

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDENT TEACHERS THROUGH EFFECTIVE TEACHER PREPARATION EXERCISES IN TEACHER PREPARATION INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE

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## ABSTRACT

The study explored improving the quality of student teachers through effective teacher preparation exercises in teacher preparation institutions in Rivers State. Pursuant to the aim and objectives of the study, the study had four research questions with four corresponding null hypotheses. The descriptive-correlational design was adopted by the study. The study population comprised the 393 lecturers of Ignatius Ajuru, together with the final year students of the 2023/2025 academic year of the institution. The sample size was 100 respondents comprising 20 lecturers and 80 students who gave information on teacher preparation exercises and quality of student teachers in the institution. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select the sample. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire constructed by the researcher and titled “Effective Teacher Preparation Exercises and Quality of Student Teachers Questionnaire (ETPEQSTQ)”. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: Section A which solicited data on respondents’ demographic variables; Section B which solicited data on Teacher Preparation Exercises; and Section C which solicited data on Quality of Student Teachers. The reliability of the instrument was established through test-retest method and Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation statistics. It was found to be 0.78. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation statistics, while the hypotheses were tested using PPMCC at a significance level of .05. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) - Version 28 was used for the analysis.

**Keywords:** Teacher Preparation Exercises, Student Teachers, Teacher Education, Teaching Practice, Microteaching, Assessment, Mentoring, Quality, Pedagogical Skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

The need for competent and well-trained teachers, astute in both content knowledge and general pedagogical practices in their subject areas, is a very pertinent one if any nation is to succeed in developing the required human capital base to foster national development. This is because teachers are the main implementers of educational policies, organized into school programmes in the form of curriculum and syllabus. It is thus very important to ensure that the quality of teacher training programs in teacher training institutions increase year after year, to ensure that the graduating student teachers possess the professional competencies necessary for them to play their roles as teachers effectively. One way to achieve this in Rivers State is through the reinforcement of the teacher preparation exercises carried out in teacher training institutions in the state.

Currently in Rivers State, the three public universities, vis-à-vis University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education offer teacher training programs at either their undergraduate or postgraduate levels. These institutions all have departments of education, where student teachers are trained, and from experience, educational programs have enjoyed massive patronage in these schools. Both first degree and postgraduate degree programs are offered in these institutions for trainee teachers. Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku equally offers teacher training program at both NCE level and Degree level. This gives a lot of hope for the primary and secondary levels of education in the state, which should ideally not be lacking quality teachers anymore. Unfortunately however, the quality of student teachers graduated from these teacher training institutions appear to be a let down on the hopes of the society in that regard. It thus shows that the quality of the programs has not been as effective as it should be. As such, there is need to improvement in the delivery of teacher training programs in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

Some prominent exercises are hallmarks of every teacher preparation programs. These include teaching practice, microteaching, supervision of student teachers, student teacher assessment and feedback, and coaching and mentoring, among others (Odunlade & Ebong, 2018; Oyekan, 2018). During the process of the teacher training programs, student teachers are through these exercises made to either experience the real teaching environment or situation through field experience or through simulated programs like the microteaching. These activities are supervised, and the student teachers are assessed and provided feedback. In some cases, they are attached to academic mentors and coaches or supervisors who work closely with them to share experience and impart knowledge to them. All of these aim at equipping the student teachers with enough experiences, knowledge and skills that would lead to their development in the teaching profession.

Some casual observations and informal discussions with a cross section of student teachers moreover seem to suggest that some student teachers appear not to fully appreciate the essence of the exercises they are subjected to on the course of their studies. They appear to regard them as just a requirement for graduation. Such trainee teachers are likely to not take the exercises seriously because it has been established that an individual's perceived benefit of a phenomenon influences the person's general attitude towards that particular phenomenon. In a similar vein, one cannot discount the possibility that trainee subject teachers' perception of the importance of field experience might influence their general attitude towards the exercise. A positive perception of the importance of field experience to trainee teachers is likely to influence

the level of importance they would attach to the exercise and this might affect the general effectiveness of the exercise.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Efforts made by the government and relevant stakeholders towards raising quality teachers for various levels of education (especially the primary and secondary levels) in the state appear to not be yielding the supposed level of dividends. The quality of teacher education in universities and colleges of education is brought to question, as there appears to be a serious gap between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge possessed by graduating teachers from these institutions. The existing disparity is having obvious deleterious effects on teacher preparedness, student learning outcomes, and ultimately the quality of education in primary and secondary schools in Rivers State. To buffer this problem, insistence is being made by stakeholders for universities and colleges of education in the state to be more deliberate towards effective teacher preparation exercises such as teaching practice, microteaching, mentoring, and assessment of student teachers in these teacher training institutions in the State. These practices seem to be lacking quality in their implementation in these institutions, and the researcher believes that if they are effectively implemented, teacher training institutions may be able to graduate fully-baked teachers who are equipped with requisite skills, knowledge and competence for effective instructional delivery in primary and secondary schools in the state.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study was to explore how the quality of student teachers can be improved through effective teacher preparation exercises in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- Determine how effective teaching practice exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.
- Investigate how effective microteaching exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.
- Explore how effective mentoring exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.
- Assess how effective assessment exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the study:

- How does effective teaching practice exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?
- How does effective microteaching exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?
- How does effective mentoring exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?

- How does effective assessment exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?

