



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Teaching Practice on Preservice Teachers' Professional Development in the Lesotho Context

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ABSTRACT

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Teaching practice (TP) is an important component of teacher education that grants pre-service teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment in the classroom environment. Studies showed that it exposes them to real teaching because it is then that they gain practical classroom experience by watching experts teach before they attempt it. However, it has been established that despite the value of TP to bridge theory and practice, preservice teachers still found it difficult to relate content learned to their everyday classroom practice. The study aims at exploring the impact teaching practice has on preservice teachers' professional development in the context. The study identified themes that present new knowledge on the impact of on the preservice service teachers. The themes identified are: inadequate supervision and mentorship; exposure to real teaching; putting theory into practice; lack of infrastructure; school culture; ability to reflect and duration of the teaching practice. When TP is inadequate preservice teachers will not be able to present fully their ability and competence as teachers. Hence, stakeholders in teacher education need to be mindful of all aspects that can affect preservice teachers during TP so that preservice teachers become quality teachers equipped with pedagogical practices to meet the increasing demands of the teaching profession.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice is an important component of teacher education that grants pre-service teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment in the classroom environment (Lukman 2021; Kihlwele & Mtandi 2020; Aglazar 2017; Kiggundu & Nayimuli 2009). It is the period when pre-service teachers realize that they have capabilities in teaching as a profession since they put them to the test. During this period, they are allowed to try the art of teaching before getting into the real world of the teaching profession in the future (Kiggundu and Nayimuli, 2009; Gorgoretia & Pilli 2012). Although it becomes the last step of teacher education in the case of Lesotho, it is the most important component of teacher education that bridges the theory and practice of preservice teachers (Lebala et al 2023; Heeralal & Bayaga 2011). Preservice teachers go for teaching practice to experience actual school situations and real lesson presentations in particular what they learned. It exposes them to real teaching because it is then that they gain practical classroom experience by watching experts teach before they attempt it (Mdluli 2020).

Being exposed to real teaching places these teachers in the right condition where challenges exist, and this strengthens them to become strong teachers who can face realities at school situations in the future. This also helps them try out methods of teaching because learning theory without teaching practice can be

considered a futile exercise (Kiggundu & Nayimuli 2009). However, it has been established that teaching is no longer attracting academically able and professionally motivated teachers into the teaching profession due to teacher education that does not produce quality teachers that can impact learners' outcomes (Msangya et al. (2016). It has also been observed that despite the value of TP to bridge theory and practice, preservice teachers still found it difficult to relate content learned to their everyday classroom practice (Msangya et al. 2016). These are some of the challenges that impact negatively the development of their profession which will remain a long-term hurdle for the rest of their teaching profession. However, despite its importance, teaching practice has remained a very challenging, demoralizing, and sometimes very frightening experience for preservice teachers if they are not well prepared. So, preservice teachers need to be guided at an early stage to develop confidence and strategies to deal with these challenges at their respective workplaces in the future (Dube 2020). Hence, this study examines the impact of teaching practice on the development of preservice teachers' profession.

Problem statement

Preservice teachers' programmes are recently becoming crucial as components of teacher education that are linked to knowledge and skills that preservice teachers need to teach in the 21st century. Since teaching is an ongoing activity that cannot be mastered once within a restricted set of skills, they need to be refreshed or reviewed because preservice teachers are not effective in their teaching. However, many teachers' professional development initiatives appear ineffective in supporting changes in teaching practices and student learning. So, this study intends to find out the impact teaching practice has on the development of preservice teachers' profession.

Research question for the study

The study is guided by the following question:

1. What impact does Teaching Practice have on the professional development of preservice teachers?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to research using Meta-synthesis review to critique and synthesize findings of the studies previously conducted on TP (Leary & Walker 2018; Darvishpour, Joolae & Cheraghi 2014; Walsh & Downe 2005). It is an approach that is used to synthesize research findings of previous studies on TP and preservice teachers into a specific topic the effectiveness of TP in the development of preservice teachers' professional development. The approach was used to identify the relationship, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies from these studies to create new knowledge which in this case, the impact of the TP in the development of the preservice teachers' profession (Darvishpour et al. 2014; Walsh & Downe 2005). The following steps were followed in conducting the meta-synthesis approach: searching for several studies about teaching practice and preservice teachers or teacher education; the role of TP to preservice teachers or student-teachers (as it is referred to in other studies) and the findings of these studies were documented in the literature review to create a new topic – the effectiveness of TP towards build preservice teachers' professionalism.

