



Turning Pre-service School Experience Challenges into Strengths

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ABSTRACT Pre-service teachers at undergraduate levels have various learning programmes built into curriculum of teachers' education programme. They learn to understand school environment in and out of classrooms with accompanying logistics which include discipline, classroom management, and learner management outside the classroom. This paper seeks to find out student teachers' initiatives to turn challenges which they experienced during school experience program into strengths using qualitative research approach. The cohort consisted of seventy-third-year Bachelor of Education students from one university in South Africa. The paper was retrospective search as data were gathered from portfolios submitted by individual students on their return from host schools. Data was analysed using content analysis in order to discover prominent and significant themes. Results revealed that more challenges were encountered than strengths. The paper therefore suggests that university should empower student teachers with strategies to deal with overcrowded classes and also effective use of language of instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers at undergraduate levels have various learning programmes built into the curriculum of teachers' education programmes. Different terminologies are used to denote pre-service teachers' learning programmes such as Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programmes, School Experience Program (SEP), Teaching Practice (TP), Work Integrated Training (WIT), and Host School Deployment (HSD) just to mention a few among others. Despite the different terminologies, such WIL programmes afford student-teachers the opportunities to go beyond the teaching and learning theories which they learned at the institution, but also to gain a wider overview. According to the Department of Education (2011), school-based WIL including supervised and assessed teaching practice constitutes an essential part of the B. Ed programme.

WIL programme involves mentoring of the apprentices with the intentions of preparing them to be functional after training. Tung Wah College Career Services (2017: 3) defines WIL programme as "work-based learning experiences that take place in an organisational context relevant to a student's future profession, or the development of generic skills that will be valuable to that profession." The schools are organisa-

tional context which are relevant for student-teachers to do their training during school experience programme. Rosenkranz (2012) mentions that although WIL programme for teachers take place in classroom and school surroundings, it can also involve learning in community locations.

The purpose for including WIL programmes in the training of student-teachers is to provide an opportunity for students to integrate classroom learning with real-world workplace experience. The student-teachers gain and learn from hands-on experience and make the general knowledge and skills acquired at work which are then transferable to their future career (Tung Wah College Services 2017). Definitely, this programme is there to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Abeysekera (2015) in Australia, articulates that WIL element is included in several universities' curriculum. However, other universities are still considering the inclusion of WIL into their programs. This programme enables students to bring work-related knowledge from the university into the classroom and facilitate proficiency among students. Abeysekera (2015) confirms also that enabling students with instructional methods build students' competence through acquiring knowledge, applying knowledge, and gaining insights into the competence being facilitated to them. It is within this process that most student-teachers experience some

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challenges which vary from one group students to the other.

EY (2014) and Martin and Tobias (2014) submitted that for the 21st century teacher training programmes, teacher training tertiary institutions, and lectures need to improve to meet the standard of knowledge required for the 21st century learners. They further suggest examination and re-development of curricular by the higher education systems. Curricular must be planned to support career development by applying and actualizing knowledge and skills in real-life settings, such as adopting work-integrated learning programmes. Factors such as digital technology, mobility of students and academics, and building deeper relationships with industry to differentiate teaching programs may influence the change in higher education. Hence, Employment and Social Development Canada (2017) suggests that WIL combines classroom learning and hands-on learning in a workplace.

School Experience Programme

The term School Experience Program (SEP) represents the variety of experiences to which teacher trainees are exposed when they work in real classroom and schools (Rawat 2016). Among the experiences is teacher preparation which intends mainly developing teaching skills among student-teachers. Schools in South Africa are involved in other programmes besides the main school business of learning and teaching, such as, school nutrition programme. These programmes involve a lot of paper work because there are finances involved. Therefore, student-teachers are introduced to these programmes at the period of study. At the period of study, student-teachers get the opportunity for hands-on experience in teaching before actually getting into the teaching profession (Rawat 2016). Thus, observations on the shift from the concept of teaching practice to the concept of school experience becomes relevant (Kiggundu and Nayimuli 2009).

The pre-service school experience programme is intended to give student-teachers opportunity to implement theory attained from the university/college in the classroom. The practice will therefore expose them to diversity in the South African classrooms where they will have to practice their knowledge of inclusive teaching and learning. This kind of exposure empow-

er student-teachers with skills on how to deal with the real classroom situation (Nomlomo and Desai 2014). Thus students should have opportunities for practical, fundamental and situational learning during their pre-service training. From the host schools, they receive mentoring from host teachers which they in turn practise in the classroom situation.

The Relationship between Mentor and Mentee

Chan (2015), defines a mentor as the one who gives guidance to the mentee by way of shaping his or her professional growth and learning. In schools, a mentor is a professional teacher in the host school and the mentee is the student teacher who is shortly for a period of specified time at the school for school experience. Student teachers are assigned to work with mentors in the host schools, and the type of relationships between the two, mentor and mentee varies.

According to Kent et al. (2012), mentoring must be an integral part in the process of teacher training programme for student-teachers to experience success in their journey to professionalism. This improves the student-teachers' professional skills and familiarize them with the socio-cultural structure (Felman-Nemser and Buchman 2013). However, some mentors may fail to accomplish the mission of guiding the mentees due to different causes and reasons. These may include either mentor teachers' lack of familiarity with mentoring, student-teachers' non-compliance with their mentor teachers' guidance, or attitude from the mentors' side. Leshlem (2012) mentions that diversity of beliefs and concerns brought by mentors and mentees into the mentoring process may lead to complicated relationships and misunderstandings at times.