## **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to be tested at 5% significance level to guide the study:

- There is no significant relationship between effective teaching practice exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between effective microteaching exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between effective mentoring exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between effective assessment exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study was anchored in the Experimental Learning Theory. Experimental Learning Theory was proposed by David Kolb in 2009, as a holistic learning model that emphasizes the importance of direct experience and reflection in the learning process (De-Ville, 2010). According to Kolb, learning is a continuous process that involves concrete experience, holistic approach, and a learning cycle. Concrete experience in learning entails learning through direct experience and reflection. Holistic learning involves integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning. The learning cycle on the other hand entails that learning is a continuous process of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and experimenting. Hence, experimental learning as proposed by Kolb emphasizes practical application of knowledge, accommodates different learning styles preferences thus making it very personalized, and promotes better retention of knowledge through direct experience. Thus, experimental learning theory emphasizes on hands-on learning, or learning by doing.

Kolb's experiential learning theory finds application in the present study as it emphasizes the importance of direct experience and reflection in the learning process. The theory has been widely applied in education (particularly in teacher training and professional development), in corporate training to enhance employee skills and performance, and in personal development, such as learning new skills and hobbies, and continues to be a popular learning model due to its practical and holistic approach to learning. The relevance of the theory to this present study on teaching practice exercise is on several fronts, some of which include:

- Hands-on experience: Experimental learning theory emphasizes the importance of direct experience and hands-on practice, which is essential for teaching practice exercises.
- Reflection and feedback: Experimental learning theory highlights the need for reflection and feedback, which is critical for quality teacher education and teaching practice exercises.

- Learning by doing: Experimental learning theory suggests that learning occurs through doing, which is in line with the idea of teaching practice exercises as a way to learn teaching.
- Teacher development: Experimental learning theory can be used to support teacher development and growth, which is a key aspect of quality teacher education.
- Collaborative learning: Experimental learning theory supports collaborative learning, which can be applied to teaching practice exercises to promote peer learning and support.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **Teacher Education cum Teacher Preparation**

The concept of teacher education has been viewed by scholars in diverse perspectives, although all the views agreed on the need for professional and career development of the teachers (and to-be teachers) towards production of valuable and resourceful teachers that will guarantee effective service delivery to the society. Adewuyi and Ogunwuyi cited in Usman (2020) opined that teacher education is the provision of professional education and specialized training within a specified period for the preparation of individuals who intends to develop and nurture the young ones into responsible and productive citizens. Uche and Onyemerekeya cited in Usman (2020) viewed teacher education as the training given or provided in an institution to teachers to enable them acquire, inculcate and impart knowledge to their pupils or students. Teacher education according to Osuji (2019) is the professional education of teachers towards attainment of attitudes, skills and knowledge considered desirable to make them efficient and effective in their work in accordance with the need of a given society at any point in time. It includes training and or education occurring before commencement of service (pre-service) and during service (in-service or on-the-job).

Teacher education is a programme that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein (Ugwoke et. al, 2012). Afe cited in Usman (2020) comprehended teacher education as the policies and practices designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider society whilst Ekpiken and Edet, (2014) conceptualized teacher education as the complex and complete procedure of educating or preparing persons whose profession is teaching in order to play their roles as teachers towards contributing to national development.

### **Student Teachers Quality Improvement**

Improving the quality of student teachers entails bequeathing to them the requisite skills, knowledge, experience and competence that make them assume the status of effective and efficient teachers by the time they are completing their teacher preparation programs. It is about graduating student teachers who possess the skills that the labour market for teachers requires. Quality student teachers are thus human resources in the teaching profession. They would by their status need no further or very little training to fit perfectly into any school system that engages them.

Quality student teachers are student teachers who have been trained to possess the attributes of an effective teacher – capable of delivering effective teaching. Effective teaching is the teacher’s ability to deliver lesson contents, monitor and follow-up, and improve students’ achievement. A focus on student outcomes and the teacher behaviours and classroom processes that promote better student outcomes are generally the predictors of teacher effectiveness. Hence, student teachers quality improvement exercises aim at making student teachers competent in improving students’ learning outcomes. James et al. (2016) highlighted the attributes of teacher quality to include that the teacher:

- Is clear about instructional goals;
- Is knowledgeable about curriculum content and the strategies for teaching it;
- Communicates to his/her students what is expected of them, and why;
- Makes expert use of existing instructional materials in order to devote more time to practices that enrich and clarify the content;
- Is knowledgeable about his/her students, adapting instruction to their needs and anticipating misconceptions in their existing knowledge;
- Teaches students meta-cognitive strategies and gives them opportunities to master them;
- Address higher- as well as lower-level cognitive objectives;
- Monitors students’ understanding by offering regular appropriate feedback; and
- Accepts responsibility for student outcomes.

Training student teachers who possess all of these teacher quality attributes therefore becomes the core values of teacher preparation programs in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

### **Teacher Preparation Exercises in Teacher Training Institutions in Rivers State**

Teacher preparation exercises are explicit programs particularly designed to prepare student teachers for the actual teaching experience. They are learning experiences or learning opportunities designed in teacher preparation institutions as part of their curriculum content, which the trainee teachers have to undergo for the reinforcement of the trainings that are being given to them. Literature identified some of these exercises to include teaching practice, microteaching, mentoring, assessment, and feedback exercises among others (Ayelaagbe & Bello, 2020; Jekayinfa et al., 2012; Odunlade & Ebong, 2018; Oyekan, 2018). These exercises are deliberately and meticulously planned by the teacher training institution and their implementation can be monitored, tracked, documented and reviewable for continuous improvement. Each of these exercises is examined in the proceeding paragraphs.

