**Chapter Seven: Discussion of Findings**

**7.1 Introduction**

This chapter employed the activity theory framework in discussing the findings of this study. It adapted Engestrom (2001) concept of expansive learning (Chapter 4) as a guide to discuss the ways in which teaching and learning takes place in the primary education course. From the lens of expansive learning as a movement in the zone of proximal development (Engestrom and Sannino, 2007), this chapter is organised on Engestrom (2001) four central questions about learning, namely: 1. who are the subjects of learning? 2. Why do they learn? 3. What do they learn? 4. How do they learn? And focused This enabled a ‘focus on the organisational structure of the course as well as on the relations between stakeholders’ (Guldberg 2010, p.169) and how these might influence learning outcomes across and within the different settings in which student teachers’ learning is situated. Using the tenets of activity theory to inform this discussion also enables the reflection on the emergent issues…[as well as] the tensions that characterised primary teacher education in [Nigeria]’ (Barab, Schatz and Scheckler, 2004, p.30).

**7.2 Who are the subjects of learning?**

Although, the focus of this study was to facilitate ‘change’ in the primary teacher education system, Young (2001) argues that change originates from individual participants in an activity system. These individual participants represent ‘the subject of the activity whose agency is selected as the point of view for the analysis’ (Barab, Schatz and Scheckler, 2004, p.27). Yamagata-Lynch (2010) explains that the subject are the ‘individuals or the group of individuals involved in the activity (p.2). This study adopted student perspective whose voices were heard through semi structured interview. This view point placed the student teachers as the subjects of learning. As seen in chapter six, these students came from diverse background and possess different characteristics. Their motivations and career goals also differs. Data showed that some students had no plan of becoming teachers on entrance to primary education course. Some students study primary education as a means to their preferred course; while others sees it as a means to fulfil their desire for a higher qualification. This is consistent with Adeleke (1999) finding which indicated that many students of education does not want to teach at all; and this could be as a result of lack of motivation as these students are in the course for an entirely different reason (Akinbote, 2007).

This raises issue on the quality of prospective students attracted to teaching course. Getting the right people to become teachers has been identified as one of the major keys in improving an education system (Barber and Mourshed, 2007) and this can be possible if the teaching profession is able to attract the ‘best and motivated candidates’ (Unesco, 2013, p. 38). But this seems to be one of the major challenges in the Nigeria primary teacher education system. Akinbote (2007) argues that majority of the prospective student teachers are not ‘good enough for university admission’ (p.68). This tend to explain why Schwatz, Nurtel and Olson (2007) claims that individuals choosing to become teachers are generally less talented, less ambitious, less curious, less diverse, demographically and more risk averse than the workforce as a whole’ (p.)

Controlling for student characteristics and background, Lyten et al. (2005) emphasis school effect on learning (Chapter two). They argued that the school context should be considered as a source of both inputs and constraints as well as a generator of the desired school outputs’ (p.12). In other words, despite the differed characteristics, students are expected to develop – to an extent –teaching competencies, knowledge and skills from the primary education course.

**7.3. Why do they learn?**

The objective of primary education course is to produce teachers who are ‘able to teach the Primary School Subjects in the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum; demonstrate school management skills and supervisory roles; implement the curriculum, write lesson plan, and teach effectively; improvise/produce instructional aids using local materials; and develop the attitude to continue learning’ (NCCE, 2009a). This course objective was exemplified in some of the students’ data in which they indicated that their motivation for studying the course is to learn how to be effective primary school teachers. On the other hand, this study also found that some student teachers are doing the course for some other reasons especially with the fact that they have no other option to obtaining a tertiary education as seen in this comment*: I think it is not all of us that are here for learning. Most people come to the college just to obtain a certificate that is higher than secondary school certificate. Some come to college so that they can get the certificate to establish[[1]](#footnote-1) a school…so most people don’t go to school [College of education] with the aim of being a teacher* (Fatima, year 1, paragraph four). This is consistent with previous findings on student teachers motivation towards a teaching course especially in Nigeria. Awanbor (1996) claimed that ‘some of the students in the college of education did not appear to be particularly enthused by the goal of the teaching training’ (p.8). They turn to teaching course because they could not get the required score for university admission (Akinbote, 2007) whereas they do not like teaching as a profession as seen in Doreen’s comment: *I don’t know if I will end up as a teacher. I am here because I found myself here not that I actually desire teaching job* **(Doreen, second year, paragraph nine)**. This attitude tend to be influenced by the ‘social, economic and cultural context and in the general image held of teaching as a career (Kyriacou et al., 1999, p.374).

