

***Teaching Skills of Special Education Students During
Teaching Practice: The Case of the University of Zambia
Pre-Service Special Education Students***

by

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Abstract

This was a qualitative study of special education students that were doing teaching practice in 2016. The study sought to establish Special Education student teachers' skills and abilities to balance between Special Education as a major and the teaching subject as a minor when teaching learners with special educational needs. It further established the pedagogical challenges they faced teaching learners with special education needs. Fifteen students were purposively and conveniently sampled to take part in the study. Data were collected by the use of the University of Zambia evaluation form and post-lesson discussions characterised by questions on certain behaviours performed in class. The findings of the study revealed that students concentrated on demonstrating skills in their teaching subjects than special education as their major. Students lacked skills for teaching learners with special education needs in the inclusive classroom. It was further established that students were not adequately prepared with skills for inclusive teaching. The study recommends adoption of the Practice-Based Approach by Benedict, A., Holdheide, L., Brownell, M., & Foley, M.A., (2016) to help prepare reflective teachers for special education. The study further recommends the strengthening

of the teaching methodologies course and appropriate posting of students to schools where they can practice effectively.

Keywords: student-teachers, teaching practice, teacher posting, teaching skills, special education, practice-based instruction

Background

The University of Zambia (UNZA), School of Education was one of the first three schools at the opening of the University in 1966. The other two were the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the School of Natural Sciences (UNZA, 2012). With 13 schools now, after the recent split of the School of Medicine into four schools, the UNZA's School of Education is still the largest school enrolling more students in both regular and distance modes. For instance, in 2014, the School of Education enrolment was 5 576 students while the School of Humanities and Social Sciences had 2 934. The School of Natural Sciences had 1 610. All other schools were below 500 enrolled in 2014 (Ministry of General Education, 2016). Enrolment in the School of Education doubled from 5 576 in 2014 to 11 776 in 2015. With about 18 education programmes in the School of Education, the Department of Educational Psychology, Sociology and Special Education (EPSSE) contributes one of the highest numbers to the overall enrolment in the School of Education. For instance, of the programmes in the school of education, the Bachelor of Education-Special Education (B.Ed Sp) alone in 2016 enrolment contributed 1, 138 students of the total number of enrolment. These numbers include students from first to fourth year (UNZA Assistant Registrar's Office Statistics, 2015). From the 2016 enrolment figures collected, Special Education enrolments are among the highest in the School of Education with Bachelor of

Arts with Education topping at 3 717 and Library and Information Science at 1 497, and the Bachelor of Adult Education at 1 305 in 2016 enrolment.

There are two types of entrants (students) under Special Education Degree programme. These are school leavers and non-school leavers who start the programme at first-year level, and in-service entrants who start the programme at third year level. Students are enrolled as full-time, parallel or distance students.

The aim of the B.Ed. Sp programme for pre-service candidates is to prepare students to teach in upper basic (Grades 8 - 9) and high school (Grades 10 – 12) special education or inclusive education classes. Students under this programme take Special Education as a major and anyone subject from Civic Education, French, Geography, History, English Language/Linguistics and Literature, Mathematics, Religious Studies, Chinese and Linguistics and African Languages as a minor (EPSSE Course Outline,n.d). It is not doubted, therefore, that the contribution of the EPSSE Department and in particular, Special Education section to Zambia's human resource is enormous. However, despite the impressive numbers of special education teachers being offloaded into schools yearly, the quality of graduates needs investigation. Such investigation is better started with the training of the students during teaching practice (TP), which is the foundation of teaching. The quality and effectiveness of an education system depend heavily on the quality of its teachers (MoE 2010). With this background, the need for this study was to assess special education skills demonstrated by student teachers on TP.

Problem Statement

Special education students like other students training to be teachers go for TP for eight weeks in the third term of their third year. Lecturers follow the students during the eight weeks TP to see how they apply the theories they learn in the university.

Students find themselves in inclusive schools, special schools and units. Since the students major in special education and minor in a teaching subject of choice, it is expected that students gain more specialisation in the major subject area (special education) and are expected to demonstrate competencies in handling Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) during TP. But lecturers can only observe such skills through the student teaching a content subject (the minor subject). However, since the introduction of the B.Ed.Sp programme, it is not known whether special education students on TP demonstrate the expected teaching skills. This study was, therefore, conducted to establish the demonstration of special education teaching skills during TP. It further established students' abilities to balance skills while teaching and the challenges they faced during TP.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives;

- (i) To assess teaching skills of special education students during TP.
- (ii) To examine special education students' ability to demonstrate special education skills when teaching the minor subject.
- (iii) To examine the challenges faced by special education student teachers in demonstrating special education skills while teaching the minor subject to LSENs.

