

Teaching Practice In The Greater Vaal Triangle Area: The Student Teachers' Experience

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Practice as observed by (Ngidi and Sibaya 2003) forms an integral part of teacher training. It exposes the students to a teaching environment in which they will contextualise their theoretical knowledge gained during their training. It also grants student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. Given the importance of teaching practice, the researcher sought to investigate the experiences of student teachers doing their teaching practice. This paper examines of the positive experiences and challenges faced by Vaal University of Technology (VUT) Post Graduate Certificate Education (PGCE) student teachers (n=24) during their 10 week teaching practice in the Vaal area. A qualitative research design was followed. Semi-structured interviews with all student teachers were used to collect the data while content analysis was used to identify themes and analyse the data. The research established that despite the enriching experiences during teaching practice, student teachers experienced many challenges which significantly affected their ability to fully achieve the desired outcomes from the exercise. Based on the findings of this study, measures were suggested on how to improve teaching Practice in order to enable the student teachers to accrue maximum benefits/ outcomes from the experience.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Practice according to Ngidi and Sibuya (2003) forms an integral part of teacher training. Still on the subject the authors further state that it (Teaching Practice) serves as the pre-service teacher's initiation into the real-life world of the school (Ngidi and Sibaya 2003). Teaching practice as described by the South African Department of Education's norms and Standard for educators as a 'mode of delivery through which all the different roles of educators should be developed and assessed' and as 'the authentic context in which student educators experience and demonstrate the integration of the competencies used to develop the entire curriculum' (RSA, 2000:12). This process affords the student teacher an opportunity to determine whether the appropriate career choice has been made or not.

Marais and Meier (2004) assert that, the term 'teaching practice' represents the range of experiences to which student educators are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. Ishmael, Halse and Buchanan (2000:40) concur in their argument that this exercise was not only challenging but an important part of teacher training, especially in developing countries such as South Africa where, according to the same researchers, the effectiveness of the teaching practice can be diminished or eroded by geographical distance, isolation, low and uneven levels of teacher expertise, and a highly structured (rigid) system of schooling and teacher training. To this list one can add; a wide-ranging lack of resources, lack of discipline among a wide cross section learners and educators' attitudes are some of the other challenges that may affect the effectiveness of the teaching practice. These challenges, observed Quick and Sieborger (2005), if not addressed, may affect the student teachers' performance during teaching practice and may in the long run affect their perception of the teaching profession (Quick and Sieborger 2005).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to examine the both positive and negative experiences faced by Vaal University of Technology (VUT) Post Graduate Certificate Education (PGCE) student teachers (n=24) during teaching practice in the Vaal Triangle. This was done with the aim of identifying areas in which student teachers would be assisted to enable them to achieve the desired outcomes from teaching practice in a more comprehensive manner.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

- To identify the positive experiences during teaching practice
- To identify the challenges faced by student teachers on teaching practice.
- To suggest recommendations as to ways of assisting student teachers to achieve the desired outcomes from the teaching practice in a more comprehensive manner.

THE GREATER VAAL TRIANGLE AREA

The Greater Vaal Triangle is a triangular area of land formed by Vereeniging Vanderbijlpark and Sasolburg together they comprise a substantial urban complex in South Africa. The area straddles the Vaal River and is a major industrial region, which is home to iron and Steel Corporation (ISCOR), the steel and oil-from-coal processing facilities.

The Vaal University of Technology (VUT) started its life in 1966 as the Vaal Triangle College for Advanced technical education. The need for such an institution was prompted by the rapid industrial growth in the Vaal region. In 1979 all Colleges were renamed Technikons as a result the Vaal Triangle College became the Vaal Triangle Technikon.. On 1 January 2004 Vaal Triangle Technikon officially became a University of Technology. VUT celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2006.

The Post Graduate certificate in Education (PGCE) is a teacher-training programme, being offered in the Department of Communication and Legal services at VUT. The programme is offered over one year full-time OR two years, part-time. During this time the student are required to do at least 12 weeks Teaching Practice (TP) as part of the experiential learning programme required for the qualification. Teaching Practice is done at South African schools that have signed cooperative agreements with the Department.

