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PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

Sources of anxiety among pre-service teachers on field placement experience

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This study examined pre-service students' perceptions of their sources of anxiety during field experience. A sample of 85 undergraduate education students participated in the study (females = 52.9%). The students completed a survey on their perceptions of sources of anxiety during teaching practice. The results suggest students experience anxiety in four domains, namely preparation and execution of lesson plans, evaluation of lessons, classroom management, and relationship with host school staff. Evaluation of lessons ranked high as a source of anxiety for student teachers on field placement, followed by preparation, classroom control and relationship with the host school staff, respectively. Seeming inconsistencies between university and school-based supervisors in lesson plan formats compounded the pre-service teachers field placement-related anxieties. Appropriately targeted student support interventions can help allay the fears and anxiety of pre-service teachers during teaching practice.

Keywords: teaching practice, anxiety, pre-service students, professional support

Introduction

Practice in any profession is a reflexive endeavour in that one has to scrutinise and learn from one's own actions (Schön, 1983). Reflecting on own practice in the context of work-integrated learning can be both exhilarating and anxiety provoking. Such is the case with field experience or teaching practice training by pre-service teachers (Perry, 2004). In the context of teacher education, teaching practice is a required field-practice experience in which pre-service teachers apply their learned theoretical concepts and ideas in real classroom settings. Quick and Sieborger (2005) argue that teaching practice puts students into the 'real world' and allows them to put theory and philosophy into practice. Teaching practice might be anxiety-provoking from self-doubting one's own teaching skills, learning to plan, and managing learners, often with limited resources (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003; Marais & Meier, 2004). However, teaching practice can be an exciting experience for pre-service teachers as it presents a critical milestone in the developing teacher's competencies.

Teacher education qualifications in South Africa currently take two forms, namely a one-year Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Education (BEd) qualification. Teaching practice is work-integrated learning (WIL), or school-based learning, as it is called, is a form of WIL which is applicable to teacher education qualifications. Teaching practice is spread throughout the four years of the study period with supervision by university staff and school educators and managers. The specific aspects of field placement practice that may cause excitement and anxiety or apprehension are in need of study.

Caires, Almeida and Martins (2009) conducted research on the experiences and perceptions of the student teachers regarding their teaching practice in four dimensions: (i) learning and supervision; (ii) professional and institutional

socialisation; (iii) emotional and physical impact; and (iv) career aspects. Their findings suggest pre-service teachers have an increase in their sense of weariness and personal-professional 'vulnerability' from enacting the teacher role in a classroom setting. Closely linked to the anxiety of lesson delivery is self-perceived inadequate knowledge of subject matter content, pedagogy as well as communication skills (Ajeyalemi, 2002; Okebukola, 2007). Caires et al. (2009) further observe that pre-service teachers develop a growing knowledge and skilfulness in their field placement performance and interactions in the context of classroom teaching.

School-based resources available for supporting pre-service teachers in their professional growth and development include the sharing and collaborative production of materials and advice provided by more experienced teachers, and the ready availability of school-based supervisors. Supervision allows for reflection about and discussion around growth-promoting aspects of work-integrated learning. The sharing of experiences with the school-based supervisors and other peer pre-service teachers, presents with significant opportunities for professional socialisation. Ngidi and Sibaya (2003, p. 21) are of the view that 'effective supervision and guidance from subject teachers at their schools of placement can also play an important role in reducing anxiety among student teachers'. However, in some cases, this relationship is marred by tension and could be a source of stress as observed by Ngidi and Sibaya (2003).

Evaluation of students during teaching practice has been reported as one of the sources of anxiety during field placement (Hart, 1987; Capel, 1997; Ngidi and Sibaya, 2003). Students may be anxious about managing and maintaining discipline in the classroom and dealing decisively with the students who misbehave (Caires et al. 2009). Preece (1979) asserted that school learner

discipline problems often lead to high levels of anxiety during teaching practice. Writing the lesson plan may engender anxiety from not being able to anticipate how a lesson might progress in real teaching. Student teachers may experience difficulties in choosing and using teaching techniques and strategies that are suitable for the learners they teach (Mkhasibe, 2014), or in meshing theory taught in professional education courses with practice during their field experiences (Boger & Boger, 2000).

Host school staff relations is another factor that causes anxiety. The host teacher plays a crucial role in shaping student teachers' perceptions of the practice teaching period, in particular, and the teaching profession, in general.