The issue above highlights the mismatch or conflict between the system’s objective and student teachers’ objective of studying primary education course. Although Engestrom (2001) emphasised that ‘motivation to learn stems from participation in culturally valued collaborative practices in which something useful is produced’ (p.141), this study found that most students’ learning tend to be driven by their personal motives. This is evidenced in the conflicting comments from the students where they described their learning journey as interesting and valuable but later indicated that they cannot keep teaching as a career. This finding highlights the dialectic nature of the object of an activity and its impact on the entire activity system (Hasan and Kazlauskas, 2014). The above discourse could be argued to be as a result of the inability of the teacher training community to articulate and acknowledge the tension that arises between the goals of the system and that of the individual learners as that could have a significant effect on learning. This tends to explain why Braun (2008) argues that ‘what students bring with them – and what they do not – affects what transpires in school (p.8).

On the contrary, Luyten et al. (2005) argues on school effect on learning (Chapter two). They claimed that the school context should be considered as a source of both inputs and constraints as well as a generator of the desired school outputs’ (p.12). In other words, despite the differed characteristics, students are expected to develop teaching competencies, knowledge and skills from the primary education course. This is because members of the teacher training community ‘need to engage with the aim of their actions and those of the cultural practices within which they act…with the view to function as competent and critical participants in the society and in a profession’ (Wardekker, 2010, p. 245).

**7.4. What are they learning?**

This study provided insight into the course structure of primary teacher education in Nigeria. The structure highlighted the curriculum, course contents, teaching practice as well as assessment and feedback procedures. These were identified to be key and instrumental to learning of teaching as seen in this comment: *they [college courses] are really helping because in principle and method of teaching [course], we are taught how to write a lesson note. And there is no way a teacher could be able to perform well and effectively in the class without an adequate lesson note…We talked about that [assessment] in our method of teaching and we talked about the effects of evaluation and the types of evaluation. And I got to understand we have formative evaluation and summative evaluation* (Ortega, year three, paragraph four)*.*

The findings of the study suggests that students teachers are developing teaching knowledge and attitudes; modelling perceived good practices; and tend to form an identity similar to that of a primary school teacher as they engage in the act of learning to teach. This is in line with Engestrom (2007) position on learning. He argues that ‘practitioners facing major transformations in work somehow see themselves as individual taking on a new personal identity’ (p.36). Although, it is evidenced from the study that most of the students are not interested in teaching as a career, they demonstrated a departure from their personal qualities as prospective student teachers to their qualities as student teachers and thus began to form a new identity that can enable them assume the role of a teacher. Bankole commented: *I think the main thing am learning is about how to be a passionate teacher…am learning how to develop my ability to face the crowd and not being shy; [how] to develop my moral… my mode of dressing, the way I talk – things I should say and things I shouldn’t say; the kind of words I speak in class and…how to manage the classroom and manage the character of different individual because students (*Bankole, year one, paragraph two).