TEACHING PRACTICE AT THE VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (VUT)

Teaching Practice for the PGCE students at VUT was scheduled for the second semester (fourth term) from August to October. The Coordinator met with a number of school principals prior to sending students out to different schools. The objective of the meeting was to established positive educational and supportive relationships with the School Management Teams (SMTs) from a number of schools in the Vaal area.

The coordinator selected suitable schools for Teaching Practice by visiting the schools, meeting with the principals and teachers and explaining the reasons why VUT would like to establish a working professional relationship with them. He then entered into an agreement with the relevant SMTs that (i) the students could do their Teaching Practice at their schools, that (ii) specific teachers would be school-based mentors to the students while in their charge for the duration of the students' teaching time, and that (iii) the SMTs would enhance the Teaching Practice by allowing the students to become 'fully integrated' learner teachers. The latter meant that students would be afforded the opportunity to participate in all school activities. Besides the fact that students were teachers-in-training, they should be given the opportunity practically to integrate and apply the theoretical knowledge and newly acquired teaching skills. They had to be exposed to, for example, completing class registers, marking learner's books, attending staff meetings, helping with extramural activities, and so on. Students were subjected to a minimum of two formal class visitations and assessments done by VUT lecturers.

During the school visits, lecturers had to give the student teachers written and oral feedback. Improvements were commended, shortcomings highlighted and suggestions made on how to, for example, overcome anxiety, use non-verbal language to enhance their teaching and learning activities, apply a variety of strategies to improve their teaching, and so on. The educators, or school-based mentors, also had to observe the student teachers' progress, behaviour and attitude at school and assess the student teachers' practical teaching and learning activities according to specific guidelines given to them by the VUT mentors.

The present study was triggered off by a discussion during an oral feedback session after a class visit when a student was asked how he had experienced the teaching practice. The lecturer expected a casual 'not bad' or 'very interesting' sort of response. Instead the student teachers came up with along list of all the negative experiences. Upon hearing the negative experience the lecturer enquired whether there were no positive experiences. The student responded by mentioning a handful of positive experiences.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was used in this exploratory study conducted at the different schools in the Vaal triangle area. Lecturers visited students during their teaching Practice period. This was made possible because of the small number of students in the PGCE programme and because all students went to schools in the Greater Vaal area.

Participants And Sample

All PGCE student teachers at Vaal university of Technology (VUT) for the year 2006 were included in the sample (n=24).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of 24 student teachers in the PGCE programme from the Vaal university of Technology (VUT) at the end of a 10-week teaching practice period.

Data Analysis

The method of analysing data was adopted from Marais and Meier (2004). Data analysis of data all data was approached in two stages. The first stage focused on segmenting the data into categories and counting of responses. The categories were consolidated into themes. The second stage focused on comparing the themes related to positive experiences and the challenges faced during teaching practice respectively. The themes were discussed in relationship to place of occurrence¹ declining order of frequency and therefore prominence (Marais and Meier 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adequate Preparation Of Student Teachers/ Ability To Translate Theory Into Practice

One of the aims of teaching practice is to provide opportunities for student teachers to integrate theory and practice. Marais and Meir (2004) observed that despite the fact that university lecturers value teaching practice as the bridge between theory and practice, student teachers sometimes found it difficult to relate course content to everyday classroom practice. Students, as noted by Waghorn and Stevens 1996:48), tend to place theory in one compartment and practice in other. A further problem revealed by Martinez (1998) as quoted by Marais and Meier (2004) is the tendency of student teachers to get overwhelmed by theoretical modules and in the process failing to cope with the arduous task of integrating different element of knowledge that they have been exposed to and at the same time, to plan their lessons and present them in the classroom. Batten in Marais and Meier (2004) suggest that other than

¹The themes, both positive and challenges were discussed under two broader categories; those emanating from the university and those emanating from the schools where Teaching practice was conducted.

lessening the theoretical component of teacher education course, student teachers should be helped to make stronger links between theory and practice.