### **Teaching Practice Exercise / Practicum**

Teaching practice is one of the core exercises of teacher education programs in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. It is a period where student teachers are sent from their institutions into primary and secondary schools for practical demonstration and mastering of what they are learning in the school with the guidance of Subject teachers in the schools they are sent to and the supervision of supervisors delegated from their own schools. Bakie (2022) conceived teaching practice as the practical mastering of the art of science of teaching by actual participation in classroom encounter under watchful eyes of experts and experienced teachers'

supervision. Anupama (2019) described teaching practice as a time when all the theoretical concepts of educational psychology, classroom management, teacher-taught relation, philosophies dealing with education learned are to be applied successfully in real classroom situation. Teaching practice therefore is the first real opportunity given to students to be involved in teaching either in primary or secondary school under the guidance of co-operating teachers.

The role of teaching practice in the development of teacher education program cannot be over emphasized. Its functions are as follows:

- It serves as an opportunity for the student teacher to be exposed to the realities of teaching and performance of professional activities.
- It helps the trainee teacher (i.e. student teacher) to improve his/her communication skills.
- It offers a conscientious student teacher a drive to master his work, and apply himself to it with passionate zeal (Afigbo cited in Onwuzo, 2021)
- Teaching practice creates opportunity for student teacher to develop in teaching profession.
- It provides opportunity for the student teacher to take responsibility, gain confidence in him/herself and improve in classroom management skills.
- It provides a basis for predicting the future success of the pre-service teacher (Aijaz et al. (2010).
- To the teacher training institution, it provides opportunity for establishing the extent student teachers master the theories taught.

Realization of these loud able objectives is dependent on the provision of adequate material resources, and getting all the stake holders to perform their roles effectively. Stake holders in this context are: learners, student teachers, heads of co-operating schools and their teachers' supervisors and teaching practice monitoring team.

### **Microteaching Exercise**

Micro-teaching is technically a scaled-down teaching encounter which helps pre-service and in-service teachers to improve both contents and methods of teaching and develop specific teaching skills such as probing questions, questioning, explanation, illustration and stimulus variation (Aliyu, 2018). It is one of the practices for preparing student teachers for their actual teaching practice exercise. It is a model of what they would experience in the classroom. According to Chuajin and Chammei (2011) in their separate studies, micro-teaching has been in use worldwide since its introduction at the Stanford university in the late 1950s by Dwight, Robert and Romney. Its purpose is to provide teachers with the opportunity for concept lessons in any teaching subject. McNight cited in Romesh (2013) saw micro-teaching as a scaled-down realistic classroom training context in which teachers both experienced and inexperienced may acquire new teaching skills and refine old ones.

This implies that microteaching is a temporal platform created by expert teachers for trainee teachers to interact with mock students, to practice theoretical knowledge and acquire new skills. Therefore, microteaching approach in teacher education prepares the pre-service teachers for the task of classroom teaching ahead of the teaching practice exercise. Also, it exposes the preservice teachers to the rudiments of teaching which enhances effective teaching and learning rudiments (Aliyu, 2018). Micro-teaching cannot be neglected as it provides a

formidable platform for acquiring teaching skills that is expected to be practiced in the classroom. As such, it is a veritable practice that can be leveraged upon by school administrators in conjunction with teaching practice supervisors to give teaching practice students the requisite training for quality teacher education on the course of their teaching service exercises.

### **Mentoring Exercise**

Mentoring programs are effective ways of supporting teacher development. This involves pairing experienced teachers with novice teachers to provide guidance, feedback, and support. Student teachers on the course of their teaching practice necessarily need to be mentored and coached by the subject teachers of the subjects they are handling. As a matter of fact, every teacher in the school system ought to see it as a duty to coach and mentor these upcoming teachers.

Mentoring is widely used all over the world and it is operational among individuals who want to acquire certain skills and knowledge. This also applies to student-teachers in Colleges of Education who are under the mentorship of the school of education, academic matters, and other areas of development. Mentoring is one of the most effective ways of developing student teachers' quality during teacher training. Mentoring is about changing lives and it is commonly seen as a situation where an individual assists another individual to develop him/herself in different areas. Mentoring is an effective way of developing professionals and it has been applied in the areas of medicine, building, and the military with effectiveness (Strong & Baron cited in Ani et al., 2021). The term mentoring describes the support given by one (usually more experienced) person for the growth and learning of another, and their integration into and acceptance by a specific community. Mentoring is a process whereby an older experienced guide acceptable to the young person helps to ease the transition to adulthood by a mix of support and challenge.

It is a hierarchical relationship in which the mentor is more experienced than the mentee, or that the mentor has or can provide knowledge and skills that the mentee wants or needs. Mentoring supports and encourages people to manage their learning so that they may maximize their potentials, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the persons they want to be. Mentoring can also be described as a technique for allowing the transmission of knowledge, skills, and experience in a supportive and challenging environment through coaching (Adeyanyu, 2013). Mentoring is the oldest form of knowledge transfer that uses the skills of questioning, listening, clarifying, and reframing in transferring learning. Mentoring is a particular mode of learning wherein the mentor not only supports the mentee but also challenges him productively so that progress is made (Smith, 2017). It involves supporting and providing feedback to the mentee without judgment or criteria. Mentoring involves guidance and suggestion, as well as the development of autonomous skills, judgments, personal and professional mastership, expertise, trust, and the development of self-confidence over time. Mentoring in education involves pairing young people with an older peer or volunteer, who acts as a positive role model. In general, mentoring aims to build confidence, develop resilience and character, or raise aspirations, rather than to develop specific academic skills or knowledge.

