

Creating an Alternative Field Experience Framework for University-Based Teacher Education in Covid-19 Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning across the world and led to school closures. Consequently, several institutions of higher learning switched to online teaching. In the Nigerian context, however, the field experience component of teacher education witnessed an unprecedented setback as the online system that was activated in some universities failed to factor the component into the alternative arrangement. Given that COVID-19 is not likely to be the last, as suggested by various reports, including the World Bank December 2021 document, there is a serious concern over the idea of suspending or delaying the exercise of emergency school closures. This paper aims to formulate an alternative field experience framework for the Nigerian setting. Data collection was conducted through survey, observation, and document analysis, while data analysis was done through descriptive statistics, analytical methods, and creative synthesis, with the constructivist paradigm as philosophical direction. The study covers three Nigerian public universities where the lead researcher was, at different times, a teacher educator and field experienced assessor. The study found, among others, that an alternative field experience framework has the potential to mitigate the risks of school

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1. Introduction

It has been established in various scientific reports that COVID-19 is not likely to be the last pandemic to be witnessed by humankind. There indeed is a great concern over the implication for learning of possible school closures arising from the pandemic. This concern has been captured in official documents released by international organizations and development partners like the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, and others of similar orientation. For instance, in a December 2021 joint report by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, entitled, 'Reversing the pandemics' education losses,' Fore and Malpass (2021) capture this emerging concern over the implication of school closures for learning.

The field experience in teacher education is an exercise that concerns not only the student teacher but also the students and cooperating teachers, who are the school-based teachers to whose guidance the student teachers are committed, during teaching practice, as well as teaching practice supervisors and coordinators. This study is primarily concerned about the implication of the emergency closures for the exercise and the rationale for a credible alternative. For the purpose of this study, it should be pointed out from the onset, that when the United States which is recognized as the initiator of organized teacher education, founded in 1954, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) officially an accrediting body for teacher preparation institutions and other professional personnel for work in preschool, elementary, and secondary schools, the integration of diversity and technology throughout coursework, field experiences, and clinical practices, among others, were identified as the core of the Council's assignment (Larabe, 1992).

Field experience comprises diverse but related concepts such as student teaching, teaching practice, internship, and teaching practicum, as will be demonstrated later. However, it should be noted that the essence of these various models of field experience is to achieve good teaching, which is a common denominator in all of them. Good teaching is a product of effective student teaching, which is a core objective of higher education. Student teaching is central to teacher preparation (Köksal & Genç, 2019). Skipping, waiving, suspending, or delaying such a central component, as was the case in Nigeria during the COVID-19 school closures, arguably rendered the training of the affected student teachers skewed or incomplete.

The significance of student teaching is evident in the status accorded it in the professional requirements for the graduation of a student teacher (Aglazor, 2017). The incorporation of student teaching as a core component of teacher training was intended to "help the student teachers to use their theoretical knowledge in schools and classroom settings and to help them experience the real classroom atmosphere" (pp. 895-896). The concept involved in the present analysis is variously tagged as "teaching practice," "apprenticeship," "internship," "teaching practice," "field experience," "practical teaching," "practice teaching,"

"teaching practicum," and "field teaching" in the scholarship of teaching (Stevick, 1980; Gebhard, 2009; Aglazor, 2017; Koksal & Genc, 2019). However, the term "field experience" has earned recognition across the years as a generic name for the various models of the practice, with their varied characterizations, in the scholarship of teaching Aglazor (2017). This paper aims to formulate a COVID-19-compliant student field experience framework in the Nigerian context. In specific terms, the paper is intended to: Examine the nature of field experience for teacher education; Assess some of the dominant alternative field experiences introduced in some of the leading universities offering programs in teacher preparation; Determine the level of suitability of alternative field experiences for student teachers in Nigerian universities, and Formulate an alternative field experience framework for the Nigerian setting. The pursuit of these four objectives is guided by four corresponding research questions, namely, 1) What is the nature of field experience for teacher education?; 2) What are dominant alternative field experiences introduced in some of the leading universities offering programs in student-teacher preparation?; 3) How suitable are alternative field experiences for student teachers in Nigerian universities?; 4) How can an alternative field experience framework be formulated in the Nigerian context?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design and Paradigm

The methodology of this study comprises a combination of a survey method (with descriptive statistics), the analytical method, observation, and document analysis, with each of the four playing a significant role in the research, as targeted at specific research questions. It is not out of place to reiterate that data collection for the study was done through questionnaire, observation, and document analysis. In contrast, data analysis, which has the constructivist paradigm as its philosophical direction, was done through descriptive statistics, analytical methods, document analysis, and creative synthesis. These researchers' choice of the constructivist philosophical paradigm was informed by the need to ensure a robust research design given the nature of the constructivist philosophical paradigm with regard to its congruence with their beliefs about the nature of reality (Livers & Piccolo, 2020).