The Relationship Between The Student Teacher And The Mentor

Research has shown that a mentor and/or supervisor has considerable influence on the performance of the student teacher during teaching practice. To emphasize the importance of a mentor, Marais and Meier (2004) pointed out that in as much as student teachers expressed their experience of practical training through a range of interactions and relationships such as with staff, learners, fellow students, and university lecturers, a major prerequisite for learning is the student teachers' relationship with the supervisor.

According to the findings gained from numerous investigations, supervisor teachers or mentors have a great influence on the development of student teacher's orientation, disposition, conceptions and classroom practice (Farrell et al 2000:35, Quick and Sieborger 2005). Several studies such as those conducted by McNally; and Inglis 1997) have shown that students value a supportive, interactive classroom environment, especially with respect to the process of learning to teach. Student teachers observe teachers at work so as to learn about teachers' skills, strategies and classroom achievements. They also evaluate their own teaching experiences through consulting with supervisors. In this way student teachers gain experience in managing and evaluating class work; gain experience in maintaining discipline and good order in the classroom; find their own teaching style and personality and become acquainted with the school organization and administration (Quick and Sieborger 2005).

Marais and Meir (2004) noted that a good relationship between student teacher and mentor was indispensable. They quoted findings by Ralph (2000:3111-312) that highlighted that disagreement between a student teacher and a supervisor is often the direct result of supervisor' inability to match their mentorship style to the student' capacity to perform instructional tasks. It may also happen that the supervisor may exploit and abuse a cordial relationship by imposing exorbitant demands on the students in terms of workload.

McGee (1996) observed that, as a result of the supervisor's attitude towards student teachers, student teachers tend to be very submissive because they are made to feel inferior and powerless. Some supervisors assume that students are already equipped by the university with the knowledge and skills required to teach and are therefore reluctant to assist them with the development of the basic skills they need. Instead of being fruitful, therefore, student' experience of their practical training under these circumstances could lead to oppressive feelings of inadequacy and difficulties in developing self-confidence (Lantz in Rushton 2001). It was found in numerous studies that inadequacy in the supervisor's guidance and training reduces the effectiveness of practical teaching (Ismal et al 2000) and can lead to a negative experience of teaching practice. (Marais and Meir 2004).

Discipline Of Learners

The findings of the study conducted by Marais and Meir (2004), reported a deterioration of moral values in schools and the neglect of discipline. Respondents Marais and Meir' study indicated that violence was a common reality. For example one student referred to the school as a place where learners fought and boys were mean and had no respect for girls. Learners were rude and impertinent, and showed disrespect towards them.

Similar findings of social and moral decay among learners were suggested in a study conducted with 10 000 learners in Grade 8-11 in 2002 (South African Youth Risk Behaviour Survey of the South African Medical Research Council), where 9% of the respondents reported to have carried a lethal weapon to school at some stage. Some 15% had been threatened or injured at school while 19% had been hurt in fights. Drugs and alcohol were identified as major problems and one in ten respondents reported to have been forced into having sex not to mention the 14.4% who had had their first sexual experience before high school. According to Marais and Meir (2004) such moral decay can make practical teaching a negative experience for student teachers, since student teachers tend to be anxious about maintenance of discipline and learner control. Respondents registered fear, noting that the amount of hatred and destructiveness they had observed among learners during teaching and learning, as well as the disruption of moral

values, was frightening to the extent that student teachers were afraid that they would not be able to control the children.

Outcomes-Based Education

Teaching has undergone significant changes during the past two decades in South Africa. South Africa has embarked on the implementation of a new national curriculum based on an 'outcomes-based education (OBE) philosophy or approach (Marais and Meir 2004). Studies such as one done by Marais and Meir (2004), Pretorius (2002) and Jansen (1997), point out that the demands made on teachers with regard to the radical curriculum changes have taken a significant toll on teachers' morale. Teachers experienced difficulties with the new OBE. This in turn led to a negative change in teachers' attitudes and what in Jansen's (1997) opinion was a reluctance to explore the successful implementation of change. Such negative attitudes of teachers may, as observed by Marais and Meir (2004), indirectly rub off on student teachers being mentored during teaching practice.