### **Assessment Exercise**

Assessment of student teachers' performance in the course of their teaching practice is a very important activity in teaching practice exercise. This is usually done by the visiting supervisors.



The teaching practice exercise often has very high credit load, and students' performance or assessment scores contribute significantly to the student's score in Teaching Practice. The grading is based on the supervisor's observation of the student teachers' performance during the classroom observation session, and also based on out-of-classroom observations and inclusive of reports by the school about the student teacher's behaviour and whereabouts in the school system. Literature (Oluwatayo & Adebule, 2022) however identified six discrete criteria by which student teachers' teaching practice performance is assessed. These according to them include, plan of the lesson, the use of teaching aids/devices, conduct of the lesson, knowledge of subject matter, class management and teacher's personality. Expectedly, the teaching performance may be rated poor, fair, good, very good or excellent depending on individual's commitment to the exercise.

### **Improving the Quality of Student Teachers through Teacher Preparation Exercises in Teacher Training Institutions**

Teacher preparation exercises are essential for improving the quality of student teachers in Nigeria, even as they provide student teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to become effective teachers. Literature has highlighted ways in which teacher preparation exercises improves the quality of teaching practice students in teacher training institutions (Borko & Putnam, 2016; Gay, 2010; Hativa, 2023). Some of the ways include:

- Improved pedagogical skills: Teacher preparation exercises help student teachers develop effective teaching strategies and techniques.
- Increased confidence: Teacher preparation exercises boost student teachers' confidence in their ability to teach.
- Enhanced subject matter knowledge: Teacher preparation exercises help student teachers deepen their understanding of the subject matter they will be teaching.
- Development of classroom management skills: Teacher preparation exercises teach student teachers how to manage a classroom effectively.
- Improved communication skills: Teacher preparation exercises help student teachers develop effective communication skills.

### **Teaching Practice Exercise for Improved Quality of Student Teachers in Teacher Training Institutions**

When effectively implemented, teaching practice possesses the potential of improving student teachers' quality in several ways. Literature highlighted some of these ways to include:

*Professionalism:* In the opinion of Obunadike and Ughammadu (2015), teaching practice is a worthwhile programme for professionalizing in teaching. Without teaching practice, a student teacher will not be recognized as a teacher. Teaching practice is thus a basic professional requirement, the un-fulfillment of which the student teacher cannot qualify as a teacher.

*Exposure:* the training gotten during teaching practice no doubt exposes the student teacher to what is obtainable in the teaching profession. In lending credence to this, Ofoegbunam (2017) posited that teaching practice is a period during which the student-teachers are exposed to the

practical realities of the teaching profession which form part of their programme. Also, Quick and Sieborger cited in Ngara et al. (2019) opined that “teaching practices exposes student teachers to real teaching world and contextualize their theoretical skills to practical skills”.

*Mastery of the subject:* Practice makes perfect. Thus, teaching practice provides the student teachers with experience in the actual teaching and learning environment which leads to perfection. Ngugi and Thungui (2014) asserted that “the mastery of the subject matter is the foundation upon which the education of a teacher requires among other things the skill of mastering the subject matter and being able to establish the inter-relationships between different subjects. Speaking further, they maintained that it is through the mastery of subject matter that they are able to help their learners to learn and understand the same subject matter, which these are essential for the professional growth of a teacher which contributes to the growth of a teacher as a person.

*Confidence:* Through the experience gathered during the exercise, the student teachers build confidence in themselves as teachers. Lukman (2019) opined that teaching practice also improves the level of confidence among student teachers. This gives them the ability to present their seminar projects effectively and also enable them to handle higher classes after graduation.

### **Microteaching Exercise for Improved Quality of Student Teachers in Teacher Training Institutions in Rivers State**

The application of micro-teaching technique in teacher training and especially during teaching practice exercises provides student teachers tremendous opportunity to develop their teaching skills. Apart from being an essential process of transforming and modifying the student teacher’s behaviour to demonstrate a given behaviour, it also provides a tremendous opportunity for both pre-service and in-service teachers to develop and improve their pedagogical skills with a small group of students mostly (8-10) using limited period of (7-10) minutes, recorded on video tape for reviewing, responding, refining and re-teaching towards perfection (Peker, 2009). Hence, effective development of teaching skills in teachers should target the teaching practice students as they are future teachers. Incorporating the development of these skills will not only make these skills practicable but also provide a model for the actual and seamless implementation of these skills in normal classroom situations.

The micro-teaching environment enables a pre-service teacher to focus attention on the practice of specific skills at a time until he or she acquires competence in it. Provision of feedback accelerates the process. After acquiring competence in a number of skills in this way, the student teacher takes to micro-teaching so as to demonstrate his/her level of competence. It is a vital technique which provides continuous training to serving teachers.