The researchers' line of thinking in this regard is consistent with Fossey et al. (2002) in the characterization of a paradigm as "a system of ideas, or worldview, used by a researcher or community of researchers to generate knowledge... or a set of assumptions, research strategies and criteria for rigour that are shared, even taken for granted by that community". The specific paradigm involved in this study is of constructivist philosophical orientation. According to Adom et al. (2016), "the constructivist philosophical paradigm is an approach that asserts that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences". This characterization for this research implies that this paradigm is the guide to the methodological direction of the research in connection with its engagement with data.

In the context of the constructivist paradigm, the analytical method was employed to engage with RQ 1 - though it also plays some role in RQ 4 - namely, What is the nature of field experience for teacher education?, because of its nature as a conceptual question. In contrast, document analysis was employed to address RQ 2: What are dominant COVID-19 compliant alternative field experiences introduced in some of the leading universities offering programs in teacher preparation? The rationale for using this method in this connection lies in the fact that the expected pieces of information are only obtainable through engagement with research reports and related academic documents published during and in the aftermath of the emergency school closures occasioned by the pandemic.

Regarding the survey and observation methods, they were targeted at RQ 3: How suitable are alternative field experiences for student teachers in Nigerian universities? It should be noted that the exploratory nature of this question necessitated a combination of quantitative data (descriptive statistics) and qualitative evaluation of the alternative field experiences in question to determine their suitability or otherwise for the Nigerian setting. That explains why survey questions were generated from Research Question 3 to elicit appropriate information. There is a clear-cut difference between research questions and survey questions as used in this study. Survey questions are merely questionnaire items for a particular research question (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2007), as will be demonstrated later in this study. However, creative synthesis was employed to address RQ 4: How can an alternative field experience framework be formulated for student teachers in the Nigerian setting? What is involved in this question is the formulation of the alternative framework. The following sub-section contains details of how each of these methods was used are provided.

2.2. Selection and Application of Methods

The use of the analytical method in this study offers a meaningful picture of the subject involved, among others (Jorgensen, 2006). For instance, it is the analytical method that is in action where this research clarifies the philological implications of the concept of field experience in connection with the concepts of teaching practice, student teaching, teaching practicum, internship, practical teaching, and related others. The undertaking aims to offer enriching perspectives on Research Question 1 and, to some extent, Research Question 4, as noted earlier.

As regards the observation method, it facilitates a researcher's study of people in their natural habitat to understand issues from their perspective. Through observation, the researchers studied and became familiar with the behavior and activities of student teachers in their regular school settings at different times and locations. This direct practical experience greatly benefited the study, especially in respect of Research Question 3. However, the survey method was also involved in this regard, as the research was situated in the context of what Adler & Adler (1994) describe as a "bedrock source" of human knowledge or collecting data "firsthand." The relevance of the survey questions to Research Question 3 should be articulated at this juncture. Survey questions generated from a research question are not targeted at explaining why people think or act as they do (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004). Instead, they are meant to determine how many people behave in a certain way for specific reasons (Moser & Kalton, 2017). Answers to them may be summarized through descriptive measures (Casinillo & Suarez, 2022). That explains the connection between the Likert scales and survey questions which feature enough options, namely Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Indifferent, Disagreed, and Strongly Disagreed, to accommodate the respondents' views on each item, rather than attract a monosyllabic answer of 'Yes' or 'No' (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004).