Findings

The following themes were identified under positive experiences from within the University:

- Adequate preparation of student teachers/ Ability to translate theory into practice

The following theme was discussed under the challenges from with in the university:

- Timing of the teaching practice

The following themes were discussed under positive experiences from the different schools were the teaching practice was conducted:

- Relationship between mentors and student teachers

The following themes were discussed under the challenges from the different schools were the teaching practice was conducted:

- Relationship between mentors and student teachers
- Induction into the school
- Attitude of other educators in the school
- Involvement in other school activities
- Relationship with learners/ Discipline of learners
- Implementation of OBE
- Resources

Positive Experiences Attributable To University

Adequate Preparation Of Student Teachers/ Ability To Translate Theory Into Practice

In contrast to the findings in the study by Marais and Meir (2005), where respondents found a discrepancy between theory of Education and reality of instruction, and where respondents indicated that they could not reconcile the teaching methods as explained during their lectures with those used in schools by teachers, the respondents in this study indicated that they were able to apply and translate the education theory learnt in class into practice during the teaching practice.

When asked whether the course had prepared them for the teaching experience, the respondents answered that they felt that the PGCE course had prepared them for the teaching practice. Respondents made a number of

interesting statements regarding the relationship between theory they had acquired during their period of study at VUT and the skills they had to apply during teaching practice.

Most respondents said that they found teaching practice very interesting because they were able to apply what they had studied and they enjoyed teaching because they were conversant with the subject content. They acknowledged the importance of both positive and negative reinforcement and of creating a conducive environment for learning, a concept they had covered in Education Theory 4. 'I discovered that learners become enthusiastic and they actively participate in activities when they are praised and rewarded for their efforts.' Commented one student educator. Most respondent indicated that they applied the knowledge and technique they had acquired during the specific didactics and professional studies lecture to plan, prepare, present, structure their lesson, and to draw up the timetables.

Some student-educators noted that the mock lessons they had had during their lectures helped them to fully understand the basics about the presentation and structuring of their lessons as well as improving their questioning techniques. One respondent specifically pointed out that the discussions they had during their lectures concerning barriers to learning helped them to deal with learners with different educational needs.

It should be mentioned however, that more than 80% of the respondents in this study reported that, despite the thorough teacher preparation, respondents found it was not easy to teach because the learners were not disciplined, they did not do assignments, made a lot of noise and were not actively involved in classroom activities. Moreover there was a language barrier. 'Learners could not communicate in English while I could not communicate in Sotho.' Commented one respondent.

This significantly affected the student teachers' performance during teaching practice and their perception towards the teaching profession in general.

Negative Experiences Attributable To University

Timing Of The Teaching Practice

All respondents pointed out that teaching practice started late when most teachers had almost completed their syllabus and were busy doing revision in preparation for the end of year exams.

Student teachers had to continue attending classes at VUT which was very inconvenient since they had to prepare for their lessons at school, marking while at the same time doing assignments and preparing themselves for their own classes. It was a great challenge having to do both at the same time

Positive Experiences Attributable To The Schools

Relationship Between Mentors And Student Teachers

Similar to the findings of the study undertaken by Marais and Meir (2004), more than 50 % of the respondents indicated that the mentors were supportive, and always willing to help. They said that the mentors gave valuable advice and shared their skills and experiences. 'We are working together with the teacher. She is a nice lady. She gives me valuable advice and tips'.

The respondents appreciated the positive attitudes displayed by their mentors by which means they were made to feel part of the school.

The majority of respondents also revealed that teaching practice motivated them to teach and that they received 'constant guidance from their mentors. One student teacher had this to say about his mentor:

I am indebted to my mentor. She has dedicated her time to ensure that I do the right thing and gain good experience in the process. She has inspired me and has helped me translate the theory I learnt into practice. She enhanced the skills

I acquired during the course, for example preparing a lesson plan. I see her as a role model and I enjoyed her teaching style

Student teachers appreciated mentors who treated them with respect. One student teachers talked about the his mentor thus:

My mentor respects me a lot and she is guiding me very well... She is one of the reasons I have enjoyed the teaching practice I never thought I would pursue the teaching career, but I am now seriously considering venturing in the real teaching world.