Aim of the study

This study sought to identify the sources of anxiety among student teachers during teaching practice. It was guided by the following research question:

- What are the sources of anxiety among pre-service teachers on field placement or work-integrated learning experience ?

Method

Participants and setting

The participants were 85 student teachers enrolled in the Natural Sciences, Languages, and Technology programmes at a university of technology in South Africa (females = 52.9%). Table 1 shows a sample profile of the participants.

Instrument

Data on sources of teaching practice-related anxiety were collected utilising a student anxiety scale (SAS). The SAS utilised for this study comprised 26 items to assess self-reported work-integrated learning anxiety across four categories: classroom management, preparation and execution of lessons, evaluation of students, and relationships of students with the host school. Items were scored on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 'never' (0) to 'very much' (4). A high mean score, therefore, indicates a high level of anxiety for that particular item. The reliability of scores from the scale was 0.87.

Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Ethics Committee, Central University of Technology. The student teachers consented to the study verbally. It was stressed to the students that their participation in the study was voluntary.

Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse and present the data. Descriptive statistics included calculation of frequencies, means and standard deviations, while inferential statistics included computation of *t*-tests.

Results and discussion

Responses of participants on sources of anxiety are divided into four domains. The means for individual items within each category, the corresponding standard deviations, as

Table 1: Demographics of respondents (*N* = 85)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	40	47.1%
Female	45	52.9
<i>Programme</i>		
Natural Sciences	43	50.6
Languages	29	34.1
Technology	13	15.4
<i>Age</i>		
Less than 20	2	2.4%
20–24	62	73.0%
25 and above	19	22.4%

well as the overall mean and standard deviation for each category are shown in Table 2. Overall the pre-service teachers reported higher levels of anxiety from evaluation experiences of work-integrated learning compared to other domains of practice.

Evaluation of students

Evaluation of students by lecturers while teaching was identified as a source of stress for students in this study. The average mean score for this category was 2.52, SD = 0.21. The finding of higher levels of anxiety from evaluation by supervisors is similar to the findings by Capel (1997), Murray-Harvey et al. (2000), and Samina Malik (2010). In this respect, evaluation by lecturers was more anxiety provoking than by school-based personnel.

Preparation and execution of lesson plans

Preparation and execution of lesson plans was a source of anxiety among the pre-service teachers. The average mean score for the items in this category was 2.06 (SD = 0.12), as seen in Table 2. The student teachers were more anxious about pedagogy issues such as lesson preparation and delivery, as well as self-evaluation. However, the pre-service teachers were less concerned about selecting the lesson content. Students need grounding in both content and pedagogical content knowledge (Caires et al 2009).

Classroom control/management

Classroom management was also identified as a source of stress among student teachers during teaching practice. The overall mean score for this category was 2.04 (SD = 0.17). The respondents were more anxious about incidents of misbehaviour in class (2.30, SD = 1.26) compared to any other aspect of their classroom management. This finding is consistent with Ngidi and Sibaya (2003), who reported a high level of anxiety among student teachers from class-management issues.

Relationship with school teachers

Relationships with school teachers was also perceived as a source of stress among the students. The mean score in this category was 1.73 (SD = 0.166). This suggests the pre-service teachers have healthy professional relationships with school personnel. As noted by Ngidi and Sibaya (2003), effective guidance from subject teachers at the host schools plays an important role in reducing anxiety among

Table 2: Students' sources of anxiety ($N = 85$)