Most of the professional teachers who have reached the peak of their professional career do not want to improve their skills of teaching. Micro-teaching helps in bridging the gap and overcoming such pitfalls. It provides settings for experimentation. With the introduction of developed curriculum, teachers are required to acquire new skills of teaching. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014, p.56) pointed out that “all teachers in our educational institutions, from pre-primary, will be professionally trained”. As a modelling instructional skill, the microteaching setting is meant for the demonstration of good teaching skills by student-teachers which can be recorded on video-tape or observed by a supervisor. Consequently, micro-

teaching provides a golden opportunity to the pre-service teacher towards exercising control over some variables which may have effect in teaching and learning e.g., the volume of students in a class, the nature of the student, the length of the period for microteaching administration, the motivation as well as the evaluation of the students.

On the effects of microteaching on the quality of teacher education, Sa'ad et al. (2015) had found that microteaching was useful in improving the teaching skills, classroom management, confidence, etc., of teacher trainees. Aliyu (2018) averred that the use of microteaching skills in teaching practice reduced the teaching anxiety level of student teachers, which would inadvertently bring about greater level of effectiveness in instructional delivery of teachers who engaged in microteaching during their teaching practice exercises. He went further to identify four major skill sets that are acquired by the student teacher through microteaching exercises, and these include: (a) set induction skills, (b) stimulus variation skills, (c) questioning skills, and (d) closure skills. These are skills, which when properly developed, enhance the quality of teachers, hence, their incorporation into the instructional content of the teaching practice for student teachers becomes a veritable strategy for quality teacher education delivery for the administrators of teaching practice.

As described by Isave (2010), set induction is a strategy of attracting the attention of learners towards making them mentally and physically ready to accomplish any task. Stimulus variation is a set of behaviour for bringing about a desirable change in variation in the stimuli which can be used to secure and sustain the student's attention towards classroom activities (Yusuf & Alasoluyi, 2017). Questioning skill is used to draw out ideas from the students, and closure skill provides the pupils with a feeling of fruition, fulfilment and accomplishment which serves as drive for continuous learning (Arikya, 2010). All of these skills are required by teachers to assure their effectiveness in the classroom and microteaching exercise bequeaths them to student teachers.

### **Mentoring Exercise for Improved Quality of Student Teachers in Teacher Training Institutions in Rivers State**

Mentoring plays an important role in enhancing inexperienced teachers' opportunities to learn within the contexts of teaching. It also helps student-teachers to develop teaching behaviours and strategies, involving a nurturing relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person where the mentor guides by serving as a role model and advisor. Mentoring in a specific context not only allows student-teachers to acquire context-specific knowledge but also develops situation-based skills, which can be transferred to similar future situations in that context. For the reason that teachers need to learn to teach in a particular context (Feiman-Nemser cited in Ani et al., 2021) and specific mentoring will occur that is dependent on the contextual circumstance. Each educational jurisdiction will, therefore, have different forms and expectations of mentoring. Mentoring, therefore, is a process that involves the mentor, the mentee, and the relationship. In a mentoring relationship, the mentees learn from their mentors to be transformed from passive receivers to active learners; to expand their perspectives; to use the forum as a platform for accelerated learning; to build the confidential relationship, and gain different insights into their career development from the experience of their mentors; to have ownership of self-development, and to initiate most contacts with their mentors.

Mentors nurture the development of the mentee through building rapport. They also use such interpersonal functions as supporting, advising, empathizing, and role modelling. Mentors

are therefore advisers, educators, counsellors, and role models who pass their experience on to less experienced people. As a mentor, a more experienced person facilitates the professional development of a new teacher or someone new to a particular stage in a career. This confirms that mentoring is also used to make newcomers aware of how a specific workplace operates. This aspect of mentoring is partly relevant to the mentoring process in initial teacher education where tutor-mentors have to teach student-teachers the principles of teaching and learning. Mentoring provides the mentee with an opportunity to have a clear career path, options, and consequently progress. Mentoring is considered a valuable process that assists professional and mentoring personal development. For a mentoring process to be complete there is a need for a mentee. A mentee is someone who wants to move up to the academic/career ladder following in the footsteps of the mentor (Adeyanyu, 2013). Student teachers usually experience several different school sites throughout their degree program, thus encountering a variety of mentor teachers. Invariably, the kinds of mentoring relationships that student-teachers form with their mentor may be significantly different to a professional who has mentored for an extended period.

### **Assessment Exercise for Improved Quality of Student Teachers in Teacher Training Institutions in Rivers State**

Assessment exercise improves student teachers' quality through helping them to know how well they are performing and then improving on their performance on various performance indices on which they are assessed on the course of their program (Oluwatayo & Adebule, 2022). One of the areas they are assessed especially during their teaching practice exercises is on lesson planning because a good teacher must necessarily know how to draw an excellent lesson plan. Basically, the student-teachers are expected to plan their lessons appropriately. Good planning underpins flexibility and provides the teacher with structure and security (Pollard, 2016). The plan of a lesson includes formulation of concise and feasible learning objectives, organization of content and technical language of instruction. The learning objectives express what the teacher intends that the students learn in terms of skills, knowledge and understanding. As explained by Pollard (2016), learning objectives are the essential planning tools of the teacher, as without clear and concise objectives linked to specific activities, the teacher has little basis on which to define the purpose of a task clearly for the learner or assess learners' progress. Importantly, the content of the lesson needs to be sequentially organized in order to provide instructional steps to be followed by the teacher so that no aspect of the lesson is omitted. Hence, the quality of student teachers' lesson plans and lesson notes become assessed by supervisors whenever they visit, and it is very important that the student teachers be provided with feedback after the assessment exercise to enable them improve on their lesson plan.