Furthermore, this approach was adapted to integrate the findings of the previous studies conducted on teaching practice and pre-service teachers specifically the roles, advantages, and disadvantages of TP to these teachers. Regardless of the positivity or negativity (contradictions) of these studies on TP and preservice teachers, the method was used to merge and develop a piece of new knowledge as indicated earlier (Leary & Walker 2018). The new knowledge in this study is the contribution that TP has on the preservice teachers' professional development. In qualitative research, the thematic method was used to merge the findings from these studies which were previously conducted to form categories before making the final categories for this study it is done with predetermined work by the researcher (Mohammed et al. 2016). Due to its time efficiency, it was also adapted to help form detailed insights into the advantages and disadvantages of TP to preservice teachers into the whole data collected (Mohammed et al. 2016).

Therefore, it helps to identify themes that respond to the research question and setting easy for synthesis (Darvishpour et al., 2014). The last step was for the writing up of a paper.

Presentation and findings of the study

Studies were reviewed on the teaching practice of preservice teachers and critically analyzed to understand the impact of TP on the development of the preservice teachers' profession. Drawing from previous studies' findings, such data were analyzed thematically as indicated in methodology in a manner that shows the impact of TP on the development of the preservice teachers' profession.

Inadequate supervision and mentorship

The findings identified that mentors and supervisors had a significant impact on the professional development of student-teachers, but then mistreat preservice teachers. Mentors are teachers at the school level who are responsible for guiding, leading, and nurturing preservice teachers during their teaching practice. They are also supposed to observe preservice teachers and provide constructive feedback to help them develop professionally. This means they are the persons who have to demonstrate to these preservice teachers how to carry out the teaching process. They are also individuals whose supervision promotes quality teaching by enabling them to reflect on their practice, which contributes to the continual development of pedagogical and other teaching skills. If mentors mistreat preservice teachers by assigning them some of their responsibilities, it causes preservice teachers to dislike their profession and believe it is not where they belong because they are burdened with too much work, and mentors are not fulfilling their obligations. Mpungose (2020), Dube (2020), Abongdia et al. (2015), and Komba & Kira (2013) have all shown that when mentors illtreat preservice teachers and do not allow preservice teachers to observe them before they can teach in order to learn which teaching methods are relevant and preservice teachers do not grow professionally. Mentors do not seem to make much an influence on the profession of preservice teachers.

Exposure to real teaching

The findings demonstrated that supervisors seldom observe all preservice teachers during the TP period, particularly those stationed in rural regions without transportation. This disadvantages preservice teachers since they end their teaching experience without being observed and this does not contribute to their professional development as hoped. According to Dube (2020; Msangya et al., 2016; Bechuke et al., 2013), when lecturers do not pay regular visits to preservice teachers, there is no assessment or monitoring of their development. It also implies that there is an issue with unskilled mentors who fail to perform their tasks and obligations during TP, which influences the quality of teachers produced following TP. Placing preservice teachers in difficult schools makes their lecturers (supervisors) unwilling to go and watch. As previously indicated, teaching practice is a crucial learning tool for preservice teachers as they learn how to teach. According to Komba and Kira (2013), it refers to the variety of experiences that preservice teachers gain from real-world teaching because they are assigned classes in schools, putting theory into practice.

Putting theory into practice

The findings revealed that TP enables people to use relevant theoretical knowledge learned in real-world classrooms and obtain practical experience, which leads to professional development. This is consistent with Malik, Amin, and Ali, (2023); Lukman, 2021; Kihlwele & Mtandi 2020; Aglazar 2017; Mannathoko 2013; Kiggundu & Naymuli, 2009) that it is regarded as a basic component of teacher education that exposes preservice teachers to the actual teaching and learning environment and that it contributes to the development of teaching experience by preparing students for the real world of work. It is also recognized as the period that permits preservice teachers to begin genuine teaching to real learners in real classrooms, putting theory to practice, where they can apply pedagogical competences learned during their studies in the same way that professional teachers do. This is advantageous to the professional growth of these pre-service teachers. As Samuel (2010), Mannathoko (2013), and Rauduviate, Lasauskiene, and Barkauskaite (2015) have demonstrated, it is considered as a teaching-guided experience in which pre-service teachers take on

more responsibility for leading learners' learning while also experiencing teaching. As a result, preservice teachers are provided an opportunity that inspires and helps them grasp their position as teachers with students in the actual classroom while contributing to their professional development.