However, what are clear from this study are the tensions exiting between what student teachers are learning and its relevance to practice. The programme handbook emphasises the need to ensure that assessment and feedback as well as the teaching and learning process focuses on developing student teachers’ knowledge and skills of primary school teaching. On the other hand, findings of the study points to a discrepancy between the teacher training courses (theory) and its connection to practice. The courses tend to focus more on students’ mastery of the subject matter; and thereby neglecting the application of the knowledge in practice. There seems to be little focus on the development of students’ pedagogical skills and this has been argued to be a ‘transfer problem (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999) as well as a reflection of the traditional application of theory model (Korthagen and Russell, 1995). Korthagen and Kessels (1996) argued that the disintegration between theory and practice in teacher education is more of a ‘failure of practice (the way of handling the knowledge) or the present incompleteness of the available knowledge in the social sciences’ (p.18). As ‘teachers need quick and concrete answers to situations in the classroom, [student teachers need a more] action-guiding knowledge different from the more abstract, systematised and general expert knowledge that teacher educators often present to them’ ((Korthagen and Kessels, 1999, p.5).

The point above tends to emphasis teacher educators as knowledge conveyors. Korthagen and Kessels (1996) argue that an ideal teacher educator should be able to instil the right and provable teaching knowledge in their students. They claimed that the ‘poor transfer of theory to practice is as a result of lack of integration of the theories presented in teacher education (teacher educator’s theory) into the conceptions student teachers bring to the teacher education programme’ (Korthagen and Russells, 1999, p.5). On the contrary, findings of this study indicated that students’ learning is facilitated by what they observed. Students tend to model the best practices demonstrated to them as seen in some of their comments

*The way the lectures explain things in class; and gist with us that when we get to the class we taught children how to do ‘this and that’; then she will demonstrate it for us. I am happy about the social studies we learnt yesterday. If am asked to teach the topic we were taught yesterday, I will be able to teach the topic* (Faith, year one, paragraph six).

This finding was in line with Robinson and McMillan (2006) findings on action research that focused on the experiences of teacher educators in preparing students for teaching in South Africa. Their research emphasised that students’ active involvement in the teaching and learning process facilitates and enhances their learning. Teacher educators assumed that students learn when they (teacher educators) practice the principles and theories they teach to the students (Robinson and McMillan, 2006).

**7.5. How do they learn?**

Barab, Schatz and Scheckler (2004) explain that in addition to what is being learnt (i.e. the tools) in an activity system, the subject-object relationship is ‘also mediated by the activity system community, the rules and the division of labour’ (p.35). In this study, the community included the lecturers, head teachers, supervisors, co-operating teachers and pupils. Division of labour was defined in terms of responsibilities of each member of the community and the rules related to policy and standards guiding the course as well as the informal norms situated by the members of the community. However, defining these mediating elements in this way tend to portray the learning process as a straightforward process and tend to overlook the dynamic nature of an activity (Hasan and Kazlauskas, 2014). This dynamic nature of an activity implies that ‘the capability and availability of tools mediates what can be done and the tool in turn evolves to hold the historical knowledge of how the community works and is organised’ (Hasan and Kazlauskas, 2014, p. 11).

The dynamic nature of student teachers’ learning was revealed in the interaction between what they are learning and how are they are learning and poses the dichotomy between theory and practice. Findings suggested that a well-planned curriculum and standards are in place to foster student learning. This curriculum and standards were depicted as a programme handbook which documented all the courses and course contents, admission guidelines, course objectives and goals as well as assessment procedures. The handbook also referenced the expected infrastructures, human and material resources that should be available in the colleges of education (NCCE, 2009c). However, there is indication in the study that suggests an ‘undefined’ model of primary teacher education in Nigeria. In chapter two, different models of teacher education were reviewed which include among others, a reflective model and research based model. These models represent the different approaches to ‘preparing student teachers for their profession’ (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999, p. 6).

Drawing on the discourse of activity theory, this study identified some tensions existing within the teacher training community. Acknowledging these tensions was seen by Engestrom (1999) as a ‘motive force of change and development of an activity’ (p.9). According to Luyten

**7.6. Summary**

1. One cannot own a school in Nigeria without acquiring a qualification in Education [↑](#footnote-ref-1)