### **Barriers to Effective Teacher Preparation Exercises in Teacher Training Institutions in Rivers State**

It is worrisome that despite the annual massive graduation of student teachers from teacher training institutions in Rivers State, very little impact is felt in the classroom when these graduates are engaged. The problem has been the quality of teacher preparation they received in their schools. Most teacher training institutions are handicapped in so many ways, which makes it almost impossible for them to equip their trainee teachers with the requisite skills required for

the teaching profession. Literature has widely highlighted barriers to the effective implementation of teacher preparation exercises in Nigeria (Ebelechukwu & Eruchalu, 2022):

- Inadequate time: Enough time is not given to teaching practice to microteaching before the commencement of the teaching practice. This no doubt affects the exercise. In some cases, students attend lectures during the teaching practice.
- Financial constraint: The student teachers are not paid during the teaching practice and this is a problem because they need money for.
- Transport and to settle their bills. In most cases, the approved schools for teaching practice within the vicinity won't absorb all the students, thus, accommodation becomes an issue too as some schools do not have accommodation. Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs portrays workers effectiveness when their needs are met, thus, student teachers are not exception. Apparently, during the period of teaching practice, they relieve the teachers of their workload.
- Unprofessionalism of supervisors: Only few supervisors understand their duty(ies), ordinarily, supervisors should be friendly with the student teachers but only few are. Cases abound of supervisors embarrassing the student-teachers before their students. Collaborating, Oku (2016) asserted that "...some supervisors especially the neophytes might see it (teaching practice) as an opportunity to terrorize and humiliate student teachers thereby making them lose their self-confidence". Such condescending attitude by the supervisors definitely would mar the objectives of teaching practice. Rather than building the students professionally, it tears or destroys.
- Lack of co-operation from schools and teachers: The schools the student teachers are posted to have a role in ensuring effective exercise. During this exercise, some schools are not friendly. Teachers instead of encouraging them criticize them. Criticism encourages growth but only when it is constructive. Besides, seeing and commenting only on the negative aspect of an individual doesn't encourage growth. In addition, Kiggudu and Nayimuli (2019) opined that "while some mentors overload students teachers, other mentors did not have confidence in the student teachers and consequently they would not leave their classes in the student teachers' care. Others would not let student teachers teach at any time because they felt that student teachers were delaying and wasting learners' valuable time and they need to finish the syllabus before the end of the year. This resulted in the student teachers getting discouraged and expressing feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence in their ability to teach".
- No feedback: Feedbacks help a great deal in growth, be it in individual life, business or other ventures. Feedback is information about reactions to a product, a persons' performance of a task, etc. which is used as a basis for improvement. It is quite unfortunate that student teachers are not given video feedback, like is done during micro-teaching in some schools. Video feedback goes a long way for the students get to see his or her true performance, devoid of any sentiment or influence.
- Wrong perception of the exercise: It is a fact that wrong perception does harm than good. Thus, student teachers wrong perception of teaching practice poses a great barrier. Teaching practice qualifies a student teacher to a professional as inability to pass the course hinders the student dream to reality. Yet, some students see the exercise as a waste of time. Such wrong perception won't allow them put in their best and also deprive them of what they should benefit from participating.

- Computer illiteracy: A student teacher who is not computer-literate will find it hard to cope in this age and time owing to modernization. Bediga and Banari (2019) asserted that the role of computer in teaching activities is becoming more important because world is in a continuous and rapid modernization and computer use in school has and will have a great role in the presentations of lessons, and for communication and information. Thus, any student teacher who is not computer literate would not enjoy the teaching practice for there are numerous benefits derivable from using the computer.
- Inadequate time: In as much as the program is tagged “teaching practice”. There should be preparations, trainings beforehand. Micro-teaching is a major preparatory avenue for teaching practice. But inadequate time could affect such preparatory programme which also poses a problem to the teaching practice exercise.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive-correlational design, which sought to identify the variables of effective teacher preparation exercises, describe their implementations, and then explore the relationship between these variables and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rives State. The population of the study was the 393 lecturers of Ignatius Ajuru, together with the final year students of the 2023/2025 academic year of the institution. The sample size was 100 respondents comprising 20 lecturers and 80 students who gave information on teacher preparation exercises and quality of student teachers in the institution. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire constructed by the researcher and titled “Effective Teacher Preparation Exercises and Quality of Student Teachers Questionnaire (ETPEQSTQ)”. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: Section A which solicited data on respondents’ demographic variables; Section B which solicited data on Teacher Preparation Exercises; and Section C which solicited data on Quality of Student Teachers. The reliability of the instrument was established through test-retest method and Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation statistics. It was found to be 0.78. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation statistics, while the hypotheses were tested using PPMCC at a significance level of .05. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) - Version 25 was used for the analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Answer to the Research Question**