Preservice teachers, on the other hand, may fail to control their classes since students understand that they are only temporary teachers in their school and cannot control them. This indicates that even if preservice teachers can apply management techniques, their classrooms will be ineffective unless they have the help of mentors. The failure to discipline learners as Pramesti 2021; Mannathoko 2013) articulated, may imply that preservice teachers lack classroom management abilities. On the other hand, it means that the theoretical part of classroom management that pre-service teachers received during training was insufficient because they were unable to apply it in the context of an actual classroom situation. However, some preservice teachers fail to demonstrate that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills for teaching. As a result, they struggle to carry out effective teaching and learning activities. Even when they are mentored by their school mentors, they struggle to cope with it and grasp what is required of them. This implies that preservice teachers should be prepared for the mentoring process by host school mentors. Finally, the adoption of information and skills, as well as inability to cope with the mentoring process, can have an impact on the correct conduct of teaching and learning activities, resulting in bad teaching and no results.

Lack of infrastructure

The results also indicate that infrastructure is a problem related with preservice teachers' professional development. It was discovered that the majority of the rural regions where these preservice teachers are placed have no or limited infrastructure, including no roads, making it difficult for their professors to visit schools in these places on a frequent basis as required. The findings also suggest that not all schools have the necessary resources that allow preservice teachers to completely practice in these sorts of schools, which agrees with Lebala, Baliyan, and Baliyan (2023) that schools with limited resources limit professional development of the preservice teachers. Furthermore, insufficient learning materials and overcrowded classrooms leave pre-service teachers with only one option: use convenient teaching approaches that require students to be primarily passive recipients of information during classes. As a result, it can be concluded that insufficient teaching and learning materials make it difficult for preservice teachers to educate effectively, contributing to professional incompetence. This is corroborated by (Aglazar et al., 2017), who state that the lack of infrastructure, including roads, makes it difficult for academics to regularly visit schools in these areas to assess and advise preservice teachers. They go on to say that not only are they unable to reach schools, but the education delivered there is of poor quality due to a lack of resources, facilities, and overcrowded classrooms. This is not favourable to preservice teachers' professional development.

School culture

Some problems that limit professional development may stem from the school culture. School culture is also linked to the professional development of preservice teachers, as there are processes and routines that preservice teachers must follow at hosting schools. During teaching practice, individuals are exposed to routines and processes that they are unfamiliar with, which is an issue because they are expected to follow them (Dube 2020). This has an impact on their enjoyment of teaching if they are not mentored through these routines in order to become a member of the schools in which they are placed. They also have their own expectations when they go for teaching practice, and if they are not guided through them, they may collide with their own, resulting in a negative experience. Subsequently, if these expectations do not align with classroom realities, it may provide a significant obstacle to teaching and learning. Since these teachers are unfamiliar with these routines and procedures they must be guided by mentors on how to use them. Sometimes school culture holidays and examinations periods affect preservice teachers' teaching experiences because there is no teaching on certain days. Having no classes shortens the number of days they must spend. Preservice instructors are unfamiliar with school routines and procedures because they

are still in university. Being unfamiliar with the school routines leads to negative attitudes toward their beliefs. Msangya et al (2016) have proven it that preservice teachers have difficulties when they are not provided with adequate direction and assistance since they rely on teachers as mentors. They may also dislike teaching as a vocation if their mentors do not help them cope with and handle TP problems.

