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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS EXPERIENCES DURING TEACHING PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract. Pre-service teachers who want to become professional teachers are mandated to go for teaching practice at schools to implement the skills learnt in the classroom. Therefore, it is crucial for proper and adequate preparation at various schools where they will be teaching. Unfortunately, experiences from pre-service teachers, literature, and observations have testified that schools do not prepare enough, especially in resources. To address this issue, the study identified challenges pre-service teachers encountered during teaching practice and explored the possible solutions pre-service teachers faced. The study adopted Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT) as a theoretical framework, Participatory Research (PR) as research design, while Transformative Paradigm TP was adopted to lens the study. The selection of participants was done using a random sampling technique in order to be fair and unbiased. So, 10 out of 40 reflective assessments submitted by final year students were selected. Student reflection was used as a data collection method, while Thematic Analysis (TA) was adopted to analyse the data generated. The findings show that schools do not adequately prepare to receive pre-service teachers for teaching practice. It thereby recommended that schools with the intervention of the government, should try as much as possible to render support, especially in the area of educational resources, since there cannot be effective teaching in its absence. Again, the study recommends that schools orient learners about their perspectives towards pre-service teachers.

Keywords: Pre-Service Teachers; Teaching Practice; Preparations; Student Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice has been described as an integral part of pre-service teacher education programmes in universities all over the world and therefore, student must pass it before the degree can be awarded (Mukeredzi, 2016; Hamilton & Margot, 2019). Teaching practice is the core of pre-service teacher experience that cannot be side-tracked nor neglected in the field of education. Teaching practice provides pre-service teacher the platform to put in practise the pedagogical knowledge and skills learnt. Teaching practice has so many benefits to pre-service teachers, some of which includes the opportunity to be in the position of a teacher, be able to implement what is learnt in the classroom to reality, that is, being able to bridge between theory and practice (Koross, 2016). Teaching practice which is also known as work-integrated learning, can therefore be defined as training where pre-service teachers are exposed to classroom management, observation and teaching with the goal of knowing and being able to become professional teachers (Msangya, Mkoma & Yihuan, 2016). Apart from the fact that TP is the core centre for pre-service teachers' degrees, the teaching experience is needed so as to allow them get

familiar with the reality of practice, identify challenges and creatively suggest solutions.

Of course, TP comes with its own challenges that cannot be overcome suddenly but gradually with the support of schools and other stakeholders. In other words, it is impossible for pre-service teachers to graduate or complete their degrees without going for teaching practice and ensuring that they pass. While the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) oversees tertiary and vocational training, it is the responsibility of universities in ensuring that pre-service teachers are placed in relevant and safe secondary schools as teaching and learning could only be effective in a conducive environment (Afrika, 2016). Mokoena (2017) mentioned three crucial areas where pre-service teachers should master: mastering teaching skills, acquisition of the role of a teacher, and experience. Therefore, the aspect of teaching practice in pre-service teacher education is an integral part and that needs both the attention of government, universities, and pre-service teachers as well. For pre-service teachers to acquire these skills and become skilful teachers, there is a need for schools (primary and secondary) to join in giving adequate and relevant training to these would-be teachers. To achieve this, it means that there is a need for schools to be well equipped

with the necessary skills in order to mentor pre-service teachers effectively. On the contrary, lack of resources, language of instruction and overcrowded classrooms, to mention but a few, were said to be some of the major challenges faced by pre-service teachers according (Msangya, Mkoma & Yihuan, 2016).

