of ways as shown below:

1. Mentorship

They should provide guidance and support to student teachers, sharing insights and experiences to help

them navigate challenges and enhance their teaching skills.

2. **Feedback**

They should offer constructive feedback on their performance, highlighting areas of strength and suggesting improvements for growth.

3. **Resource sharing**

Tutors should share relevant resources such as teaching materials, research articles and professional development opportunities, to support their learning and development.

4. **Networking**

They should facilitate connections with other educators and professionals in the field, fostering collaboration and sharing of best practices.

5. **Observation and modelling**

They should demonstrate effective teaching strategies and classroom management techniques through observation and modelling, providing a practical example for student teachers to emulate.

6. **Encouragement and motivation**

They should offer encouragement and motivation, recognizing achievements and celebrating successes to boost confidence and resilience.

By providing mentorship, feedback, resources, networking opportunities, observation and modelling, college tutors can significantly support student teachers during their school attachment. It is impossible for the tutors to accomplish everything alluded to above in just 1 visit to a student on school attachment. I am advising tutors to increase the frequency of visiting students to at least 3 times and not just once as is the situation currently.

REB

A lot of credit is being given to REB for encouraging students to take up the teaching profession. For instance, students only pay half the fees required to train as teachers. However more can be done to assist the students on school attachment. Some of the ways it can do so are explained below:

1. **Provision of resources**

REB can ensure that school attachment venues have the necessary resources, including textbooks, learning materials, and technology, to support students' education.

2. **Teacher training**

REB can also provide training for teachers to effectively support students with diverse needs, including those with disabilities or special educational needs.

3. **Mentoring and evaluation**

REB can also regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school attachment programmes to identify areas of improvement and ensure that students are receiving quality education. For instance, I have noted that there is need for a vehicle to be allocated to the department that is headed by the school attachment coordinator for the sole purposes of the school attachment issues. This development will go a long way in making it possible for student teachers to be supervised at least 3 times by different tutors.

4. **Support services**

REB can make arrangements for colleges to have support services such as counselling, mental health support, and career guidance to help students to navigate their educational journey.

5. **Policy development**

REB can develop and implement policies that promote inclusive and equitable education for all students,

ensuring that school attachment programmes are accessible and effective. Colleges should be able to enroll disabled students. The college has just acquired Braille machines. This is a step in the right direction. By implementing these measures, REB can create an environment in which students on school attachment can thrive academically, socially, morally, physically and politically.

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