No	<i>Classroom management</i>	Mean	Rank	SD
	I am anxious about:			
1	how to give each student the attention s/he needs without neglecting others	2.04	3	1.36
2	class control	1.96	4	1.49
3	possible problems in the class with individual disruptive learner	2.20	2	1.17
4	incidents of misbehaviour in class	2.30	1	1.26
5	controlling the noise level in the class	1.90	5	1.53
6	how to handle defiance from a learner	1.86	6	1.30
	<i>Average mean</i>	<i>2.04</i>		<i>0.17</i>
	<i>Evaluation of students</i>			
	I am anxious about:			
1	being observed by my school subject teacher	2.04	8	1.46
2	being observed by university staff/lecturer	2.10	7	1.35
3	what my lecturer will expect	2.54	2	1.39
4	how the university staff/lecturer will react to one or more unsuccessful lessons if they occur	2.56	1	1.23
5	whether the principal will be happy with my work	2.17	5.5	1.42
6	how the school subject teacher will react to one or more unsuccessful lessons if they occur	1.92	9	1.35
7	assessment by the university staff/lecturer	2.36	3	1.33
8	what lesson the university staff would come in to see	2.17	5.5	1.40
9	whether or not my performance will be satisfactory from the point of view of the school subject teacher	2.28	4	1.43
	<i>Average mean</i>	<i>2.52</i>		<i>0.21</i>
	<i>Preparation and execution of lesson plans</i>			
	I am anxious about:			
1	setting work at the right level for the learners	2.05	5.5	1.38
2	whether or not my plans will be adequate	2.20	1	1.27
3	completing lesson plans in the required forms	2.06	4	1.43
4	whether or not I will cover the material adequately	2.14	3	1.39
5	selecting suitable lesson content	1.81	8	1.41
6	maintaining a good enough approach	2.0	7	1.33
7	maintaining a good enough standard of preparation	2.05	5.5	1.42
8	getting all paper work done in time	2.18	2	1.49
	<i>Average mean</i>	<i>2.06</i>		<i>0.12</i>
	<i>Host school staff</i>			
	I am anxious about:			
1	how helpful members of staff of the school will be	1.85	1	1.40
2	getting on with the school staff	1.54	3	1.42
3	cooperating with school staff	1.8	2	1.57
	<i>Average mean</i>	<i>1.73</i>		<i>0.166</i>

student teachers. Caires et al (2009) considered acceptance and recognition of pre-service teachers by school personnel as boosting their student teachers' confidence and self-efficacy in their competencies.

Table 3 presents the summary descriptive statistics for the full scale as well as the different categories. In addition to the mean scores and standard deviations for the different categories (which have already been discussed), it also shows the maximum and minimum values, the mean differences as well as p values.

These findings are in contrast to that of Danner (2014), who found staff cooperation as the first among the sources of anxiety followed by evaluation anxiety, with the least being class control. These findings stress the importance of maintaining cordial student-teacher co-operation.

Collateral findings

Male pre-service teachers reported to be more anxious during work-integrated learning experience compared

to their female peers ($t = 2.7$ ($df = 50$); $p = 0.0093$), and particularly with regard to classroom-management competencies ($t = 2.66$ ($df = 50$); $p = 0.0142$); and preparation and execution of lesson plans ($t = 4.02$ ($df = 50$); $p = 0.0012$). These findings contradict those by Caires et al. (2009), who reported higher levels of tiredness, stress and weariness from work-integrated learning found among female pre-service teachers. Danner (2014) found no significant difference in male and female student-teachers' perceptions of the sources of anxiety of teaching practice, although female student-teachers' perceptions were higher in school/staff co-operation and evaluation than the male student-teachers.

Since evaluation of students by lecturers is perceived to be the major source of stress, mitigating this source of anxiety would require confidence and trust-building interventions between university supervisors and students on work-integrated learning. For instance, students may be less anxious if they knew exactly what was expected of them during evaluation of lessons, and were provided

Table 3: Summary of the descriptive and inferential statistics for the full scale and categories ($N = 85$)

Anxiety scale	Mean	SD	Min value	Max Value	Range	<i>t</i> -test <i>p</i> value
Full scale	2.08	0.23	1.54	2.56	1.02	0.0093
Classroom control	2.04	0.17	1.90	2.30	0.4	0.0142
Evaluation of students	2.52	0.21	1.92	2.56	0.64	0.2046
Preparation and execution of lessons	2.06	0.12	1.81	2.20	0.39	0.0012
Host school staff	1.73	0.17	1.54	1.85	0.31	0.2896

* $p < 0.05$

with prompt and constructive feedback on their lessons to support their ongoing field-based learning. Allowing for peer feedback can also be effective for reducing anxiety from work-integrated learning evaluations (Bhargava, 2009).

Limitations of the study

The study is a case study of the teaching-practice exercise of the undergraduate education students of one university. Thus, findings may not be generalisable to other university programmes and work-integrated learning settings. There is a need to replicate and extend the findings of this study with a larger sample of pre-service teachers and teaching-discipline settings.

Conclusion

Students on teaching work-integrated learning were perceived to be more anxious from evaluation by supervisors, classroom management or control, and preparation and execution of lesson plans than from their professional relationships with host-school staff. Support interventions for work-integrated learning for pre-service teachers should prioritise domains of practice perceived to be most anxiety provoking by the students.

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