Pre-service teachers who are novices at the teaching practice period should be supervised by both the university (lecturers) and a mentor teacher in the particular school for some time. Supervision of pre-service teacher by a mentor at this time is very important as to oversee the classroom teaching and learning activities for quality assurance, to encourage and to support them where necessary (Mukeredzi, 2016). Unfortunately, it was established that mentor teacher sees pre-service teacher as an alternative to shift their workload to when they are on TP. Meanwhile, to the novice teacher, no matter how many times they have embarked on this exercise, teaching is still difficult for them to execute effectively (Rauduvaitė, Lasauskienė & Barkauskaitė, 2015; Koross, 2016). Additionally, studies confirmed that pre-service teachers still face so many challenges such as language of instruction, lack of resources, COVID-19 pandemic, work overload from mentor teachers, and lack of discipline and respect among learners (Aldabbus, 2018; Mahmood & Iqbal, 2018). This means that the above challenges hinder pre-service teachers from giving their best. Pre-service teacher who teaches science subject complains of lack of laboratory, communication to learners in the English language was also mentioned as a barrier, mentor teachers giving pre-service teacher their work to do, learners not respecting pre-service teacher. There is a need for schools to make all the necessary arrangements for effective, smooth, and acceptable teaching preparation for the pre-service teacher (Hamilton, & Margot, 2019). Unfortunately, it was established that schools are never ready nor prepared to receive pre-service teachers for their practicals (Nkambule, & Mukeredzi, 2017; Nketsia, Opoku, Mohammed, Kumi, Twum & Kyere, 2021). Hence, the study sees this unpreparedness of schools as a problem that needs to be addressed if pre-service teachers' experiences should be enhanced.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the challenges pre-service teachers faced during TP and to proffer possible solutions in this regard.

Theoretical Framework

Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT) was adopted for the study due to its relevance. TLT was propounded by James MacGregor Burns (1978) with the assumption that people in leadership positions should work together with people who believe in their managing skills and look up to them with the view of being motivated. Transformative leadership theory is interested in developing people by creating a platform for their followers to have a better chance of helping one another and being empowered to be the type of leader that can influence positive change in day-to-day people's lives (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013). From the information provided above about the theory, it is clear that TL is known for many good attributes of good leadership,

such as the ability to motivate and engage followers, patient to listen, being able to tolerate every individual, and humility (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). In a nutshell, TLT can therefore be defined as a leadership style that intends to change people's lives (Budur & Poturak, 2021).

This fits into my study since it aims to better pre-service teachers' teaching skill from existing knowledge. With the support of school leadership where teaching resources are available and gaining respect from learners, pre-service teachers' teaching experience would be influenced positively under TLT. This means that they have most of the things needed to obtain the required teaching and learning knowledge to teach effectively. Additionally, when leaders in schools work closely with pre-service teachers, it motivates them to do more in becoming the best and that is why transformative leadership theory works perfectly in the study (Purwanto, Purba, Bernarto & Sijabat, 2021). Despite the challenges pre-service teachers face during teaching practice, if leaders in authority could explore TLT, there would be positive experiences that would encourage pre-service teachers to give their best. Even though the study does not focus on mentor teachers, this theory emphasises the importance of grooming pre-service teachers for change (Purwanto, Purba, Bernarto & Sijabat, (2021).

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Paradigm and Research Design

This study adopted the Transformative Paradigm (TP). TP is a type of paradigm interested in bringing change to people's lives. It is a paradigm that centres on the experience of the marginalised to transform the existing situation by seeking justice (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). TP is appropriate for the study because it aims to bring positive change to people's lives and that is why it was chosen to complement the intention of the study, which is to identify challenges pre-service teachers face and suggest possible solutions to these challenges. This study adopted Participatory Research (PR) as the research design. Working collaboratively with this set of people will help proffer solutions to the existing situation (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). PR emphasises the importance of people, individuals or communities sharing their personal experiences pertaining to a situation (Omodan, 2020). Participatory research is deemed fit for this study because it allowed the concerned, that is, would-be pre-service teachers to share their experiences and suggest the way forward. It is believed that people in a particular situation are in the best position to tell their stories better (Dube, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Omodan, 2021a; Omodan, 2021b).

B. Method of data collection

The study generated data through 4th-year students' reflective assessment on teaching practice exercise. The reflective assessment was guided by certain questions that were asked concerning their experiences in teaching practice. Questions like "What challenges did you encounter?" How

were you able to overcome them?" This reflective task is to help pre-service teachers identify problems they faced during this time and to be able to provide solutions to them without the help of a mentor teacher. By taking part in this reflection, they will be informed of what to do when those problems arise. The rationale for the study was to investigate the experiences of 4th-year pre-service teachers who specialised in education (Rauduvaitė, Lasauskienė & Barkauskaitė, 2015).

C. Participants and selection of participants

The participants for the study consist of 40 final year pre-service teachers. The study was aimed to investigate by means of reflecting the experiences of 4h-year students who just concluded their final teaching practice exercise. To identify the challenges encountered during this time and how they overcame them. Hence, to achieve this, ten reflective assessments were randomly selected. Random sampling is a form of data collection tool that is used within the total population and chooses participants unbiasedly. This means that from a particular setting with similar experience, anybody can be chosen as a participant (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The relevance of the sampling is because it allowed the researcher to select the number of needed reflective assessments without being biased, which in this case, ten out of forty were selected. Participants are represented with alphabetical letters (A-G) for anonymous sake.

