

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE SUPPORT RECEIVED BY STUDENT TEACHERS DURING THE TEACHING PRACTICE STAGE I OF THE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

Post Graduate Diploma in Education(PGDE) is the basic professional qualification for Graduate teachers in Sri Lanka. The Open University of Sri Lanka conducts the PGDE programme through the distance mode with the aim of improving the professional competencies of Graduate teachers in the school system. Teaching practice is an important component for becoming a teacher (Kiggundu& Nayimuli, 2009). Teaching Practice is a major component of PGDE programme and is conducted in two stages. The stage I takes place at student teachers' own schools for a period of 10 weeks. School principals exercise significant influence on teachers' professional development. Bredeson(2000) states that, the role of the school principal is to encourage, nurture and support teacher learning.

The student teachers are allowed to do their teaching practice at their own schools with the support of their principals, mentors, colleagues and master teachers. According to Reddy & Sekhar (2011), the task of a mentor is to define a unique relationship with his or her apprentice and fulfill a need unmet by any other relationship. Further, Mentor is someone who gives help and advice over a period of time. He/she supports, guides and counsels a young adult as he/she accomplishes mastery of the adult world or the world of work. Further, Co-operative and friendly collegial relationships, open communication and free exchange of ideas may be sources of emotional and psychological support for teachers' work and promote their professional development (Geijsel et al.,2001).

Every year nearly 400 Master teachers are appointed by the Faculty of Education to evaluate teaching practice stage I. The faculty expects the Master teachers to provide necessary guidance and support for the development of teaching skills of their student teachers. During teaching practice, student teacher is given opportunities to try the art of teaching before actually getting into the real world of the teaching. From 2009/2010 academic year the University has taken steps to appoint school Mentors to provide further support to these student teachers. The present study attempts to compare the support received by the student teachers who registered at Colombo and Jaffna Regional Centres of the Open University of Sri Lanka.

The objectives of the study are

- to compare the support received by the student teachers registered at Colombo and Jaffna Regional Centres from their ;
 - master teachers
 - school mentors
 - colleagues
 - principals
 - and

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- to make suggestions to improve the support from relevant stakeholders to the student teachers during teaching practice stage I

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was used for this study. The population of this study was student teachers registered for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Programme at the Open University of Sri Lanka in the 2011/2012 academic year. The sample consisted of 150 student teachers from Jaffna Regional Centre and 250 student teachers from Colombo Regional Centre. The main data collection instrument was the teachers' questionnaire which included some open ended questions as well. Data analysis was done by using quantitative and qualitative techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Majority of the student teachers from both centres mentioned that they have received enough support from their principals to improve their performance of the teaching practice stage I. The following table shows their responses for each type of support.

Table 1: Support received from principals as percentages

Supports	To a great extent		To some extent		To a least extent		Not at all	
	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC
Motivating	53	54	45	25	-	21	02	-
Sharing his/her previous own experiences of trainee of teaching practice	21	42	61	21	10	12	08	25
Ready to allow/adjust any needed changes regarding teaching practice	37	58	49	30	12	12	02	-
Provide suitable time table	82	66	18	26	-	08		-
Provide necessary quality inputs to use for teaching-learning processes	61	66	35	21	04	08	-	05
Support to arrange the classroom in a suitable place	62	66	26	21	12	08	-	05
Give support to Master teachers	76	71	24	21	-	08	-	-
Support to appoint a mentor	80	71	18	21	02	08	-	-
Give support to the mentor	76	71	22	21	02	08	-	-

According to the data given in the table, 82% of the student teachers registered at Jaffna Regional Centre (JRC) agreed to a great extent that their Principals supported them by providing suitable time tables. But only 66% of CRC student teachers agreed to this statement. Compared to JRC, more student teachers from CRC agreed to a great extent that their principals supported them by motivating them, sharing their experiences, adjusting needed changes regarding teaching practice and by providing necessary quality inputs. The above table reveals that compared to other aspects, at JRC and CRC fewer number of teachers

agreed that their principals shared their experiences. For an open ended question related to the problems faced, most of them mentioned that they were unable to find time for preparation as their principals forced them to teach more than 36 periods per week. However, a large proportion of student teachers from JRC mentioned that their principals gave support to Master teachers and mentors, to appoint mentors and provided suitable time tables. It may be inferred that support provided by the principals of CRC student teachers is higher than that of the JRC student teachers.

For the question related to the mentors' support, almost all the teachers from both centres stated that they have received enough support from their mentors to improve their performance of the teaching practice stage I. Table 2 gives details.