Another one affirmed thus:

'We worked very well with the class teacher. She assisted me on how to make a lesson plan, rubrics, and disciplining learners. The teacher sits in class whilst I am teaching and this helps to maintain discipline'.

To these student educators, teaching practice, gave them hands-on experience in schools and it helped to make a decision to become teachers.

Despite the above positive remarks by the majority of respondents, some respondents expressed negative experiences with their mentors. These respondents indicated that they did not get any support from the class teachers. Some respondents as expressed by Ralph in Marais and Meier (2004) saw it as exploitation and abuse by the mentors who imposed exorbitant demands on them in terms of workload:

He is just enjoying himself, he is a free man, he does not come to class, he just gave me the textbook showed me where he had stopped and that was all. I feel that teacher should still take responsibility of his class and not damp everything on me. I don't have a problem but I strongly feel that as a class teacher, he should be available to provide the support and guidance because I am still learning. Commented one of the respondents.

Some respondents felt that mentors did not have any confidence in them. The following remarks were captured from the responses:

Despite the fact that my mentor respects me a lot and she is guiding me very well, she does not trust me. When she is not at school she cannot entrust the class in my care. I can only teach if she is around. At first I appreciated the fact that she sat in my classroom when I taught because she helped to control the class but as time went on I realized that she did not think I was capable of handling the class on my own. I feel mentors should have confidence in us because we feel we have got appropriate training and we can handle the classes on our own. I have only taught once because the teacher thinks that I will delay her.

Induction Into The School

Respondents from three of the schools noted that there was no general induction procedure in place when they first arrived at the school. They were not introduced to staff members, as attested by the following statement: 'They do not have staff meetings so we were not introduced formally. Other educators and learners just see us there.'

Some respondents felt a sense of alienation. One student educator remarked thus:

We were never introduced to staff. This affected us psychologically because we felt like strangers. We never felt that sense of belonging.

Such feelings of alienation resulted into 'panic' and lack of self-confidence that in turn reduced the effectiveness of teaching practice and negatively affected student teachers attitude towards the teaching profession (Marais and Meir 2004).

A good reception from the Headmasters and teachers could lead to a positive attitude towards teaching as attested by the statement by one of the student educators, who received a good reception. ‘We were introduced to the staff. They took to the classes and we introduced ourselves to the learners. Learners were told to respect us. We were introduced as teachers not as student teachers and this in a way influenced the way other teachers and learners related to us.’

Another student teacher affirmed thus, “I was given a warm welcome. I feel as if I have been there for a whole year. All teachers as well as administrators treat me like a permanent teacher and not as a student teacher. They have made my stay at the school the most exciting experience that I could ever have in my life.”

Attitude Of Other Educators In The School

Respondents intimated that other staff members did not make them feel welcome. They did not respect them. ‘We are not respected as their colleagues.

They just order us around. They treat us like errand boys. Someone ordered me to supervise her class while she went to fetch her child. I would have appreciated it if she had asked me in a collegial manner and not ordering me around like a small kid. I did it but I did not appreciate the manner in which I was ordered...I felt left out because I did not understand the language used by other teachers. During the morning meetings I would just sit and watch them talk but would not know what they were talking about and sometimes they would laugh and I would feel left out and a bit idiotic. For example, there was a day they were informed in Afrikaans that the following day was a casual day and because I did not understand the language I came the following morning dressed in a formal wear while the rest of the staff were dressed casually. I felt stupid. In another Instance I felt that other teachers were taking me as a cheap tool of convenience (personal assistant) as they would just send me to do things such as taking cups to the staff room and controlling students in the corridors. The teacher would shout at me in front of students, which I found very demeaning. I found the teachers to be unprofessional He was never prepared for his class and he was always late. That demoralized me.