D. Method of data analysis and ethical consideration

Thematic Analysis (TA) was adopted to analyse the study because of its easy and flexible nature (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). TA will help the researcher identify, analyse patterns, make sense of the data generated (Tuanany, 2015), and adopt the six steps of data analysis according to (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These steps include the familiarising of oneself with the data collected, sorting of coding, theming/categorising of data according to the meaning, reviewing of themes, defining of themes and analysis or reporting of data. The study falls under qualitative analysis; therefore, the thematic analysis helped the researcher analyse data according to the themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical consideration is an important part of research that deals with participants' consciousness and willingness to take part in a project and as such, there is a need for them to know by seeking their consent (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). Since it is unethical to cajole anyone to participate, it is therefore mandatory for research to seek people's consent. The researcher informed the participants about the study and assured them that their confidentiality was guaranteed both during and after the study.

E. Presentation of Data

This section presents the analysis and the interpretation of data based on the objectives of the study. The data were categorised according to the two objectives; the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice exercise and the suggested solutions on how these challenges

can be prevented by both pre-service teachers and schools. However, data were interpreted according to the participants' conversation on challenges and suggested solutions to pre-service teachers during teaching practice.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Lack of Teaching Resources

It is no doubt that for anyone to be effective in every sphere of life, there is a need for adequate resources to some extent. Additionally, there is a need for resources for effective and smooth delivery of teaching content in teaching and learning. Pre-service teachers who are still on training at universities and posted to schools for their practice should be provided with the necessary resources for effective teaching, but it was found that lack of teaching resources was one of the major challenges encountered and this hindered them from giving their best. It was shown that stress, work overload, lack of support were some of the factors school teachers face that prevent them from receiving pre-service teacher at their different schools (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; García & Weiss, 2020; Adebayo, Ntokozo, & Grace, 2020).

In other words, according to the above scholars, lack of education resources hinders pre-service teachers from teaching as expected. Below are participants' conversations to confirm this.

Participant F: I could see that the majority of the class was not learning anything because the class was overcrowded, and other learners were making noise.

Participant G: Some learners lost their stationery (exercise books, rulers, pens, and pencils) which delays the process of teaching and learning.

Participant C: Physical education requires tennis balls, soccer balls and other materials. Unfortunately, there were no such materials to support this subject as a learning area.

Participant D: In most schools where I was conducting teaching practices, especially in rural areas, there are no laboratories to conduct experiments/practical work, so in this case, I normally do experiments that do not require a laboratory.

Participant E: "The school I was doing my practicals in did not have resources, no laboratory, and no science kit. I was really challenging because we end up doing everything in theory".

Participant F: "I'm a science teacher, my majors are science and mathematics. Whenever I go to teaching practice, I teach natural science and technology. In natural science and technology, I do a lot of practicals and experiments.

From the above conversations from pre-service teachers who were on their teaching practice during this study, it is clear that schools are not prepared to receive pre-service teachers in relation to the availability of educational resources. By the nature of physical science subjects, for instance, resources such as laboratory for experiment, tennis ball, soccer balls for physical education, to mention but a

few must be important, otherwise, pre-service teachers will be hindered from teaching as expected.

Again, the issue of overcrowding is due to a lack of preparation by schools, according to participant F above. This participant further said that in such a congested classroom, most learners do not learn anything but rather disrupt the class. Pre-service teachers are at the mercy of schools' preparation and readiness in terms of teaching resources to succeed in their teaching practice. In the absence of these, problems such as overcrowded classrooms will continue to hinder pre-service teacher's progress. Ayua (2021) holds that when pre-service teachers do not have resources to teach, they tend to lack collaboration and experience, which automatically affects their performance. In a science classroom, for example, where pre-service teachers need to do an experiment but do not have a laboratory or the chemicals needed. Apart from being frustrated, they become unavailable, irrelevant and might lose interest in teaching in the future. The fact that lack of teaching resources deprived pre-service teachers from performing well due to the unpreparedness of schools was also reported as the major reason why learners' performance was below average due to lack of resources in schools (Mupa, & Chinooneka, 2015).