Research Questions

The research questions that helped to achieve the objectives were;

- (i) What special education skills do special education student teachers demonstrate when teaching (LSENs) during TP?
- (ii) Are special education student teachers able to demonstrate expected skills in special education while teaching their

minor subject?

- (iii) What challenges do special education students face in teaching LSENs during TP?

Literature Review

Teaching practice, sometimes called school experience is the practice that first time students who train to be teachers undergo before joining the teaching profession. During TP, student teachers are exposed to the real classroom situation. All students training to be teachers in Zambian universities and colleges of education have to do TP before they graduate. It is a requirement that before students graduate, they must pass TP. The significance of TP in training of teachers cannot be over emphasised. Students need to be exposed to the classroom situation and be assessed in the acquisition of teaching skills before they complete their course and be deployed to teach. While on TP, students are expected to acquire a number of skills. They are also expected to apply the theories they learn in universities and colleges of education. According to Monk & Dillon (2005: 3), the competencies that are expected to develop in newly qualified teachers are subject knowledge, subject application, class management, assessment and recording of pupil progress and further professional development (Monk and Dillon, 2005:3). According to Musonda (1999:164), when the Zambia Education Reform Programme (ZARTEP) was introduced in Zambia's teacher education system, trainee teachers were assessed in four broad competencies namely; the student's subject knowledge for teaching in the basic school age range, the student's planning, teaching and classroom management, the student's assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' progress and the students' interpersonal and social skills. Such competencies are key especially in the management of learners with special educational needs. There are a variety of disabilities that need different skills by the teacher. The best time

to acquire the desired skills for teaching learners with special educational needs is during TP.

Teaching Practice is a phase in the training of a teacher when he or she is expected to demonstrate knowledge and skills acquired during part of the training in real life teaching. It is not peer teaching, it is actual teaching in a natural classroom setting. The performance of students during TP is dependent on how well they are prepared for the exercise. Students can apply themselves in TP when they are shown to do what is expected of them. The Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory is very much applicable to the preparation of a teacher for teaching. In the Cognitive Apprenticeship theory pioneered by Collins (1989), the trainee teacher is expected to master the teaching skills and demonstrate them in classroom teaching under the observation of the instructor. The model has its roots in the constructivist theory. The learner is expected to learn from his instructor and in turn, should be able to teach his or her learners the way he or she has been taught. Collins *et al.*, (1989) in Dennen and Burner (n.d) defined the concept of a cognitive apprenticeship as learning through guided experience on cognitive and metacognitive, rather than physical, skills and processes with its roots in social learning theories. They further argue that one cannot engage in a cognitive apprenticeship alone, but rather it is dependent on expert demonstration (modelling) and guidance (coaching) in the initial phases of learning.

The question that needs to be answered in this study is, 'do our special education students demonstrate adequate and acceptable competencies during TP? Although this study did not dwell on whether or not students are prepared in an apprenticeship manner, a reference to this model is critical. By the time students go into TP they should have models and have been coached and scaffolded. In Special Education, students should be coached to teach and manage different LSEs. They also need support (scaffolding) to be ready to face the different challenges learners with different

special needs bring to the classroom. Without the much-needed support and effective preparation before TP, miracles should not be expected even among the best students. Students can be given content about theories of teaching but without apprenticeship support, they cannot apply what they learn, if they do, it will be with difficulties. Githinji, Nderitu and Mugailwa (2013), in a Kenyan study of 100 trainee teachers from 18 Diploma colleges found that theories are not necessarily put into practice during TP. Further, in a study to determine the effectiveness of TP to prepare student teachers to teach in Botswana by Mannathoko (2013) student teachers for creative and performing arts on TP did not receive enough help especially in pedagogy. Mannathoko (2013) further reported that students did not receive any ‘assistance at all from tutors and supervisors before and during TP despite their plea for help.’ If students are not helped to become good teachers as the case is for Botswana, then the quality of graduates is likely to be compromised. These are situations where when such students graduate, they have to start learning to teach as if they had never been in TP at all.