Concerning the role of document analysis employed in the researchers' engagement with Research Question 2, which revolves around emerging alternative field experiences, it should be acknowledged as a social research method that has gained general acceptance as an effective research tool (O'leary, 2014). Owen (2014) has articulated the significance of the method for data collection and analysis in research. It is unmistakable from the preceding that document analysis is an essential research method where policies are involved, as is the case with the alternative field experiences introduced in some of the leading American universities offering programs in teacher education. The choice of the American universities was informed by the recognition accorded the United States as the originator of professional teacher education (Larabe, 1992).

As regards creative synthesis, its relevance to this study stems from its nature as a tool for "the combining of separate elements to form a coherent whole" (Murphy, 2007). The

creative and synthetic dimension of the study is evident in its formulation of an alternative field experience framework in the Nigerian setting. Such a formulation is cognizant of the pedagogical and technological peculiarities and other salient considerations with potential to engage successfully with, Research Question 4.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

The study benefitted from the present lead researcher's experience as a teacher educator and field experience supervisor and assessor in the three universities whose student teachers were involved in this research, In collaboration with one teacher educator from each of the three universities, the lead researcher explored the possibility of guiding students to create materials and develop an e-portfolio to ensure uninterrupted learning during emergency school closures. After a rigorous peer assessment of the procedure for pursuing this objective, the lead researcher guided a group of 33 student teachers from two universities and 34 from the third university to make a total of one hundred student teachers. A sample size of one hundred from a universe of student teachers due for field experience in a particular year can facilitate meaningful data, especially where the data is of both qualitative and quantitative orientations and the target research question is focused on the specific parameters (Lakens, 2021). The sampling technique used is purposive sampling. It is used for identifying and selecting information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources, as is the case in identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about the subject involved and who are also available and willing to participate in the research (Patton, 2002; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The student teachers from among those due for the final student teaching were selected through the assistance of the Class Representative in one instance and colleagues in the other two. The student teachers were requested to take part in a survey that asked them to respond to the five survey questions itemized earlier. The lead researcher constructed e-portfolios by using Google Sites. It was widely believed to be easy, accessible, and well known among student teachers. They were introduced to templates of portfolio sites and guided in lesson planning, video lesson creation, and instruction that may be used in the virtual instruction of their classroom students.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this research was conducted in four phases. In the first phase, the researchers engaged critically with the scholarship of teaching in connection with field experience and involved the research literature. At this stage, the researchers gathered the data targeted at Research Question 1. In the second phase, the researchers engaged with documents in academic reports and related others published during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This phase was targeted at possible insights into what some reputable institutions of higher learning in the developed world are doing to mitigate the risk of school closures in connection with field experience for student teachers. The purpose of this was to draw some inspiration from such documents. What the researchers did in this regard was focused on Research Question 2. Consequently, the researchers advanced to the third phase as the lead researcher situated the data collected in the second phase in a personal narrative about his experience with student teachers in the three universities.

The researchers sent five-item survey questions to the selected one hundred student teachers via WhatsApp on a ratio of 33, 33, and 34 per university. The use of WhatsApp is the dominant platform or tool for an online survey like Google Forms and Qualtrics. Its popularity and ease informed its frequent use by university students, who are familiar with WhatsApp group operations and meetings despite the technological limitations arising from a dearth of

devices or lack of ownership of tablets. That most of them own at least an android cell phone makes WhatsApp easily accessible to them. The data involved was therefore collected through both questionnaires and observation. The purpose of the survey was to determine the level of their preparedness for an alternative field experience placement, assess the degree of their familiarity with the technology involved, and their dispositions to the change of pedagogical landscape dictated by school closures as occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collected helped improve the researchers' understanding of what could and could not work as an alternative field experience in the Nigerian context and how to prepare the student teachers for a change in their field experience.

According to the subject involved in Research Question 4, the researchers, in the fourth phase, carefully contrasted the data collected in phase three with the ideas emerging from the new interventions. The researchers then assessed the frequency of the occurrence of each idea in each intervention as exposed through document analysis in the second phase and rated them in order of relevance to the Nigerian context before eliminating some of the alternative practices to achieve a systematic deduction concerning the nature of the emerging alternative field experiences. This undertaking is the basis of the alternative field experience framework formulated through engagement with Research Question 4, which accounts for the significance of the study as a contribution to scholarship.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

