IMPLICATIONS OF TRAINING STUDENT TEACHERS OF PRE-SCHOOLING THROUGH MICRO-TEACHING ACTIVITIES WITH MENTALLY-DISABLED STUDENTS

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to find out whether there is a difference between the student teachers' opinions in-class teaching skills before and after applying micro-teaching. This study was carried out with the participation of some second-year students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt. The opinions of the student teachers about in-class teaching skills were obtained via a questionnaire consisting of items. In the opinions of the students, significant differences were observed before and after micro-teaching applications. Following micro-teaching activities, self-confidence of the student teachers and their in-class teaching skills increased. Their concerns about classroom management were observed to dissipate.*

Introduction

One of the most important objectives of today's teacher education systems is to equip student teachers with continuous pleasure and skill of learning rather than transferring information to them, and evoke their interests in an ever-changing and developing contemporary world around them. A teacher is someone who does not only acquires some sort of knowledge but is also capable of teaching it. Therefore, student teachers should gain practical skills such as; classroom management/ communication, making lesson plans, creating a state of teaching and learning, evaluating education and students, as well as theoretical knowledge {knowledge of the field). To gain such teaching skilb, students are provided with practicum, special teaching methods and the skills in the teaching of special subjects.

Planning Learning Experiences and Determining Effective Learning: Teaching strategies in teaching settings are important for the quality of teaching. In the learning- teaching process, teaching conditions should be organized to reach pre-determined targets. In this process, content, method-technique and tools-equipment are determined.

Teaching method can be defined as the ways to be foffowed to guide the students towards the objectives set (Romiszowski, 1986). According to Burden and Byrd (1994), instructional strategies are the means by which the content is presented and the learning objectives are achieved. On the other hand, the teaching technique is a way of implementing a teaching method or a route to be followed in presenting the teaching materials and structuring teaching activities. In faculties or colleges where teacher- students are educated, the teaching knowledge and skills obtained by student teachers and the teaching approaches adopted by them would affect students in classrooms where they would be teaching. At the same time, the

teaching process requires student- teacher to specialize in his subject field and obtain deep knowledge (Garet, 2001).

Effective teachers have a repertoire of strategies that can be used in the classroom (Burden and Byrd, 1994). As stated _by Connecticut State of Education (2007), effective instruction and improved student outcomes begin with the teacher. Brophy and Good (1986), review numerous studies about teacher impact on student achievement and concluded that "the myth that teachers do or do not make a difference in student learning has been refuted".

More recent studies has noted that, the individual class- room teacher has an even greater effect on student achievement than originally thought (Sanders and Horn, 1994; Wright and Sanders, 1997). Although, teachers are provided with many opportunities concerning technology in learning-teaching process, teachers usually do not utilize these opportunities (Means and Olson, 1994).Therefore, educating teachers about "special teaching programs" designed for children with mental disabilities, attending pre-schools (kindergarten, nursery etc.) is important.

Applications taking place in centres where teacher students are educated to work in pre-schools enhance the efficiency of the teaching program. With regard to the quality of teaching, it is important for teachers to find opportunities to apply the principles and theories about any subject in the classroom setting. Akgamete (1991) states that, in an individual teaching program aiming at children with mental disabilities, freedom to select his teaching method and technique and materials should be taken into account by the teacher. There are many methods which are considered to be effective in teacher training. For that reason, student teachers are exposed to various techniques in classroom situations such as teaching in groups (demonstration, micro-teaching, group and pair work, dramatization, role play, educational plays etc and individual teaching techniques (individualized teaching, programmed education and computer assisted teaching), ft is possible to observe that in the related literature, micro-teaching technique has not been much encountered in educating teachers who will work in the schools for mentally- disabled students.