B. Lack of respect

Lack of respect in high schools and among learners towards pre-service teacher has been linked to the unpreparedness of schools to receive these novice teachers according to the studies conducted by Mupa and Chinooneka (2015); Mufidah (2019). This bad attitude is not limited to a particular country but rather a global behaviour. Unfortunately, this habit has been reported as one of the challenges that hindered pre-service teachers' performance during teaching practice. To support the above, below are statements from the participants

Participant G: "They didn't respect me because I appeared to be quite young. It was a humiliating experience because some of the students were talking back at me."

Participant I: 'Learners not doing their homework when I have given them one. They also do not sometimes do their classwork and wait until corrections are being done to do it.'

Participant D: "Some learners were not behaving well or cooperating during the lessons. Teaching learners was not easy because the learners were different and came from different backgrounds, making them behave differently. Some would be laughing, making noise, drawing things while I am busy teaching etc."

Participant H: Learners were behaving in a very bad way; they were so stiff and stubborn and could not perform in terms of results. I observed that behaviour because there is a lack of punishment, learners are not cooperating in the expected way; they are disorderly and misbehave.

Participant C: Whenever I had to present a lesson (LS) they would disrupt my class and make noise as if I am

not in the class. And at some point, they would encourage the innocent ones to join their shenanigans.

From the first and the third statements, it's obvious that learners do not have respect for pre-service teachers regardless of their stature. This attitude could cause psychological effects on pre-service teachers, leading to poor performance, absenteeism from teaching practice, low-self-esteem, lack of confidence and peradventure, and hindered effectiveness. In my opinion, this is a sign that schools were not prepared to receive pre-service teachers from working as expected in such schools. The researcher believes that a school that is fully prepared would have warned or informed their learners of the consequences of not respecting either teachers or pre-service teachers. There is nothing as discouraging and humiliating as seeing learners laughing and talking back at pre-service teachers during teaching, bearing in mind that these are novices trying to find their feet in teaching. For instance, the third participant said learners were busy laughing and making noise while teaching was going on in the classroom and would give up in his/her career. Definitely, the courage to teach wholeheartedly would not be there anymore and this could hinder their effectiveness

Again, I could deduce from the second participant that learners who failed to do homework know fully well that pre-service teachers could not punish them. In schools where there are stated rules and regulations regarding learners who default in doing their homework, this uncared and nonchalant attitude would have been curbed. This argument is supported by Thompson (2018) that lack of discipline among learners does negatively affect pre-service teacher effectiveness. From the fifth participant, he/she discovered that learners do not respect him/her because of the abolishment of corporal punishment by the government in schools coupled with the fact that that particular school did not prepare enough to receive pre-service teachers. Lastly, lack of homework policy is a result of unpreparedness of schools; otherwise, every learner and even parents would have known what happens when their children fail to do homework.

C. Possible panacea to the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during the teaching practice exercise

This section discusses the suggested possible solutions that pre-service teachers could explore in future when faced with such challenges since teaching practice is an integral part of their degrees. According to participants, if schoolteachers could give these two solutions: availability of resources and respect to pre-service teachers attention, pre-service teachers teaching practice would be more effective.

Provision of adequate instructional material

Availability of resources is the key to success in any organisation that wishes to achieve its goal and objectives and therefore, schools are not an exception in this regard. Resources are not debatable nor are they negotiable when it comes to teaching and learning, especially when dealing with pre-service teachers who are still training to become teachers. Furthermore, the impact of teaching resources

cannot be underestimated for several reasons, both for pre-service teachers and even learners. Resources enhance teaching; that is, it makes teaching to be real, felt, meaningful and fun. Below are participants reports.

Participant J: "So I thought of how I could solve this, then I sat down and read some articles on how to manage an overcrowded classroom. I found three tips and I implemented them."

Participant B: "As a science student, since there is no laboratory and instead of doing theory, I downloaded videos using my laptop which will help learners understand the experiment better. While playing that video, I also explained what was happening in chronological order."

Participant C: "I was able to teach one of the topics I was afraid to talk about through video. I achieved this by asking them to watch a video and discuss some dangers of HIV/AIDS infection. This caused my learners to consider the dangers of prostitution, such as the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS."

Participant E: "To manage an overcrowded classroom, I used to conduct extra time classes (morning and afternoon classes) with group learners who have low self-esteem among the gifted learners and also give them additional work to keep them busy during the process of teaching and learning."