The population for this study comprised all the student teachers on whom the lead researcher had conducted long-term, consistent, and repeated observations about knowledge, skills, and values. However, they were later systematically observed for the purpose of this study. Data collected through such observation supplement the data from the literature, which exposed the gaps in research and a rationale for the present study. It is interesting to note that data from observation, literature review, and survey of student teachers constitute a source of strength for both the validity and reliability of the study. As regards the validity and reliability of the data involved in the study, it is pertinent to state the intertwined concepts of validity and reliability in the context of qualitative research, as noted by Lincoln & Guba (1985). It comprises the trustworthiness of a study as the naturalist's equivalent of internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity. Each of these is achievable by credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In an attempt to demystify the concept of validation, Eisner (2017) constructed standards such as structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy as evidence for asserting the credibility of qualitative research. This implies that the researcher is expected to have specific credible sources to support or reject a particular view or interpretation.

Accordingly, in addition to a diversity of credible sources on this subject, the researchers' reliance on official educational blueprints as documents whose provisions capture. It was repeatedly observed by them as a lived experience for an appreciable length of time and commented upon by peers, which goes a long way in strengthening the validity and reliability of this study. Having addressed Research Question 1, while also exposing the gap in research through literature review, it is imperative to engage with Research Question 2, which revolves around emerging alternative field experiences for student teachers.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1. *Emerging Alternative Field Experiences for Student Teachers*

Some of the leading universities across the world offering programs in teacher education attempted to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 school closures as they affected the field experience of student teachers. Such student teacher programs proffered alternative field experiences to ensure that the student teachers do not miss the opportunity of the mandatory exercises. This section of the paper analyzes five alternatives created or introduced by them. The essence is to expose the nature of the alternatives, derive possible inspiration from them, and assess the level of their replicability in the Nigerian. The rationale for choosing the five alternative field experiences is that they were offered in developed settings and some of the universities that have earned general acceptance and recognition as offering best practices in teacher preparation, as will be demonstrated below. However, the focus section is on alternatives created rather than the universities or Faculties where they were introduced.

At the University of Central Florida (UCF), the COVID-19 pandemic prevented education students from completing their final internships for the Spring 2020 semester, as well as those who were on the verge of earning their professional endorsement. However, nineteen final- internship students could complete their graduation requirements via an alternative plan in the form of simulated teaching presentations with three English-language learner avatars in a virtual classroom. According to Monroe et al. (2020), who conducted a study entitled, "Virtually Remote: How Interrupted Internships Continued in a Virtual Classroom," internship students were prepared for the exercises, which involved a group of 20 students, only two of whom were unprepared skills-wise. The students without previous virtual classroom experience were expectedly nervous about using the platform, and a few admitted that they had never used Skype. The authors note that it is not recommended that simulated teaching practices take the place of internships in teacher education. It should be pointed out that they equally note that there are instances where replication can be of great value, especially where there is limited provision for the monitoring, supervision, and assessment of student teachers or where there is no alternative to the in-person internship classroom observation, as was the case at the University of Central Florida.

In their research, Livers & Piccolo (2020) underscore several implications arising from a sudden shift or change to the online system of field experience. Some of the implications shared by student teachers, supervisors, and university personnel include student teachers' learning to identify related factors such as classroom certification issues within their control and those not within their control. According to Livers & Piccolo (2020), many student teachers were willing to continue working with their cooperating teachers. However, they could not do so because their school decided to suspend student teaching for the rest of the year. Another salient issue identified by the authors is that student teachers became considerate and flexible in the changing nature of their roles and responsibilities in the new online system.

Koch & Vu (2020) report how an instructor made creative use of Zoom as an online video conferencing platform to help student teachers gain realistic school experience and interview skills and facilitate meaningful interaction. Remarkably, Koch and Vu found that video conference-based experiences proved helpful to students and could be an excellent alternative to traditional in-person experiences in the face of the closures of the pandemic. Given that student experience and learning outcomes concerning the virtual activities involved in the exercise were as effective as the traditional face-to-face classes, it behoves one to be curious about the specific details of the alternative experience.