**Research Question 1:** How does effective teaching practice exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective teaching practice exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions

s/n	Items	Lecturers (N=20)		Student teachers (N=80)		Mean Set (N=100)		Decisi on
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	Mean	SD	
1	Effective teaching practice provides student teachers with hands-on experience in teaching and this improves their quality.	3.53	.541	3.50	.541	3.52	.541	Agree
2	Student teachers learn how to manage classroom behaviours during teaching practice and this boosts their quality.	2.80	.529	2.82	.529	2.81	.528	Agree
3	Effective teaching practice develops student teachers' confidence and self-efficacy for improved quality.	2.69	.444	2.58	.445	2.64	.444	Agree
4	Effective teaching practice equips student teachers with skills and strategies for improving student outcomes and this boosts their quality	2.70	.554	2.64	.556	2.67	.554	Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.86</b>	<b>.519</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>.519</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>.515</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between effective teaching practice exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

Table 2: PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective teaching practice exercise and the quality of student teachers

Variable	N	R	Sig	Remark
Effective teaching practice	20	.631	.000	H <sub>01</sub> Rejected
Student teacher quality	80			

.05 level of significance

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of lectures and student teachers on how effective teaching practice exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions, while Table 2 is the PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective teaching practice exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. From Table 1, it is seen that all the items have mean ratings and standard deviations which are each greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. This means that majority of the respondents agree on the various ways effective teaching practice improves the quality of student teachers in teacher preparation institutions in Rivers State. The table shows that the various ways include: providing student teachers with hands-on experience in teaching; equipping student teachers with knowledge of classroom management behaviours; developing student teachers' confidence and self-efficacy; and equipping student teachers with skills and strategies for improving student outcomes. Table 2 revealed that there is a strong positive significant relationship between effective teaching practice and quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

These finding are in line with Bakie (2022) who revealed that teaching practice is an avenue through which student teachers practically master the art of science of teaching by actual participation in classroom encounter under watchful eyes of experts and experienced teachers'

supervision. This means teaching practice makes student teachers to become masters in the teaching profession even before they become formally engaged as teachers. It is however worthy of note that teaching practice is only able to achieve its aim of preparing student teachers when it is implemented effectively.

**Research Question 2:** How does effective microteaching exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective microteaching exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions

s/n	Items	Lecturers (N=20)		Student teachers (N=80)		Mean set (N=100)		Decision
		$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	Mean	SD	
5	The observation of microteaching sessions by experienced lecturers helps in pointing out student teachers' deficiencies and in correcting them.	3.54	.553	3.55	.554	3.55	.552	Agree
6	The recording of microteaching session helps in effective review of student teachers' performance, which improves the quality of teacher education.	3.44	.551	3.48	.556	3.46	.553	Agree
7	The processes of questioning, explanation, stimulus variation, and lesson closure are mastered during microteaching sessions.	3.48	.515	3.51	.530	3.49	.522	Agree
8	Microteaching helps teacher education students to master the act of effectively managing real classrooms.	3.54	.553	3.55	.554	3.55	.552	Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.51</b>	<b>.542</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>.549</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>.545</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between effective microteaching exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

Table 4: PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective microteaching exercise and the quality of student teachers

Variable	N	R	Sig	Remark
Effective microteaching	20	.836	.000	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
Student teacher quality	80			

.05 level of significance

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective microteaching exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions, while Table 4 shows the PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective microteaching exercise and the quality of student teachers. In Table 3, all the items have mean and standard deviation scores that are greater than the criterion mean score of 2.50. This show that majority of the respondents agreed on the items. As revealed in the table, the various ways effective microteaching improves the quality of student teachers include: pointing out and correct student teachers' deficiencies by experienced teachers who observe microteaching sessions; effectively



reviewing student teachers' performance through recorded sessions; helping student teachers to master the processes of questioning, explanation, stimulus variation, and lesson closure; and helping student teachers to master the act of effectively managing real classrooms.

Table 4 in the same vein shows that there was a very strong positive and significant relationship ( $r = .863$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ) between effective microteaching exercise and quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. These findings are coherent with the findings of Sa'ad et al. (2015) that microteaching was useful in improving the teaching skills, classroom management, confidence etc. of teacher trainees. Similarly, Aliyu (2018) found that the use of micro-teaching skills in teaching practice reduced the teaching anxiety level of student teachers, which inadvertently brought about greater level of effectiveness in instructional delivery of teacher trainees who engaged in microteaching during their teacher preparation programs.

**Research Question 3:** How does effective mentoring exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?

Table 5: Mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective mentoring exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions

s/n	Items	Lecturers (N=20)		Student teachers(N=80)		Mean set (N=100)		Decision
		$\bar{X}_1$	$SD_1$	$\bar{X}_2$	$SD_2$	Mean	SD	
9	Pairing student teachers with more experienced teachers helps in knowledge and skill transfer, which is necessary for quality teacher education.	2.74	.553	2.80	.554	2.77	.552	Agree
10	Presiding teachers guide and direct student teachers during teaching practice, and this boosts their performance and quality of teacher education.	3.44	.551	3.40	.556	3.42	.553	Agree
11	Teachers and school administrators support and provide feedback to student teachers without being judgmental of their performance, and this improves their teaching practice experience.	2.78	.515	2.70	.530	2.74	.522	Agree
12	Student teachers are always guided on better ways of managing students and school situations, and this boosts the quality of teacher education programs.	2.94	.553	3.32	.554	3.13	.552	Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.97</b>	<b>.543</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>.549</b>	<b>3.01</b>	<b>.546</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant relationship between effective mentoring exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

Table 6: PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective mentoring exercise and the quality of student teachers

Variable	N	R	Sig	Remark
Effective mentoring	20	.675	.000	H0 <sub>3</sub> Rejected
Student teacher quality	80			

.05 level of significance

Table 5 shows the mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective mentoring exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions, while Table 6 shows the PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective mentoring exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. As shown by Table 5, majority of the respondents agreed that all the examined items were ways effective mentoring improved the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = .546$ ). These ways include: through knowledge and skill transfer from experienced teachers; through regularly receiving guidance and direction from presiding teachers, which enables them to know what is expected of them at any point in time; through receiving support and non-feedback from teachers and school administrators on their performance, which brings about needed improvement; and by gaining knowledge on better ways of managing students.