Although this study concentrated on teaching skills demonstrated by special education students during TP, there are other challenges that affect the performance of students. Muzata and Penda (2013), also found that student teachers face numerous challenges which include pedagogy, lack of instructional material, poor guidance, shorter period of TP and many other challenges amongst several challenges. According to Okobia (2013), students faced several challenges among them that the period for TP was too short, lack of instructional materials and resources in schools, poor learning environments and overcrowded classrooms, difficulties preparing notes, inadequate TP orientation of students before actual TP, lack of provision of field trip/excursion when necessary and other challenges that bordered on relationships with other experienced teachers and personal welfare challenges of accommodation and allowances.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative approach by the use of observation and post-lesson discussion. According to Mukherji and Albon (2015: 135), observation can be quantitative or qualitative. ‘Quantitative observations, sometimes known as structured observations, are designed to give standardised, numerical data, in an effort to reduce the number of variables and improve the reliability of the findings’. The other type is qualitative observations is often undertaken for explorative purposes and exactly what will be observed is not specified beforehand. Qualitative observations are usually undertaken in naturalistic situations with what the researcher records being guided by the overall aim of the research and interesting things that they see at the time (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). The population of this study was special education students that were on teaching practice in 2016. Since the study was qualitative, only 15 students were sampled. Purposive convenience sampling was used to identify the participants. Participants were observed in their natural classroom teaching setting. After every lesson, post-lesson discussions were held. Questions were based on observations made during lesson observation. Although post-lesson discussions were meant to guide the students, the students were given chance through questions to reflect on their classroom practices. The researcher asked questions based on the lessons. Thus, the questions were more like unstructured interviews because there were different individuals observed and could not be expected to perform in the same way because they taught learners of different characteristics and different lessons. In some schools where there were more than two students observed, group post-lesson discussions were used. Ghosh (2015) acknowledges the use of group interviews in qualitative research as helpful

at economising time. Murkheji and Albon (2015:154) say, 'Unstructured interviews are also qualitative in nature and are designed to provide in-depth information about the participants' beliefs, thoughts and feelings'. The UNZA TP evaluation form was used to collect data from lesson observations. Although the instrument is vital for assessment of students on TP, it does not have all the expected qualities that special education students are expected to demonstrate.

Data were analysed by the use of Nvivo qualitative software to clean, sort and organise into three major themes namely; student teachers' skills, ability to balance teaching skills and the challenges students faced in teaching. Coding comparisons were made that reflected on where student teachers' skills were more concentrated.

Post lesson discussion data was recorded on an 8 GB Sony Digital Voice Recorder while a duplicate copy of each observed student teachers' evaluation was taken by the researcher. To satisfy ethical procedures, participants were informed about the audio recording and its purpose. They were assured of privacy and informed that the recording was for research and reflection purposes meant to improve pedagogical practice. The participants' and schools' names were withheld for ethical reasons.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that special education students on TP demonstrate more and better skills in the minor teaching subject than special education which is their major programme. Student teachers concentrated more on their minor subject, ignoring special education which was their major. Ordinarily, students are expected to demonstrate skills in the programme in which they are specialising. The following are selected summaries of comments about students that were obtained from

Comments from the UNZA Evaluation Sheet and Post Lesson Discussions

Research Participant (RP) 1 (Special Education and Civic Education (CVE)

Positive comments about the student teacher: The student teacher demonstrated some good qualities of teaching from the introduction of the lesson to development. He used the question and answer technique from the start and used a chart to consolidate the lesson.

Weaknesses: The student teacher demonstrated difficulties in teaching learners with hearing impairments. With difficult in sign language, the student teacher relied on writing notes on the board. The chart was also too crowded and poorly labelled with incorrect spellings in some cases. Although the student teacher was able to use a bit of sign language, much of the communication was through signs. He ignored the use of total communication making the lesson fail to flow naturally. He could not position learners well when he asked them to sign. In other words, the learners were signing to him and not to the class.

RP 2 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: The student introduced the lesson with two key questions that made learners reflect on their previous lesson. The lesson development progressed orderly with good command of language, audibility, clear board work and well-tailored and distributed questions. The student showed

understanding of subject content. He placed the albino learner in front with pre-written large print notes in order to follow the teaching.

Weaknesses: While the student teacher was teaching, no special attention was paid to the learner with albinism. It was difficult for the learner with visual impairments to follow a lesson at the speed the student teacher was teaching, at the same time to follow the detailed large print notes given to the learner. The student teacher further could not at any point ask the learner whether she was following or not. The student's board work was not suitable for the learners with low vision. He was cutting words on the board.

RP 3 (Special Education and History)

Positive about the student teacher: The student taught a Grade 10 class which was an inclusive class with a learner with a physical disability. After providing a historical story, the student teacher asked learners a very good question that introduced the lesson. The student teacher used the question and answer technique with very good voice projection, order and involvement of learners.

Weaknesses: Board work lacked clarity although the nature of disability in the class may not have required this quality. The handwriting was too tiny for visibility by especially those at the back of the class.

RP 4 (Special Education and History)

Positive about the student teacher: The class had one learner with albinism placed in front of the class and served with

pre-written large print notes for the learner to follow the lesson. The student introduced the lesson with revision questions. In a class, without serious disabilities, the student is a good teacher. He understands his subject content and presented the lesson orderly.