Micro-teaching in teacher education

One of the techniques used to develop student teachers' teaching skills is micro-teaching. Micro-teaching is also used in training teachers of other branches. Napoli (2008) employed three micro-teaching segments in music teacher education. In her study, immediately after teaching the student teachers, she filled out an evaluation form indicating four things they did well, one suggestion for improvement and effectiveness score from 1 - 15. All students in class also completed this task. But at pre- school level, it enables student teachers to get prepared for the teaching profession in a special way by taking into consideration the features of development of mental, psychomotor and social skills of the group they are to teach.

The purpose of micro-teaching is to get student teachers to gain the predetermined critical teaching behaviours. This technique is important as it enables predetermined critical teaching behaviours to be gained and perceived better. Micro-teaching is an artificial form of real classroom teaching rendered in a more limited scope. It is a scaled-down model of teaching. It is essentially an opportunity for pre-service teachers and experienced professionals to develop and/or improve specific teaching skills with a small group of students by means of

brief single-concept lessons. These lessons are recorded on videotape for reviewing, refining, ar analyzing very specific teaching processes.

Micro-teaching is a technique that allows the teacher to place small aspects of teachir under the microscope (Orlich et al., 1985).In England, micro-teaching applications and the analysi of the skills acquired during these applications are widely used in teacher training (Bisset, 1999). In his study, Macleod (1987) found very little evidence con- cerning the ineffectiveness of micro-teaching. Although, micro-teaching is limited to theory-based research, it is argued that together with the present applications, micro- teaching applications are based on the cognitive model which brings a new dimension to future research attempts.

In Nigeria, micro-teaching has started to be applied in some universities and private institutions as a means of pre-service and in-service training. For this reason, micro-teaching is an important aspect of the teaching application which is used to prepare student teachers for the profession of teaching. Teaching practices are still conducted in real school and classroom settings. In the beginning, it is not a very easy experience for most teachers. For those who start doing teaching practice, the first impressions, experiences and their effects are highly important. For these student teachers who have just started their teaching practices; classroom management is a very complex issue. Therefore, micro-teaching is considered to be a transition in preparing for such a classroom situation (Kiilahci, 1994). According to Gorgen (2003), the means of micro-teaching applications in teacher training is aimed at helping student teachers to gain confidence and research skills. Via micro-teaching, student teachers can gain pre- and in-service teaching experiences and academic self-confidence.

Preparatory process for micro-teaching

In the application stage of micro-teaching, the duration of teaching is usually set to be 5 - 20 minutes and the number of students is 5 - 10. The objectives of micro-teaching are clearly explained to the teacher candidates (Klilahci, 1994). Other friends of the student teacher act as students. What is important with micro-teaching practice is not to teach some particular subject but to practice it. Stages of teaching through micro-teaching technique are implemented as follows:

(i)   A 10 -15 min lesson plan is prepared for a predetermined subject.
(ii)   The way the lesson is carried out is videotaped,
(iii)   The lesson which is videotaped is viewed,
(iv)   The lesson is evaluated by the instructor and the group of other student teachers who have participated in completion of the micro-teaching evaluation form,
(v)   After the lesson is viewed from the video, the instructor summarizes the micro-teaching performance of each student teacher and some tips are given for the following teaching applications.
(vi)   Each student self-evaluates, and
(vii)   The questionnaire which is used in the beginning to evaluate attitudes towards teaching is applied once again.

Mentally-disabled children

At pre-school age, experiences that can be learnt by doing are experiences that are important for children. In particular, when children with mental disabilities are classified according to their training needs, it becomes important'for them on what to learn and to what

extent. In some countries, the regulations of private schools operating under the control of the Ministry of Education, children with mental disabilities are classified as "trainable, teachable and in need of clinical care". Usually, the disability of children with mental disabilities is noticed in the pre-school development period. Of such children, those who are trainable can utilize primary school education. According to Moleneye [1979], children with mental disabilities who can be taught can acquire basic academic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics (Moleneye 1979, cited in Eripek, 1996).

According to American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before the age of 18 (AAMR, 2008}.These children can learn self-care skills as well as basic academic skills. The student teachers being trained for the children with mental disabilities who can be taught are chosen as the participants of the present study.