Table 2: Support received from mentors as percentages

Supports	To a great extent		To some extent		To a least extent		Not at all	
	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC
Motivation	70	84	28	16	02	-	-	-
Sharing his/her previous own experiences of trainee of teaching practice	60	67	32	33	08	-	-	-
Ready to adjust any needed changes regarding teaching practice	66	84	28	16	06	-	-	-
Provide support to prepare teaching aids	43	62	42	30	15	08	-	-
Provide support to plan the lesson	45	62	47	30	08	08	-	-
Give guide lines to use quality inputs in an effective way in the teaching learning process	47	62	40	30	13	08	-	-
Support to arrange the classroom in a suitable place	53	67	34	20	09	13	04	-
Give support to identify suitable methods of teaching	45	75	42	16	13	09	-	-
Guide to maintain good relationship with Principal	57	70	28	25	06	05	09	-
Give support to the master teacher to carry out his/her duty.	64	87	26	08	02	05	08	-
Guide to identify significant problem for project	68	84	26	16	06	-	-	-
Give support to complete the project in time.	75	62	19	30	06	08	-	-
Give guidance to write reflection	62	62	30	30	08	08	-	-

Table 2 clearly reveals that, in JRC and CRC student teachers were highly motivated by their mentors. One of the main duties of school mentor is to guide student teachers to complete a project during their teaching practice stage I. Compared to student teachers at CRC, more student teachers at JRC agreed to a great extent that their mentors gave support to complete

their project in time but in all other aspects student teachers at CRC rated the highest percentage. Student teachers at JRC mentioned that their mentors did not support them to arrange classrooms in suitable places (4%), to maintain good relationship with principals (9%) and to support Master teachers to carry out their duties (8%).

When teachers were asked about the support they received from their colleagues the following responses were obtained.

Table 3: Support received from colleagues as percentages

Supports	To a great extent		To a some extent		To a least extent		Not at all	
	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC
Motivation	53	75	43	17	04	08	-	-
Sharing his/her previous own experiences of trainee of teaching practice	47	75	39	17	10	08	04	-
Adjust any needed changes regarding teaching practice	42	58	48	38	08	04	02	-
Provide support to prepare teaching aids	43	66	37	25	18	09	02	-
Provide support to plan the lesson	36	58	44	33	12	09	08	-
Give guide lines to use quality inputs in an effective way in the teaching learning process	43	63	43	20	14	17	-	-
Support to arrange the classroom in a suitable place	45	63	39	33	12	04	04	-
Support to identify suitable methods of teaching	40	75	44	17	10	04	06	04
Guide to maintain good relationship with Principal	53	80	37	12	04	-	06	08
Give support to the Master teacher to carry out his/her duty.	57	76	35	12	02	12	06	-

As shown in Table 3, compared to JRC student teachers, those who are attached to CRC agreed that their colleagues have supported them to a great extent. However 6% from JRC and 4% from CRC agreed that their colleagues did not support them to identify suitable teaching methods. Further, 6% from JRC and 8% from CRC stated that their colleagues did not guide them to maintain a good relationship with their principals.

Table 4: Support received from master teachers as percentages

Supports	Fully satisfy		Satisfy		Not satisfy		Completely not satisfy	
	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC	JRC	CRC
Conducted first meeting on time	58	83	38	17	02	-	02	-
Provided enough instructions	50	75	46	25	04	-	-	-
Follow the instructions given by the Open University	65	83	31	17	04	-	-	-
Made the first visit within two weeks	73	66	25	17	-	-	02	17
Gave Feedback on scheme of work	48	83	48	17	02	-	02	-

Gave Feedback on writing lesson plans	52	83	44	17	02	-	02	-
Gave Feedback on writing behavioural objectives for each lesson	50	83	44	17	04	-	02	-
Gave Feedback on preparation of teaching aids	45	83	45	17	10	-	-	-
Feedback on usage of teaching aids and teaching methods	42	58	48	38	06	04	04	-
Feedback on selection of teaching methods	38	58	56	38	03	04	03	-
Feedback on writing student activities in the lesson plans	46	58	50	30	04	12		-
Feedback on writing and teacher activities in the lesson plans	44	58	52	30	04	12		-
Feedback on writing evaluation methods	44	58	52	30	04	12		-

Student teachers' responses regarding the support from their Master teachers are shown in Table 4. The study reveals that 83% of the student teachers registered at CRC and 58% at JRC expressed their full satisfaction in conducting first meeting on time. But 2% of the teachers from JRC were not satisfied with this statement. Compared to CRC, most teachers from JRC expressed their full satisfaction with this aspect. Compared to CRC most teachers from JRC mentioned their full satisfaction regarding the first visit of Master teachers. However, 17% of the student teachers at CRC expressed their dissatisfaction for this aspect. Compared to JRC, more student teachers from CRC expressed their full satisfaction on this aspect. Compared to JRC, most teachers in CRC have expressed their full satisfaction in some areas such as providing instructions and following the instructions given by OUSL.

It could be concluded that in relation to teaching practice stage I, in both centres, principals, mentors and colleagues have supported student teachers to a satisfactory level. On the other hand master teachers also have played their role to some extent. But there were some problems. In some aspects, the support provided by the master teachers differs between the two centres. Therefore, the Faculty needs to take necessary actions to improve the contribution of master teachers and school society in teaching practice stage I. As the Open University of Sri Lanka follows a regular mechanism in the implementation of teaching practice stage I, no significant differences were observed between the two centres.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the study.

Faculty should

1. Take necessary actions to train Master teachers periodically to improve their knowledge in writing lesson plans, preparation and usage of teaching aids and selection of teaching methods.
2. Pay more attention to monitor the input of Master teachers of JRC.
3. Follow a mechanism to regulate Master teachers' visits to the schools for the supervision.
4. Make necessary arrangements to improve the support of school society particularly Principals and Mentors in teaching practice stage I.
5. Conduct a study island wide to investigate the factors influencing the performance of Master teachers and Mentors.

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