Weaknesses: The student taught the class ordinarily with little or no attention paid to the LSENs except the notes that she was given and the learner centre position in front of the class. The student did not use the board appropriately and the file did not show any plans for LSENs.

RP 5 (Special Education and Geography)

The teacher showed effective skills in board work, motivation strategies and the use of different teaching strategies which included work cards, a chart, board work and exercises which allowed learners to be able to relate what they saw on work cards to what was on the board. This student demonstrated effective practice. No serious weaknesses were observed.

RP 6 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: The teacher introduced the lesson with a song and developed the lesson by writing words on the board and asking the learners to read the words. This is a case of a student who was trained in civic education as a teaching subject but teaching English sound identification to learners with intellectual disabilities.

Weakness: Instead of teaching sounds, the teacher taught whole words without breaking the sounds that make the words. In any case, the student was teaching English and not

rehabilitating reading. Further, the learners were not taught according to their levels of understanding. Learners lost patience and started laughing at each other. The teacher used threats to control this behaviour but the learners continued laughing.

RP 7 (Special Education and Geography)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teacher helped learners to revise the previous lesson and developed the board notes alongside explanations. A chart was also used.

Weaknesses: The student teacher needed to show knowledge of learners with specific learning difficulties, behaviour difficulties, and short attention span and apply learned skills. The student was further advised to face learners when explaining concepts and to be confident. He was further advised to write in straight lines. This lesson was literally writing notes because very little time was spent explaining. The student was literally reading the lesson plan. No aspects of special education were seen practised.

RP 8 (Special Education and History)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teacher asked questions as a revision of the previous lesson before providing learning tasks in groups for the new lesson. She gave clear instructions and time limits to finish the tasks. She tried to use sign language to the best of her abilities, supervised and managed the class effectively. Board work was clear. One impressive skill the teacher

used was she noted one learner looking low. She asked the learner while touching his shoulder, ‘are you sick, what is wrong today? You look so low.’ After this incident, the learner was motivated and participated effectively in the lesson than most other learners.

Weakness: The student teacher had problems with sign language. He used the lecture method to teach. No total communication strategies were used.

RP 9 (Special Education and History)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teacher revised the previous lesson through questions based on the previous lesson. Learners’ responses were written on the board. Work cards were used to develop the lesson. Learners’ responses from work card tasks were written on the board. This was accompanied with explanations of the concepts.

Weaknesses: However, the student teacher could not position the learners with hearing impairments well when signing. The class had a learner who had difficulties remembering what was recently taught.

RP 10 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teacher revised the previous lesson using questions. The question and answer technique was used to develop the lesson. Through questions, learners were actively involved. Board work was clear and the student was able to use both finger spellings and sign language during the lesson. Words that were written on the board were signed.

Weakness: The student teacher did not ask clear and specific questions and did not use more learner-centred approaches that could encourage the development of sign language and exchange of ideas among learners with hearing impairments.

RP 11 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teacher first checked the homework that he gave the learners, marked it and verbally rewarded the learners. This was commended. A new lesson was introduced by connecting it to the previous lesson with real-life examples and involvement of learners. The student's teaching was characterised by neat and orderly board work and the student applied different strategies during lesson development.

Weaknesses: However, the student teacher could not apply individual attention strategies to learners' different levels of cognition. The LICs operate at different levels. They cannot do the same tasks at the same pace. The student teacher's file did not show any plans for LSENs.

RP 12 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teachers showed effective skills of orderly development of the lesson, interaction with learners and the use of charts and involvement of learners in the lesson.

Weaknesses: The student teacher could not utilise individual learners to tell what they knew about the lesson. The two LSEs she had were at different levels of intellectual capacity but she taught them the same content at the same pace. Only one of them was able to respond to the questions the teacher was giving.

RP 13 (Special Education and Geography)

Positive about the student teacher: The student teacher showed very good teaching skills from the introduction to the development of the lesson. Apart from a well-drawn and labelled chart, she used a variety of real objects as teaching and learning aids. A lot of activities characterised the lesson with the effective supervision of tracing activities.

Weakness: the student could not design activities to the different levels of learners. No individual attention was paid to learners with intellectual challenges.

RP 14 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: The student taught divisions of numbers and demonstrated teacher professional skills of clear and orderly board work, providing clear examples and involving learners. He had enough teaching and learning aids that learners used to solve mathematical problems.

Weakness: Activities were not tailored to the different levels of learners' abilities. When using learners to demonstrate the solving of mathematical problems on the board,

the student teacher needed to help position the learners very well so that others could see. The aspect of teaching too much within the same lesson to learners with intellectual disabilities was also noted.