Closely related to the alternative proffered in the preceding is that instanced Besser's (2020) work, "Video Instruction Transparency During COVID-19: Modelling for Student

Teachers," which examines the instructional method (delivery of content through video) and a multiplicity of strategies based on first-hand experiences for asynchronous and synchronous video creation, about how to invite student teachers into the discussion. Besser (2020) identifies the purpose of such an alternative experience as strengthening teacher identity and equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills with the potential to make them better prepared for any future school closures. Given the increasing use of video to mitigate the instructional and field experience time loss in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. This informs an increasing need for enlightenment on video instruction's technical and pedagogical issues. The technical considerations involved in this experience are not without severe pedagogical implications, as will later be demonstrated in this paper.

3.1.2. An Assessment of the Suitability of Emerging Alternative Field Experiences for Nigerian University

The researchers attempted determine the suitability of the alternatives and the level of preparedness of student teachers for an alternative field experience placement, and assess the degree of their familiarity with the technology involved and their dispositions to the change of pedagogical landscape dictated by school closures as occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve that, the researchers, as noted earlier, sent a five-item survey question to the selected 100 student teachers via WhatsApp on a ratio of 33, 33, and 34 per university. The survey questions generated to elicit information for Research Question 3, are as follows, 1. What is the taking on having the final teaching practice online as against the traditional on-site practice? 2. If guided, do you have what it takes to develop a teaching portfolio to ensure that the current school closures do not prevent you from having your final teaching practice? 3. Do you think an online arrangement will enable you to demonstrate your teaching knowledge and skills to the fullest? 4. Do you think you are in a vantage position regarding technical issues that may hinder maximum performance regarding the teaching portfolios? 5. Do you think a waiver of the mandatory field experience should be considered? The respondents were provided the five scales of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Indifferent, Disagreed, and Strongly Disagreed. Their responses to the survey questions are presented in what follows.

Fifty-nine (59) of the student teachers (which logically amounts to 59% of a sample of 100 student teachers) strongly favored having their final teaching practice online as against the traditional on-site practice; 18% welcomed it. In comparison, 15% and 8% disfavoured and strongly disfavoured it respectively. It should be noted that none of the respondents was indifferent to the survey question. Fifty-four (54) student teachers (54% of the sample) strongly believed that if guided and trained, they had what it took to develop a teaching portfolio to ensure that the present school closures do not prevent them from having their final teaching practice. Thirty-seven of them (37%) believed they could do it, while 7 of them, i.e., 7%, were not sure of themselves, whereas only 2 (2%) believed they could not cope with the alternative field experience. Sixty-two (62) of the student's teachers (which translates to 62%) strongly believed that the online arrangement would enable them to demonstrate their teaching knowledge and skills to the fullest, and 36% believed it would be easy for them to handle.

In comparison, just 2 of them, i.e., 2%, were pessimistic. Thirty-seven (37) student teachers, which amounts to 37%, strongly believed that the required technology was accessible to them. They were in a vantage position about technological considerations that may hinder the maximum performance of the teaching portfolios, while 20% also held the same belief with less degree of strength. Interestingly, the same number, namely 37, which is 37%, strongly disagreed, while 6, which means 6%, expressed some mild reservations. Twenty-seven (27) student teachers, 27% of a sample of 100, strongly favored waiving the mandatory field experience owing to the COVID-19 school closures, while 15 of them, meaning 15%, hold the same belief. However, 35 of them, which accounts for 35%, strongly disfavoured the

idea, and 23 of them, i.e., 23%, were opposed. It is interesting to note that none of the respondents was indifferent to any of the survey questions.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. *Implications of Findings*

The implications of the above survey include the fact that there is an urgent need for an alternative field experience to prevent the disruption of teacher preparation programs as a result of school closures for COVID-19. For instance, most of the student teachers (58%) at the levels of Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed were unfavorably disposed to waiving the mandatory field experience. What this means, whatever the situation, is that field experience must not be sacrificed or skipped. This indeed is a strong rationale for an alternative field experience placement. This consideration is closely connected to the student teachers' preference for online field experience as against forfeiting or missing it altogether. It is evident in their responses that 59% preferred to have their field experience virtually rather than not having it at all, owing to the school closures. Only a total of 23% of them were opposed to the idea of the online field experience.