Ability to reflect

The findings revealed that preservice teachers can reflect on their own experiences during TP when they are supported by their supervisors and mentors. Unlike when learning theory in class, during teaching practice, these teachers participate and reflect on the lesson presentation as well as all other activities that take place in their specific schools, allowing them to gain first-hand experience as teachers. This is supported by Dube 202; Lopes et al. 2023; and Abongdia, Adu, and Foncha (2015), who state that teaching practice allows student teachers to express their educational philosophies, theories, and understandings, as well as experiment and test their knowledge and skills in the profession of teaching and learning during TP. They are able to reflect on their own experiences. So much so that they can determine their own weaknesses and strengths. Being able to reflect on and improve their weaknesses enhances their ability to change learners' behaviours in the classroom. It also demonstrates professional growth because they understand where to make adjustments. Preservice teachers can also analyze their own teaching experiences through interactions with other teachers at the hosting school, mentors, and supervisors, as well as through self-reflection while adopting a variety of approaches and strategies to promote meaningful learning.

Reflecting on their teaching also confirms that preservice teachers can evaluate their own faults and strengths, resulting in professional progress when weaknesses are addressed, classroom instructions can be modified based on their reflections. This is when they begin to improve their teaching potential by identifying their limitations and strengths. It agrees with Komba and Kira (2013) that pre-service teachers must grow through this practical activity, which is monitored by mentors who will provide feedback on their practice strategies. According to the literature, it gives pre-service teachers the opportunity to express their educational philosophies, learning beliefs, and understandings, allowing them to explore and evaluate their knowledge and abilities concerning the teaching profession. So, this means putting acquired theory into practice and seeing if it works with real students. According to Dube (2020), professional teachers must find a strategy to assist preservice teachers in developing their professional knowledge during this period so that it has a beneficial impact on their professional progress.

Duration of teaching practice

The findings revealed that the teaching practice period is insufficient for preservice teachers to gain a comprehensive experience. The studies revealed that it takes around eight weeks, or roughly two months. There is not much that can provide preservice teachers enough experience with how teaching works. Preservice teachers practice what they learned in the classrooms during teaching practice to prepare for their teaching vocation, and this information adds value when they encounter real-world classroom situations. It agrees with Lebala, Baliyan, & Baliyan, (2024); Pramesti, 2021; Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020; Mungure, (2016) who consider the teaching practice period shorter because it is also interrupted by a number of activities done at the school level, such as preparation weeks for teaching and examination weeks shorten the actual time that pre-service teachers need to use the theoretical knowledge they have received in the practical classroom scenario, so consolidating their skills. Being short means that they are not prepared to become quality teachers with the necessary skills and competencies. In some situations, TP begins late in the year, when schools are busy revising and preparing for exams, and it becomes a challenge for them while they continue to attend lessons. Mannathoko (2013) also demonstrated that it is a period that differs from the local secondary school calendar in many activities, reducing the amount of days preservice teachers must spend on the field. In addition, the short duration of teaching practice, which can run up to six weeks in some situations, was disrupted by midterm vacations at the practicing schools, public holidays such as Easter, and weeks spent reporting to their TP stations, all of which reduced teaching practice duration. As short as it is, it is insufficient to further their teaching careers because they only work

in schools for a few months. When TP is not well organized, it may fail to create the desired competences for preservice teachers, resulting in lower teacher quality in the future.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings have shown that teaching practice is the integral component of teaching education that allows preservice teachers to initiate the actual teaching with real learners, applying acquired pedagogical skills and professional principles. This means it gives them the ability to make choices that help manage and control their classrooms as professionals. It also allows them to determine whether they are fit for the profession of their choice because they are allowed to reflect on their practices. When they are given enough support by their supervisors and mentors, they develop intrinsic motivation and feel like teachers who can reflect on their teaching as a way of showing professional growth. TP is a period of putting theory into practice and it should be a period that preservice teachers gain personal and professional experience, therefore it should be long to allow them full practice and gain classroom experience that would lead to achieving professional activities successfully. However, it becomes a threatening activity to preservice teachers if they are not assessed and given feedback and a chance to reflect on their own experiences which would help them embrace their value and passion for teaching which manifests from effective teaching practice. This affects the quality of teachers they will be in the future when they are not supported and guided throughout teaching practice. Quality TP is also affected by inadequate resources which do not allow preservice teachers to present fully their ability and competence to becoming a teacher. Stakeholders in teacher education need to be mindful of all aspects that can affect preservice teachers during TP so that preservice teachers become quality teachers equipped with pedagogical practices to meet the increasing demands of the teaching profession.

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Informed Consent

This study is a literature review, hence there is no informed consent authors had to obtain before collecting data for this study.

Conflict of interest

Authors have no conflict of interest in this study.

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