RP 15 (Special Education and CVE)

Positive about the student teacher: After a revision question, the student teacher's lesson developed through the use of real objects as teaching aids and active involvement of the learners in solving problems. The student teacher's board work was clear. She supervised class activities effectively.

Weaknesses: The student did not demonstrate the most required special education skills for handling LSEs. For instance, in addition to being intellectually challenged, one learner had habitual disorders. The learner was chewing a pencil but the teacher looked on. The learner was also drooling saliva and all that the student teacher did was to ask the learner to take his handkerchief and never during the learning process did she remind the learner to clean himself. The learner was also left-handed. Left-handedness is not a disability unless it presents learning difficulties. When asked during post-lesson discussion what other needs the learner had, it was good to note that the student teacher understood the learners' need as being slow at writing, drooling and short memory. The student teacher was guided to take into account the other learning needs while teaching.

From the results above, it is clear that students faced various challenges demonstrating the expected skills in special education during TP. The following themes discuss the challenges student teachers faced:

Demonstration and balancing of skills: From the above summaries of the findings, students made effort to demonstrate good teaching skills especially in the teaching subjects. For instance, they were able to demonstrate knowledge of subject matter in the teaching subjects. Some used real objects as teaching and learning aids during the lesson. They were able to use appropriate methods and strategies of teaching and asked clear questions that allowed for the smooth flow of lessons. Revision of previous lessons was the most common form of introducing lessons.

However, students faced challenges demonstrating skills that enable LSEs to learn effectively in a classroom.

Problems of sign language: First, some students had problems with sign language. This inhibited natural flow of lessons. When one of the student teachers was asked on why he chose to select some learners with intellectual disabilities yet there were also learners with hearing impairments in the same class, the student teacher answered; '*I am not conversant with sign language*'. Student teachers who had problems with sign language mainly relied on writing notes on the board. This does not help learners much especially if such learners also have reading and writing problems. Students who taught deaf learners also failed to use total communication. Total communication ensures the use of a combination of communication strategies to drive a point home. Thus, the use of sign language combined with lip reading, gestures, writing and pointing explains such communication meant to make deaf learners be at

pace and understand concepts being explained fully. Total communication is quite helpful to especially post-linguistic deaf learners, (learners who become deaf after acquiring speech). The Ministry of General Education (2014) acknowledges that there is lack of sign language skills among Zambian teachers teaching the hearing impaired learners. If such a challenge exists, even among those being trained, then the need to intensify sign language training for special education students becomes critical.

Failure to provide individualised attention to LSEs: The other challenge was a failure to pay attention to LSEs. Individualised attention is a core skill required to be demonstrated by students training to teach LSEs. Individualised attention can be demonstrated while teaching and when giving activities to learners. The MoGE (2016) advises teachers to prepare individualised education activities (IEA) during classroom learning besides the individualised education plan which is meant to restore long-term functional problems among LSEs. In this study, students failed to demonstrate this skill, which is very significant in special education. For instance, RP 11, as observed by the researcher did not provide special assistance to learners with intellectual challenges. Learners with intellectual challenges operate at different levels and require individualised attention at all costs if learning is to be expected. The thinking capacity of intellectually challenged learners is considerably low. Teaching them same activities at the same pace using whole class methods does not help them much. No task analysis and differentiation were applied in teaching the learners with intellectual challenges. Learners with intellectual challenges also do not need

to be given a lot of work as was observed in RP 14. The lack of individual attention was also observed in RP 2 and RP 4 who had learners with albinism. Learners with albinism have problems of low vision and require large print, magnifiers and supervision during teaching and learning. Student teachers are expected to prepare large print copies of learning activities for them and monitor whether they are moving at pace with other learners while teaching. Letters on the board need to be large enough and a good selection of brighter colours need to be used to ensure visibility for such learners. However, although RP 4, was able to provide large print, RP 2 did not. The difficulties in this theme relate to how well prepared our students are for teaching LSENs in inclusive classrooms. According to Lewis and Bagree (2013: 13)

It is vital for trainee teachers to learn about inclusive education from day one of their training so that focusing on quality and inclusive teaching and learning is seen as a natural part of every teacher's job.

The problem of teachers failing to demonstrate appropriate skills when teaching LSENs in inclusive classrooms may also affect experienced teachers who have not been prepared to teach using inclusive methodologies and approaches. For students, before they get into TP, there is need to prepare them adequately for content and practice. Lewis and Bagree (2013) advise a balance between theory and practice-based learning in order to initiate students for inclusive teaching. They advise that students need many opportunities to observe and implement the theories in practice.