In relation to the educators’ unprofessional manner, another respondent intimated that, ‘the teachers take advantage of us and they keep us in the computer centre to type their work. Some teachers give us personal assignments. Most teachers in this school are lazy and they drink a lot.’

Involvement In Other School Activities

As observed by Quick and Sieborger (2005), teaching involves many experiences, and student educators should get involved in all aspect of the school. In this study despite the fact that, the SMTs had been requested to provide student teachers with the opportunity to become ‘fully integrated’ teachers by allowing students teachers’ participation in all school activities, the student educators were limited in their participation in the school activities. They were treated as termed by one student teacher, as ‘second class citizens’ in the school. The majority of student educators echoed this thought; ‘we are not invited for staff meetings so we never know what takes place in the meetings. We would like to be involved and attend those meetings because we believe that we can give some valuable input.’

Another respondent commented that they were made to feel insignificant. ‘For example, every morning briefing takes place around the table in staff room however as student teachers we are excluded from the table. We are given a small table in the corner of the staff room and we don t feel like we are part of them.

We are doing the same work yet we are excluded from the staff meetings. After the briefing we are expected to take on the responsibilities’

One respondent remarked that they were even excluded from sport activities. When they voiced their concern to the headmaster he just shrugged his shoulders and moved away.

Relationship With Students/Discipline

Similar to findings by Marais and Meir (2004), where respondents experienced a deterioration of moral values in schools and the neglect of discipline, the majority of respondents in the present study also noted that discipline was almost non-existent in most schools. One respondent remarked that, 'learners were very unruly because there were no effective disciplinary measures taken against misconduct. Learners were allowed to use cell phones in class which I found very disruptive.' Another respondent indicated that, 'learners gave an impression that we are their age mates so they don't respect us. There is no discipline at all. Learners are rude. It is not easy to control the class. Even when the teacher is there, learners would be playing cards, ring tone of cell phones and eating in class.'

In contrast to the above negative responses, respondents from one school said that learners were well behaved and actively participated in the class activities. 'Learners respect us as teachers, though there are some who think that since we are student teachers, we don't have the power/ authority to punish them.'

Implementation Of OBE

All respondents admitted that they found it very difficult effectively to implement OBE because of the lack of learner support materials (LSM) in all schools, the large numbers of students in class, lack of discipline and the time limitation.

The majority of respondents indicated that the time allocated for the lessons was very limited, at most 45 minutes.

When you really want to engage students it is difficult to put them into groups because of the limited time... Moreover there is also limited space for the educator to move around checking the progress of the learners as they work. Was one of the responses.

Similar responses were obtained by Marais and Meir (2005), where almost half of the respondents indicated that they experienced difficulties with the OBE because of the excessive workload pressure and the ambiguous OBE guidelines.

Resources

Most respondents remarked that, the schools did not have resources. Learners did not have text books so it made teaching difficult. One respondent remarked that his school did not have a library and there was a shortage of textbooks. It was also revealed by the majority of respondents that students had to share text books in class. This was felt to be time-consuming and students end up making noise. 'The few books available are kept in a storeroom; learners are not allowed to take them home so it becomes problematic when you give them home work.' When asked whether they applied OBE, the respondents said that they were trying but it was very difficult because of the lack of learner support materials (LSM). Respondents indicated that they did not have access to the photocopying machine whenever they wanted to make copies of worksheets and other LSM for learners; they had to seek the assistance of the school secretary who in most cases was unwilling to do it for student teachers.

DISCUSSION

Overall the respondents indicated that they had benefited from the PGCE course. However, all respondents felt that in as much as the theory acquired during university lectures provided them with enough information on how to teach, It was the teaching practice that introduced and given them the exposure into the experiences of the real teaching world. This is in support of arguments by researchers such as Dreyer (1998), Buchner and Hay (1999:320) who asserted that teaching involved many experiences that simply could not be replicated in a non-school environment. However, the teaching practice provides student teachers with the opportunity to integrate the theory of Education with that which they are experiencing at first hand.