The line of thinking upheld by the student teachers in this regard is not without implications for their firm belief that, if guided and trained, they had what it took to perform well in the alternative field experience arrangement as strongly held by 54% and supported by 37%, with only 7% and 2% respectively being unfavourably disposed to the alternative arrangement. Similarly, the student teachers strongly posited that the online arrangement would enable them to demonstrate their pedagogical knowledge and skills to the fullest, which was the position strongly held by 62% and supported by 36% of them, with only 2% maintaining a negative stance. However, there is a concern over the seeming pessimism expressed by the student teachers over the required technological devices, as 37% of them strongly believed there would not be any problem in this regard, whereas the same percentage strongly disagreed. However, 20% of the student teachers supported those who were strongly optimistic, while only 6% supported strongly pessimistic over the accessibility of the required technological devices.

According to the pedagogical interventions calculated to provide an alternative field experience placement, Mollenkopf et al. (2020) attempted to create learning experiences for student- and in-service teachers facing interruptions in field experience placements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study focussed on the efforts made by that professor who replaced the cancelled field experience with written and video-based case studies. In the study in question, survey responses reveal that student teachers felt that course adjustments were proper and provided meaningful learning experiences as 52% of them preferred video formats to written cases and said they benefitted immensely from the case studies.

The implication of such a finding is that case studies have the potential to create alternative learning opportunities that have the potential to take the place of field experiences and cater to the need of student teachers during school closures. In this case, the professor was teaching two sessions of an Early Childhood Special Education course which required students to work with two children with special needs and attend early Intervention home visits. School closures prevented the professor from exposing his students to the required field experience and challenged him to proffer an effective alternative.

According to Mollenkopf et al. (2020), the cancellation of field experience created deficiencies in three aspects of the student teacher preparation, namely home visits, journal entries, and summary reports. In creating an alternative to home visits, the professor searched for home visits that students could observe online or virtually. He used the Results Matter Video Library, which comprises six videos in the 'Just Being Kids' series of Early Intervention

home visits, free and accessible, with their YouTube format easily accessible for watching on multiple ubiquitous devices. Given that some of the students had attended one or more visits before the closures, the professor allowed them to combine their observations during their physical home visits with their observations via videos.

While that addressed the first gap, the professor addressed the second gap, namely the journal entries, by writing short scenarios of fictitious children and challenging students to analyze, plan, and engage with the contents, as if they were in an actual physical classroom situation, teaching the children and providing them guidance in that regard. To address the third gap of the semester; summary reports were expected to contain the students' descriptions of the children they taught, analyses of data from their classroom experiences, and interpretation of the entire situation. Pursuant to that, the professor created two-page scenarios of fictitious children with special needs with specific descriptions of the student's strengths and deficiencies, how an imaginary instructor taught children each session and a weekly illustration of how they performed and progressed over time. The professor provided the student teachers meaningful guidance in this regard.

3.2.2. Creating an alternative field experience for universities in COVID-19 Nigeria

This study has diagnosed the issue of alternative teacher education field experiences to understand what can work and why it can, concerning pedagogy in the Nigerian context. The imperative of this undertaking lies in its potential to facilitate a good understanding of alternative field experiences, through a careful diagnosis, of what can work for the country and why it can. In order to achieve a systematic transition, a detailed methodological analysis was provided to guide the diagnostic engagement (Ornstein & Hunkin, 2004; Tom, 1997; Rufai, 2012). Such an undertaking has the potential to offer good directions, based on the peculiarities of Nigeria, concerning how to transit from the traditional teacher education field experience to an alternative format of the exercise, demonstrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1 shows the transition cycle from the traditional field experience to an alternative format in preservice teacher preparation. The table shows the continuing sequence and circular flow from the traditional to the alternative.

In consonance with the technical nature of a curriculum and pedagogy framework, the present framework's formulation aims to set the parameters, standards, principles, and directions for an alternative field experience. It highlights the elements of practices, experiences, and activities essential for the acquisition of target skills. It guides the evaluation and revision of the existing teacher education blueprints based on student's progress in learning outcomes. Rather than being a curriculum per se, this field experience framework is a guide/toolkit to organize, control, direct, and regulate the components of an alternative field experience (Abdallah & Muhammad, 2015). It seeks to change the landscape of field experience from the traditional or in-person arrangement to the alternative or online format. The purpose includes equipping the learners with knowledge, skills, and mindset demonstrable through specific competencies with the potential to enable them to cope with the changing landscape of field experience. This framework is intended to ultimately direct the activities and experiences involved in pedagogical field practice, to prepare for any future occurrence of school-based learning disruptions that were occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is instructive to state that the first condition to meet in formulating an alternative teachers education field experience framework in Nigeria is technical soundness. It requires an investigation of what can and may not work for Nigeria. This is in contrast to the pervasive practice of blind imitation, sheepish embrace, or wholesale importation of alternatives introduced in other settings, with different characteristics, peculiarities, or orientations. Technical soundness and change in the structure of schooling in the form of teacher-students interaction, which is a *sine qua none* to curriculum or pedagogical change. It is never approached bureaucratically but organically (Ornstein & Hunkin, 2004). For instance, it was in a bid that Nigerian student teachers used the alternative field experience framework. They were involved at the preliminary stage of the formulation to understand better their view of