The split between theory and practice needs to be well-balanced. Too much theoretical and too little

practice-based learning can leave teachers ill-prepared for the real-life challenges they will face in class. Equally, however, if there is very little theory-based learning, teachers can miss out on vital opportunities to learn from wider sources of information and to learn how to be more reflective and analytical practitioners (Lewis & Bagree, 2013: 16)

Teaching method challenges: The use of interactive methodologies in teaching-learning processes has major advantages to LSENs. Many LSENs suffer from self-esteem problems because of the disabilities they have and the negative attitudes of society towards them. The use of methods that allow them to interact with peers and learn from each other would further help them develop self-concept and improve self-esteem. However, special education students in this study did not use interactive methodologies that could have given such learners opportunities to interact with their peers. Knowledge acquisition according to social-cultural psychologists is socially constructed. Student teachers seemed to rely more on the question and answer, and lecture and whole class methods. Some LSENs do not benefit much from such methods. Students are encouraged to use group work, projects, debates, and other methods that help learners to interact.

Class organisation and management: Positioning of learners is also a critical strategy in the teaching of LSENs. For instance, learners with low vision require being in the middle front position, although this depends on the type of low vision the learner has. Myopic or short-sighted learners can only see better when the stimulus is situated near while hyperopic (longsighted) learners

can see better from afar. Although in this study, students did not have any of the two extremes, (myopia and hyperopia), they did not use positioning as a strategy for learners with low vision such as albinos. RP 1 and RP 9 were examples of students that could not use the positioning strategy while RP 4 applied it but did not use it to fully benefit the learner. For instance, RP 4 'simply placed the learner in front and given a large print, no further prompts were done to ensure that the learner is participating in the lesson'. Learners with partial hearing loss also require good positioning while learning. Positioning for learners with partial hearing loss depends on the affected ear and the degree of the loss. For learners with behavioural problems, positioning helps in managing disruptive behaviour. Students studying to teach LSENs need to employ a variety of strategies to manage learners.

Teaching file: Students generally, performed poorly on teaching file assessment. Some students had not even prepared a teaching file 3 weeks into TP. The need for documents that reflect the needs for LSENs is critical. A teaching file is a teacher's diary. It has records and plans for all learners. Expected documents on a special education teacher's file are lesson plans that show integrated lesson objectives, task analysis activities, learners' individual activities, and individualised education plans among others. Like was established in this study, Rosenzweig (2009) reported research findings by Schumm & Vaughn, (1991) and Zigmond, (2003) that general education teachers rarely prepared extensive individualised plans denying LSENs the one on one highly effective instruction for learners with learning

problems. This attitude can best be eliminated by initiating trainee teachers into preparing and filing IEPs during TP. MoGE (2016) places importance on teachers preparing the IEPs for LSENs. Further, on the file, detailed lesson and evaluations about learners' progress should be accessed. However, there seemed to be little attention paid to files by students. For instance, RP 2 and 4 did not have any documentation on the file for LSENs. How much institutions pay attention to preparing students for teaching files should be a matter of concern. Muzata and Penda (2013) in a study of "Pedagogical Experiences of Students on School TP" in three teacher education institutions found that out of the three teacher education institutions, only one institution paid particular attention to assessing the teaching file and guiding students on the qualities of the teaching file. Failure to prepare students on teachings files creates a cadre of laissez-faire teachers who would not value the significance of planning and record keeping. LSENs rely on previous progress usually recorded on the file before taking further interventions.

There are a number of skills that special education students are expected to demonstrate in classroom teaching and learning situations. The researcher came up with a list of skills that students and teachers need to show when teaching LSENs. The table below is a list of expected skills needed to be assessed by lecturers observing special education students on TP.

Proposed TP Observation Sheet

Considering the amount of challenges student teachers' faced

during TP, the researcher further observed that the evaluation form used to assess students during TP did not address most competencies for assessing special education students. The following observation sheet (Table 1) is a proposed tool that would help guide special education students and supervisors on expected skills for assessment during TP.

Table 1: Special Education Lesson Evaluation Form of Expected Skills for Observation in TP

	CATEGORY	MARKS					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
	Introduction						
1	Captures attention of LSENs						
2	Lesson shows integrative, attainable, unique and clear objectives						
	Development						
3	Motivates learners with SEN						
4	Breaks down content into learnable units						
5	Presents work appropriate to SEN level						
6	Positions HI learners well for signing						
7	Teacher demonstrates effective sign language skills						
8	Teacher involves learners in signed interaction						