Purpose of the study

With the application of micro-teaching, it is believed that, student teachers studying at the school can prepare themselves more effectively for teaching children with mild mental disabilities. In the micro-teaching application, it is possible for a student teacher to analyze his or her learning and teaching styles and to evaluate them, so that, he or she can acquire professional knowledge, skills and attitudes by watching micro-teaching presentations, making systematic observations and rearranging learning. The course aimed at training student teachers, dealing with teaching children with mild mental disabilities, both on a theoretical and practical basis indicates that, some teaching applications and skills such as making lesson plans, getting prepared for the lesson, making more use of special teaching techniques and methods, communication, classroom management and relationship with students (decrease in level of anxiety, feeling more secure) etc, can be gained more easily.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether any change occurs in the perceptions of the student teachers, performing micro-teaching applications about in-class teaching skills with regard to teaching children with mild mental disabilities before and after micro teaching applications.

Methodology

According to Gibbon and Morris [1978], pre-and post-test design can be employed with one group. When comparisons between groups are not needed in research, design is employed. In the present study, one group of student teachers is taken and then, they are given a test before and after the application of research to see whether there are any changes in the opinions of student teachers regarding to teaching skills for mentally-disabled students (Gibbonand Morris, 1978, Erden, 1995).

Sampling

The participants of the study are some students who took the course of Micro-teaching/Methodology from the Department of Curriculum/Instructional Technology Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt in the full term of academic year. They participate in this study on. a voluntary basis. In addition to this course, the students are taking various subjects and lessons concerning educating disabled children with audio- visual and/orf

orthopaedic disabilities in their training programs. The student teachers are trained for pre-school education.

Procedure

1. At the beginning of the period, before the first lesson, a questionnaire measuring "the opinions of the student teachers about the teaching skills" developed by Gorgen (2003) was given to each of the student teachers.

2. In this process, while a student teacher was presenting the lesson, other student teachers role-played mentally-disabled students in order to make this process more authentic and reliable in the course of the research. Every student was given an opportunity to do micro-teaching. Meanwhile, as a part of this course, the student teachers engaged in various activities such as planning a lesson, having a theoretical background and observing course teacher in the classroom. In addition, they did teaching practicum in regular pre-schools for six months.

3. Every student teacher has decided on a sub-topic so as to be prepared for micro- teaching from the text-book by Abie, Samuel [2005].

4. According to Snell (1993) in the course of designing teaching processes, the skills of planning a lesson are handled as follows: Taking these stages into consideration, sub-topics have been prepared as a daily lesson plan.

5. Whilst a student teacher was presenting the lesson she had planned, another student teacher kept a record of the time, videotape of the student teacher and the other student teachers became members of the class. After the micro-teaching application was over, every student teacher joined the evaluation process of the presentation of every student teacher.

6. In micro-teaching applications, observation results obtained by analyzing the teaching skills of the student teachers were recorded in the micro-teaching evaluation form (Sands et al., 1996).

7. The lesson plans were designed in conjunction with the principle from easy to difficult and from abstract to concrete,-

8. After the classroom discussion of each micro-teaching application, feedback-correction was given to the student teacher, and then each student teacher performed a self-evaluation.

9. At the end of the period, the same questionnaire was completed again by the same group of student teachers.

Conclusion

According to the results obtained from the study, it can be argued that micro teaching applications bring about positive changes within the opinions of the student teachers towards teaching skills. This application also enables student teachers to develop awareness for learning the level of these tasks as they engaged their peers in similar micro-teaching activities. In teacher training programs, experience of micro-teaching applications by student teachers in "theoretical and applied" part of teaching activities, real-life like design of the teaching-learning environment objective evaluation which may have positive effects on the acquisition of teaching skills by student teachers. In particular, providing the student teachers with the opportunity of self-evaluation by means of videotaping the lesson and the immediate feedback

and correction process can help student teachers to see theirweaknesses and strengths. As a result they can improve their weaknesses by building up professional self-confidence.

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