the alternative field experience and their possible disposition to a change in the pedagogical orientation of their training. This endeavor was intended to prevent a possible bureaucratic dimension while ensuring a pedagogically organic engagement with the student teachers. The essence of this technical consideration is to make the alternative framework an adaptive and realistic approach focused on fundamental problems of field experience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

The idea of an alternative framework sounds great and exciting. However, it should be noted that no alternative field experience framework can explain the peculiarities of field experience for teacher education in Nigeria, especially given the limits of teacher education reform in the country. Therefore, this paper seeks to alert teacher education stakeholders in Nigeria to the risk of importing an alternative from an overseas model under the guise of creating an alternative framework for the country. At the same time, appreciable instances of best practices may be contextualized for replication in curriculum and instructional formulations (Allan, 1997; Kliebard, 1992). It should be noted that there is no acceptable practice that is bereft of faults and failings, which is why framework importation or imposition is deemed bizarre in education parlance. A framework is a product of peculiarities and identities. It is hardly undifferentiated even between two historically homogenous and geographically neighbouring states.

An alternative field experience framework is expected to be a product of a purposefully formulated blueprint that is cognizant of what is required to function as a teacher in a Nigeria focussed but globally oriented setting in today's context (Samuel, 2002). The experiences and activities to be developed should potentially facilitate the acquisition of Nigerian focussed 21st Century Skills (Saylor et al., 1981). Therefore, the specific descriptions and peculiarities of teacher education in Nigeria play a leading role in the form formula framework. This explains why there is a need for communication and collaboration among teacher educators and school managers to support student teachers, cooperating teachers, and their students. According to Hendrith et al. (2020), the idea of collaborative practice is derived from the principle that successful teaching is a product of the expertise of everyone involved in the learning environment. The collaboration takes the form of teacher educators and school administrators working together to determine the specific pedagogical skills and competencies that student teachers should demonstrate to meet the requirements of the alternative field experiences. An illustration of this is provided in Figure 2.

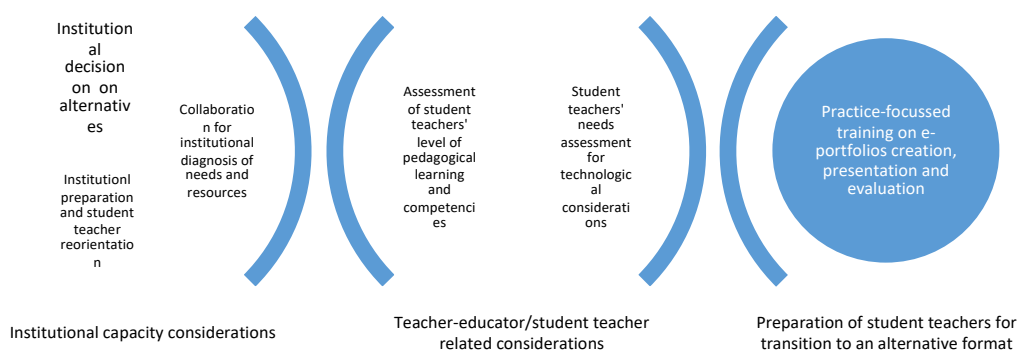


Figure 2 shows the three phases involved in the process of decision making, institutional, staff, and student capacity development, and preparation for transition to the alternative format of field experience, which is a multi-levelled phase.

It is through such a collaboration that appropriate content can be created to serve as alternative experiences. The creation of e-portfolios central to the alternative framework formulated in this study can only be realistic where there is collaborative pedagogical practice.