9	Teacher uses appropriate behaviour modification techniques/rewards/encourages learning						
10	Charts have well-combined colours/not crowded/clearly labelled						
11	Positions VI learners according to their visual acuity						
12	Board work is clear for VI learners						
13	Teacher uses total communication for HI learners/allows for lip reading						
14	Teacher's voice is audible						
15	Knows learners by names or by signed names for HI learners						
16	Able to use grade 1/grade 2 braille						
17	Uses more learners centred approaches with LSEN						
18	Changes methods when there need/use variety strategy according to need						
19	Shows concern for hygiene/dressing of learners						
20	Able to rehabilitate reading difficulties/writing/mathematical/correct speech						
21	Allows/encourages verbalisation of responses						
22	Uses T/L aids/assistive devices						
	Conclusion						
23	Gives a summary of main points,/assesses learned points/connects to next lesson						

	Personal						
24	Demonstrates suitable dress code						
25	Teacher-pupil relationship						
	File						
26	Has general information, durability, key documents						
27	Evaluates lesson methods, Objectives, weaknesses, strengths, T/L aids						
28	Schemes of work show skills for LSEN						
29	Records/ evaluate learners weaknesses and successes						
30	Shows an IEP/ remedial tasks/lists of different LSENs/Assessment records						
31	Consider other special qualities used by student for other LSENs						

Source: *Author*

Key to Understanding of Rating

Rating	0	1	2	3	4	5
Meaning	Absent	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very good	Excellent

The list is not exhaustive but can act as a guide for assessing special education students’ skills while on TP. There are different disabilities whose features may not all be on the list. Lecturers should be specialised in Special Education to be able to assess students on the various skills in this area.

Structural and System Challenges

Apart from challenges due to students’ own inadequacies, there are also structural and system challenges that also affect the TP experience for students. Structural and system challenges are beyond the student’s control but have an indirect negative effect on student performance during TP. Challenges that have to do with schools where students are posted to practice and the subjects they end up teaching instead of the ones they are trained to teach are some of the examples. Table 2 below shows a summary of what students are teaching while on TP.

Table 2: Subjects, Grade Level and School and Nature of Learners Students Were Teaching

S/N	Subject Trained in	Subject Taught	Grade level	Nature of SN
2	Civic Education	Civic Education	Senior Secondary	Hearing Impairments
3	History	Social Studies	Junior secondary	Visual Impairment
4	History	History	Senior Secondary	Physical Disability
5	Geography	History	Junior Secondary	Albino/VI
6	Civic Education	Expressive Arts	Primary	Intellectual Disability
7	Geography	English	Primary	Intellectual Disability
8	History	Geography	Junior Secondary	No LSEs Identified
9	History	History	Junior Secondary	Hearing Impairments
10	Civic Education	History	Junior Secondary	Hearing Impairments
11	Civic Education	Civics	Junior Secondary	Hearing Impairments
12	Civic Education	Mathematics	Primary	Intellectual Disability
13	Geography	Social Studies	Primary	Intellectual Disability
14	Civic Education	Mathematics	Primary	Intellectual Disability
15	Civic Education	Mathematics	Primary	Intellectual Disability
		Mathematics	Primary	Intellectual Disability

From Table 2 above, student challenges during TP may be beyond expected skills that they are required to demonstrate

during observation. Thus, some of the difficulties students were facing with regard to applying expected skills when teaching LSEs were system challenges. For instance, of the 15 students observed, only two were rightly placed to practice teaching at senior secondary school level. Pre-service students in the B.Ed. Sp, are prepared in secondary methodologies by virtue of the minor subject they take. Posting them to primary schools to practice poses challenges in the application of what they have learnt in theory. Students need suitable places for the practice of the learned theories. Learning is enhanced when teacher trainees are provided with multiple opportunities to apply what they have learned in meaningful contexts (Gangne, 1985, Gardener, 1999 in Githinji, Nderitu & Mugailwa, 2013). In any case, it does not help to expect someone you have trained at the secondary school level to demonstrate exemplary skills at another level that they have not been prepared for. Although there may be similarities in methodologies, there are different strategies required when teaching younger learners.

Table 2 further shows that students end up teaching subjects they are not trained in. For instance, there were students that ended up teaching Social Studies instead of Civic Education, Expressive Arts instead of Geography, Mathematics and English instead of Civic Education. This disparity puts students in disarray. First, they have to prepare for special education learners in a strange subject they only find in school. This does not help students to apply what they learn. They end up having pressure and may not enjoy their teaching experience.

The other problem is specialisation. Students studying for the B.Ed.Sp at UNZA are trained without specialisation in specific disabilities. The 2013 curriculum framework demands that teacher training institutions need to teach students in specialised areas such as visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities and learning disabilities (MESVTEE, 2013). For instance, MoE (2014: 3) acknowledged that ‘colleges of education

and universities have not yet adjusted their curriculum to equip student teachers with the necessary skills to adequately teach children with hearing impairments'. As at December 2015, the MoGE released a circular calling on colleges of education and universities offering teacher education programmes to align their curriculum with the newly revised curriculum (MoGE, 2015). However, at the time of this study, the School of Education had not yet aligned its curriculum to the curriculum already in schools. The argument is that once a student is prepared to teach learners with hearing impairments, they would not experience difficulties using sign language when they go to practice teaching. It is not easy to master all special skills for the different disabilities and demonstrate them in teaching on an equal basis unless students are intensively prepared to do so.