From participants J and E, it is very clear that they struggled with overcrowded classrooms since the schools do not have enough classrooms to split learners into smaller groups that pre-service teacher can manage. Despite their limited experiences and resources, the good news was that they came up with the creative idea of using social media to enhance their subjects by downloading videos for learners to watch. They knew the importance of using teaching resources and the advantages. Even when schools do not have the resources, they went the extra mile to make their learners enjoy and understand the content. Meanwhile, pre-service teachers learn more, understand lessons the more, and increase their achievement, knowledge, and skills.

Nevertheless, there is a need for laboratory for pre-service teachers like participants B and C who teach science subjects. It is not new that resources help learners understand better as this allows learners to apply concept/theory to reality, their way of thinking will be enhanced, learning will be motivating, and retention will be fun and enjoyable. According to Usman (2016); Pino and Viladot (2019), using teaching resources in the classroom promotes and brings out the good outcome. That is, there will be a better academic achievement for both pre-service teachers and learners. However, this study's kind of teaching resources includes any instrument or aids that could make teaching easily understood, such as projectors, laboratory, classroom, chalkboard, stationeries, photographs, maps, video (Frimpong, 2021).

D. Respect for pre-service teachers as a solution

For pre-service teachers to teach effectively and acquire teaching skills, there is a need for adequate preparation from

schoolteachers. Respect, especially from learners to pre-service teachers and vice versa, is important.

Participant E: "I tried verbal discipline; they listen and apologise but do it again. I then applied a few strategies of managing classroom I learnt in TPR, like making sure that when we do something, we all do it simultaneously and anyone who fails to follow the instruction will get punished."

Participant K: Cleaning the classroom, push-ups and picking-up littered papers were my punishments to the learners who disobeyed the rules of the class and the lesson as well.

Participant D: I overcame that challenge of lack of respect by seeking the intervention of my mentor teacher when I could not bear it anymore.

Participant L: I reported the misbehaviour of my learners to my mentor teacher and told her about the disruption during classes. Each learner was called to the office to say their problems.

From the above statement from the E and K participants, it shows that the pre-service teacher were the ones who came up with their strategies to discipline learners since there are no rules from the school due to lack of preparation to receive pre-service teachers. As future teachers, they both thought of what could be done to maintain orderliness in the classroom and suggested strategies like TPR (Total Physical Response), a type of classroom management that combines both verbal communication and physical body movement. While Participant K introduced a strategy of cleaning the school environment as a punishment for any learner who disrupts the class. This shows good leadership skills, ability to manage the classroom, and creativity. This means that pre-service teachers would do tremendously well during the teaching practice programme both in delivering content and performance if the school can offer support, especially in respect from learners.

Meanwhile, from Participants D and L statements, the solutions suggested to the challenge of lack of respect to pre-service teachers was to involve their mentor teachers to address the learners. Again, learners have been invited to the principal's office for questioning as to why they disrupted the class. This could be a control measure in the classrooms, and I will checkmate other learners. Even though it was reported that there is a need for pre-service teachers to respect their learners for a smooth relationship between the two parties in order for good classroom management to be achieved (Corzo & Castañeda, 2017). Hence, with the preparation of the schoolteacher, pre-service teachers teaching practice would be effective with increased performance.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the literature, presentation and analysis of data, the findings showed that the lack of school preparation to receive pre-service teachers hindered teaching effectiveness. It is obvious from the above that if pre-service teachers receive support in the provision of teaching resources from schools, they will perform better both in teaching learners

and acquiring good training. Therefore, the study recommends that all relevant stakeholders work hand-in-hand with schools in providing necessary resources and ensuring that pre-service teachers get supported to teach effectively and to obtain experience and for learners to acquire knowledge that will better their lives. Again, the findings show that learners lack discipline and as a result, pre-service teachers were not respected in the classroom. This could lead to demotivation. This study, therefore, recommends that schools should lecture their learners to respect pre-service teachers and also design a policy on learners' discipline where they know that if found guilty, there are consequences to face. In conclusion, the study appeals to schools working collaboratively with universities to ensure pre-service teachers are motivated and supported to teach effectively. By so doing, we are building a good legacy and providing a conducive learning environment in the education system. With this, both pre-service teachers and learners will have a better perspective and embrace education more.

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