The findings in relation to the influence of the mentors in the present study were similar to those by Marais and Meier (2004) which revealed that many mentors were supportive, friendly, willing to give valuable advice, creative ideas and tips and share their professional skills. Some student educators classified their mentors as exemplary role models and that in turn they set a worthwhile example to follow.

Although some student teachers indicated a supportive relationship with the school-based mentors, some respondents felt that they were exploited by the mentors. This resulted in the student teachers having, what is termed by Marais and Meier (2004), as feelings of inferiority and disabling lack of self-confidence. In the present study some mentors did not give time and attention to student educators. Others did not have confidence in the student educators and as such they could not leave their classes in their care. Others could not let student educators teach because mentors felt that student educators were delaying and wasting learners' valuable time since they had to finish the syllabus before the end of the year. The results also indicate that some mentors were unprofessional and did not set a good example to the Student educators.

The way in which student teachers were received and treated varied from one school to another. The majority of student teachers in the present study attested to the fact that they were not well received and introduced at their schools of placement and that resulted into other teachers and learners not respecting them. This significantly influenced student educators' performance during teaching practice and their attitude towards the teaching profession.

With regards to discipline, the present study established that the majority of learners (90%) lacked discipline and did not show respect to student teachers as such students teachers could not control the learners in the classroom. This made teaching practice a negative experience for student teachers.

Finally 80% of student teachers experienced difficulties with the implementation of OBE because of the large number of learners within limited space, lack of appropriate learner support materials, and the limited time allocated for the lessons (at most 45 minutes) as such they could not effectively engage students in group work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the preceding discussion it is recommended that Teacher-Training Institutions reflect critically on the following:

- The teaching programme Timetable should be designed in such a way that it does not coincide with key school quarters such as towards or during the months of June and October when teachers are preparing students for crucial exams.
- Teacher Training Institutions should desist from the temptation of having 'traditional schools' where they routinely send student-teachers as such schools may experience what I may term 'facility fatigue' akin to donor fatigue, thereby contributing to the negativity experienced by the student teachers during the course of practice.
- Teaching practice time should be spread more evenly throughout the year. For example, students should be placed at schools for an initial observation time of four weeks during the beginning of the year. So that students can have time to experience how schools function during the beginning of the year when emphasis is placed on athletics and other summer sport activities. This should be followed by a four-week session during the second term, another four weeks during the third term. Such a distribution would expose the students to as many different school activities and events as possible. Students should also be placed at two different schools so that they can experience different management styles and different institutional cultures. This is in line with the recommendations given by Quick and Sieborger (2005:4), that teaching practice should be divided into at least two, possibly three school experience sessions.
- The schools that provide facilities for practice should not be taken for granted. Before and during each teaching practice session there should be thorough public relations groundwork undertaken by the institution in order to maintain good relations between the student teachers and all relevant role players. The establishment of full partnership between the schools that host student teachers and the Higher Education

Institution was also identified as a priority in the study by Quick and Sieborger (2005). They emphasised the importance of regular communication between the host teachers, mentors and university lecturers.

- During teaching practice the student teachers must be reminded to maintain a high degree of professionalism in order to gain and maintain respect from regular teachers and pupils. During the course of study, institutions need to inform student educators about what is expected of them during teaching practice.
- Effective supervision and guidance from school-based mentors can also play an important role in making Teaching practice more thorough. However serious consideration should be given to assessment of the professional competence of the mentors and there must be a shared responsibility with the university rather than a dependence on the mentor alone. Maynard and Furlong (1993) in Quick and Sieborger (2005), argued that ‘effective mentoring is... a difficult and demanding task and the teachers performing the role need the time and in-service support appropriate to the increased responsibility being placed on them.’

CONCLUSION

The Positive experience and the challenges faced by student teachers during their 10 weeks teaching practice are attributable to factors concerning the preparation during training, relationship with school-based mentors, induction into the school, attitude of other educators, involvement in other activities, learner discipline lack of resources and implementation of OBE. It is important that teacher trainers be made aware of the factors that militate against positive teaching practice experience to which end teacher education will have to be reconceptualised to assist student teachers to achieve the desired outcomes from the teaching practice in a more comprehensive manner.

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