Although the study findings did not establish whether the eight weeks period affected the students' ability to practice teaching, studies reveal that students complained that the period was too short to practice (Muzata & Penda, 2013). Students in Special Education need more time, observations and feedback to improve their classroom skills. Special Education is a hands-on area where students need a lot of guidance to be competent.

To prepare teachers adequately especially in the area of special education, it is important to reflect on the Cognitive Apprenticeship model whose main features emphasise better learning through modelling, coaching and scaffolding. Benedict, Holdheide, Brownell and Foley, (2016) use the features of cognitive apprenticeship to explain what they call 'Practice-Based Preparation in Teacher Education'. Benedict *et al.*, (2016) emphasise six features of high-quality practice-based preparation for educators preparing students to teach. The diagram below is a summary of the features.

Figure 1: Practice-Based Model for Preparing Teachers to Teach



Source: Author representation best model for preparing student teachers for practice adapted from Benedict, A., Holdheide, L., Brownell, M., & Foley, M.A. (2016)

The above diagram summarises the features for preparing student teachers. Students should learn from lecturers as their models first before they get into teaching and such models should be in real situations. The provision of spaced learning opportunities over a period of time helps students to get the mastery of their field of specialisation especially if the exposure to such practice is sustained and repeated. Varied learning experiences once provided to students would expose them to different learners with different challenges and they would learn to provide necessary support to the different learners with different needs. For instance, students can be observed teaching learners with hearing impairments,

at another time, they would be observed teaching learners with visual impairments, the intellectually challenged or the physically challenged. This way, the student is being prepared holistically. Coaching is also an effective practice for preparing student teachers. After observation, a long session of discussion with students on their lessons and the file documents helps to provide effective feedback to students. In coaching, supervisors expect to see whether students are able to demonstrate knowledge and skills they acquired during coursework (Benedict *et al.*, 2016). During, for instance, post-lesson discussions as was done in this study, students should be engaged in analysing and reflecting on their performance in teaching. Questions and prompts would help students to reflect on their performance during teaching. Students can as well be asked for other alternatives for better delivery of the same lesson. This would help students to internalise their practices and reflect on the theories they have studied during coursework. Students need to be graduated from lower to levels of complexity with continuous but fading support as they increase their knowledge and skills. This model provides very important learning points for preparing an effective teacher. The model is worth adopting and putting into practice if quality teachers are to be produced.

Conclusion

The study established that special education student teachers demonstrated better skills in the minor subject than special education which is the major subject. Special e-ducation student teachers faced various challenges in teaching LSENs. The pedagogical challenges students faced relate to training. However, there were also structural and system challenges that compounded their abilities to demonstrate effective skills in teaching LSENs. It is important for teacher education institutions to engage in

continuous evaluation of their training programmes in order to ensure quality assurance in teacher education. The study calls for a review of the training package for students in special education to prepare them adequately for teaching. In 2012, Banja reported that the UNZA graduates took longer to adapt to their new found jobs thereby recommending a lengthened industrial attachment (Banja, 2012). This study recommends a practice-based training that takes into account both theory and practice as crucial components in producing competent teachers for LSENs. Being a specialised field, special education students need more practical attachments for teaching to help them gain more skills in teaching LSENs. Once this is not addressed, the department would be latently breeding negative attitudes towards special education by students using it only as a vehicle to be better teachers in the minor subjects they study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations would help improve the quality of training in Special Education:

- (i) Strengthen the Teaching Methodology Course to enable students to teach in inclusive classrooms.
- (ii) Institutions training teachers in Special Education should create strong links between the major subject of study and the minor subject so that lecturers teach students how to teach topics to LSENs.
- (iii) Special Education methodology lecturers should coach students how to adapt and teach minor subject content topics to LSENs.
- (iv) There is a need for teacher education institutions to adopt

the cognitive apprenticeship model in Special Education teacher training because it provides more hands-on practice during training.

- (v) There should be clear guidelines for the type of schools where Special Education students should be posted for TP. Special Education students should be posted or choose to practice in schools where there are LSENs.
- (vi) There is need to intensify monitoring and supervision by EPSSE department and schools to help students acquire the needed skills during the period of teaching practice.
- (vii) The EPSSE department should work in liaison with TP coordinator to modify the assessment instrument to focus more on expected skills for handling LSENs.

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