In the same manner, Table 6 shows that there was a strong positive and significant relationship ( $r = .675$ ;  $p = .000 < .05$ ) between effective mentoring and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. These findings are in accord with the findings of Ebelechukwu and Eruchalu (2022) that mentors nurture the development of the mentees through building rapport, and interpersonal functions as supporting, advising, empathizing, and role modelling. Mentors are therefore advisers, educators, counsellors, and role models who pass their experience on to less experienced people. In receiving the guidance of and modelling from a mentor, student teachers' quality is definitely improved even as they are able to avoid the mistakes made by their doctors, and quickly begin to enjoy the successes of their mentors through shared experiences. As such, by the time the student teacher eventually gets officially engaged in the teaching profession, he would not be coming in as a novice, but with so much wealth of experiences which makes him perform effectively with no or very little further training or supervision.

**Research Question 4:** How does effective assessment exercise improve the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State?

Table 7: Mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective assessment exercise improves the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions

s/n	Items	Lecturers (N=20)		Student teachers (N=80)		Mean set (N=100)		Decision
		$\bar{X}_1$	$SD_1$	$\bar{X}_2$	$SD_2$	Mean	SD	
13	Assessment of student teachers by supervisors and teachers makes them take their teaching practice more seriously and this improves the quality of the exercise.	2.64	.553	2.65	.554	2.65	.552	Agree
14	Feedback provided to student teachers after their assessment helps them improve on their teaching practice and this brings about quality teacher education.	3.04	.551	2.78	.556	2.91	.553	Agree
15	Assessment and feedback helps student teachers to master effective preparation of lesson notes and lesson plans.	2.60	.515	2.70	.530	2.65	.522	Agree
16	Assessment and feedback improve student teachers' teaching skill and this brings about quality teacher education.	2.76	.553	3.04	.554	2.90	.552	Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.77</b>	<b>.542</b>	<b>2.79</b>	<b>.550</b>	<b>2.77</b>	<b>.546</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant relationship between effective assessment exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State.

Table 8: PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective assessment exercise and the quality of student teachers

Variable	N	r	Sig	Remark
Effective assessment	20	.795	.000	H0 <sub>4</sub> Rejected
Student teacher quality	80			

.05 level of significance

Table 7 shows the mean ratings of lecturers and student teachers on how effective assessment exercise improves the quality of student teachers, while Table 8 shows the PPMC output on the existence of relationship between effective assessment exercise and the quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. As revealed by Table 7, majority of the respondents strongly agreed on the various ways assessment exercises improve student teachers' quality ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = .546$ ) with the grand mean set being higher than the criterion mean. The various ways include: making student teacher to be more serious with their teacher preparation programs and exercises; improvement on their teaching engagements; mastery of effective preparation of lesson notes and lesson plans; and improvement in student teachers' skills.

Table 8 in the same vein shows that there exists a very strong positive and significant relationship ( $r = .795$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ) between assessment exercise and quality of student teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State. These findings are in line with that of Oluwatayo and Adebule (2022) that assessment exercise improves student teachers' quality through helping them to know how well they are performing and then improving on their performance on various performance indices on which they are assessed on the course of their program. This also highlights the fact that providing constructive feedback to student teachers to help them improve on their teaching practice performance should be the main goal of assessment exercise. As much as student teachers get graded by their performance in the various forms of assessment during their teacher preparation programs, lecturers and supervisors need to always ensure that feedback is given to the student teachers so that they can know areas where they need improvement.

## CONCLUSION

To raise quality teachers in teacher training institutions in Rivers State, administrators, deans, heads of departments, and lecturers need to be innovative with exercises that can bequeath student teachers with requisite skills, knowledge and competences in the teaching profession. Some of these exercises, such as teaching practice, microteaching, mentoring and assessment of student teachers on the course of their programs are actually on ground in these institutions but have lost their efficacies because of poor management. If effectively implemented, they possess the potentials of transforming the outputs of teacher training institutions into the right calibre of teachers that will help in the attainment of education goals of the state.

## Recommendations

Based on the forgone findings and conclusion of the study, the following suggestions are made:

- Teacher training institutions should take their teaching practice exercises very seriously, by ensuring that student teachers in the exercise are adequately and properly supervised and assisted to become their best during the teaching practice exercise.
- School administrators should ensure that microteaching laboratories in teacher training institutions are equipped with state of the art facilities to make the exercise achieve its goal of adequately preparing student teachers to possess the quality that is expected of them by their institutions and the society.
- The administration of teacher training institutions should normalize pairing student teachers with experienced faculty members for the purpose of coaching and mentorship to facilitate the transfer of teaching experiences for improved quality of student teachers.
- Supervisors of teacher preparation exercises should always provide student teachers with feedback after assessment to help them know areas where they need improvement and to make necessary adjustment.

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