It is possible to devote sufficient instructional time to selecting and developing materials into the e-portfolios in a creative format. It allows the student teachers to access their teacher educators' activities about how to approach the collection and selection as well as correcting the artefacts that show their progression in learning and skills acquisition.

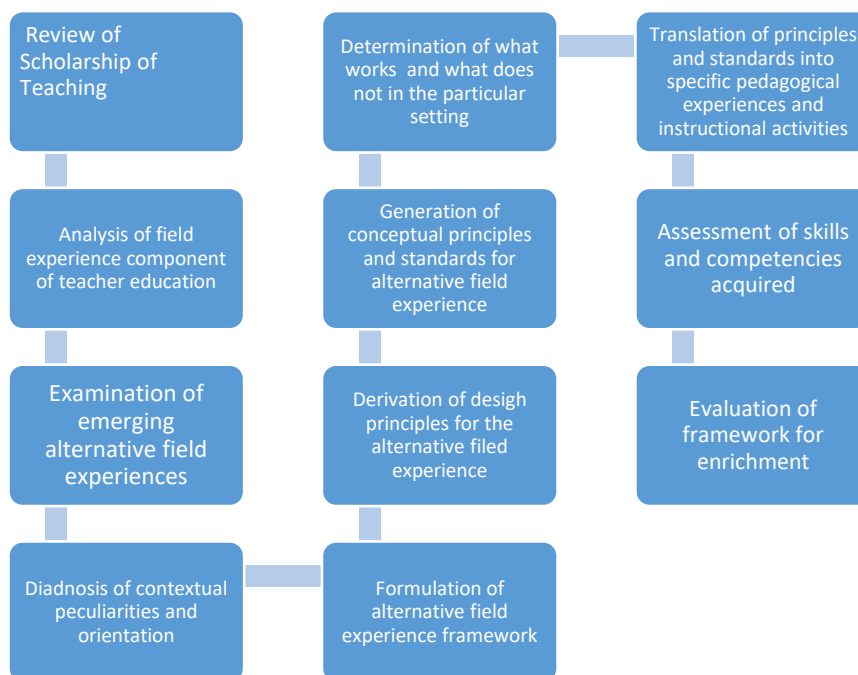


Figure 3 Shows the progression or sequential steps and workflow in formulating an alternative field experience framework for student teacher preparation in the Nigerian context.

The idea of teamwork was informed by the fact that in the alternative arrangement that involves the creation of e-portfolios, standards, and rubrics, teacher educators have much to deliver within a short time. They expect each teacher educator to be involved at every stage of creating standards or rubrics for the assignments submitted by the student teachers, as well as in assessing and grading the submissions. While the e-portfolios may just be displayed for all teacher educators to see, each of them is to handle only the grading of those that fall into their areas of expertise.

4. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to formulate an alternative teacher preparation field experience framework for the Nigerian setting. Such a framework is targeted at mitigating the risk of school closures that may paralyze academic activities, disrupt learning and prevent the conduct of teaching practice, as was the case following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The formulation was based on findings from a survey of COVID-19 focussed alternative field experiences introduced in some of the institutions reputed for offering best practices in teacher education and on a survey of final-year student teachers in the country. As captured in the findings of this study, it was revealed that there is an urgent need for an alternative field experience to prevent the disruption of teacher preparation programs due to school closures for COVID-19. This finding was established empirically through systematic engagement with the research questions.

The study also found that the line of thinking upheld by the student teachers shows that if carefully guided and adequately trained, they have what it takes to perform well in the

alternative field experience arrangement as they demonstrated an impressive level of preparedness for the alternative framework. It is of great importance to note that the student teachers appeared somewhat unprepared for using the required technological devices. This inadequate level of preparedness is not without profound implications for learning in the context of the alternative framework. The study equally found that the idea of suspending or delaying student field experience may not be regarded as a past experience, owing to the formulation of this alternative framework.

It should be pointed out that the study has three limitations. The study relies essentially on the American experience of alternative field experiences, whereas global best practices in teacher education are not restricted to the American models. Two, the sample for the study was selected from among only student teachers, whereas the perspectives of teacher educators too are not irrelevant. Three, after the survey, there was no further engagement with the participants through semi-structured interviews, from which few functional themes might have emerged.

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