In his research findings, one of the participants maintained that accepting feedback as constructive criticism needs transparency between the mentor and mentee. Therefore, knowing each other was understood to be noteworthy. Though, there may also be conflict of perceptions between mentor and mentee, whereby mentees expect mentoring which will be accommodative to their disposition and level of learning but receive the contrary (Leshlem 2012). Maphosa and Ndamba (2012) support the aforementioned researchers that some mentors have been accused of failing to assist student teach-

ers with discipline. Instead, they absent themselves from school leaving the full load to student teachers.

Correspondingly, Robinson (2015) concurs with Leshlem (2012) and Maphosa and Ndamba (2012) in that pre-service students may receive inadequate mentoring and support or see other teachers acting as less than positive role models. They (pre-service teachers) then suffer the consequences because their expectations are not fulfilled. In some schools they gain what they expected but in others, it falls short of their expectations. The reality is that not all schools can offer the same quality of teaching and learning, nor the same quality of mentoring (Robinson 2015).

On the other side, Chan (2015) maintains that mentor is supposed to serve as a positive role model, whereas mentee have to accept guidance and feedback from his or her mentor. Concurring with Leshlem's (2012) statement on complicated relationships, Chan stated that the expected feedback is the constructive one, although it is not always the case with some mentors in different host schools. Leshlem (2012) views mentoring process as part of professional development. Likewise, Sweeney (2017) in the study conducted in Italy highlights that pre-service teachers spend several weeks observing the routines and methodologies of their mentor teachers. Then as they become more familiar and more comfortable, the mentor leader begins to assign teaching responsibilities to them. It sometimes becomes unfortunate for some mentees for they are not given chance to observe, instead some teachers leave the student teacher with the class.

Positive support from mentor teachers develops pre-service teachers' self-efficacy (Moulding et al. 2014). Nevertheless, mentor teachers' non-fulfilment of their responsibilities negatively affects practicum experiences of pre-service teachers. Chaplin (2008) notes that when student-teachers feel unsupported they become demotivated to teach and they also experience high levels of stress due to disruptive learners and high workloads during practicum. These views are affirmed by Mayaba (2015) who noted that mentor teachers in some schools do not seem to share student views during teaching practice.

Student Teachers' Expectations in Host School

For school experience programme to operate as expected, a good co-operation between the university or college of education and the schools to host the student-teachers is the best

practice to observe (Ranjan 2013). Before the start of the school experience programme, the school experience programme co-ordinator approaches the host schools' managers; the objective being to establish positive educational and supportive relations. In addition to that, there are expectations from the side of the host school and what the host school should expect from the side of the university or college. Teachers in host schools are assigned to provide professional guidance (mentoring) to student teachers during school experience programme.

Failing to perform the above mentioned procedure may result in confusion on the side of the host schools. In cases where host schools are not knowledgeable on what to do during the mentoring process, the university or college of education's mission intended objective for the programme is not accomplished. Besides, student-teachers fail to comply with their hosts' guidance so those are the things that may hinder the purpose of the programme and for this reason, there should be effective communication and co-operation to assist in producing teachers who are academically qualified, professionally skilled, and attitudinally and ethically committed.

The conditions under which the school operates also determines the quality of training experience. These conditions include contribution of the positive school culture, positive learning environment, and concentration on teaching and learning (Field and Philpott 2006). Sag (2014) concurs with Field and Philpott (2006) in that suitability of host schools, variety and quality of the personal traits of teachers together with guidance provided for student teachers during this process plays a major role in moulding the trainees for their future job.

It should therefore be a habit for all teacher training institutions to develop and socialise their teacher trainees through school experience programme. However, such development and socialization is often highly fraught and various tensions can emerge in some host schools regardless of the educational location (Bloomfield 2010; Johnston 2010). Hence, challenges and discomforts are encountered by the student-teachers.

Most of the studies were done on students' challenges encountered during school experience programme. Findings from various authors were reported as: Less motivating lesson presentations, inability to consider Bloom's taxon-

omy in questioning, failure to address diversity in the classroom, language of instruction and, lack of resources (Watzke 2007; Sariçoban 2010; Meredith 2016).

Elaborating on language problem, Sariçoban (2010) commends that some student teachers learnt in rural areas where their teachers were trans-linguaging instead of code-switching. That alone had negative effect in their lesson presentation. Watzke (2007) maintains that, foreign language teachers as well as others should encompass language, content area, and pedagogy courses.

A study conducted in India confirms that although most teachers become anxious before the school experience program commences, but once started teaching, they find school experience program very interesting and rewarding because they are able to apply what they have studied (Meredith 2016). In fact, school experience program encompasses a range of experiences, to which it creates a mixture of anxiety, excitement, and frightening experiences for student teachers.

Language of Learning and Teaching

Parker and Karaagac (2015) states that the use of mother tongue cannot be sidestepped in classrooms especially if the teacher speaks the same language as the learners. Though, it should not be exaggerated to deny learners the opportunity to learn the official language of instruction. Parker and Karaagac (2015) opines that, using mother tongue to teach also builds rapport and makes the topic clearer because the teacher explains further during the lesson presentation. However, the adoption of English as the official language of learning and teaching (LOLT) presents a variety of challenges for teachers and learners (Mamutse 2015). The point is this, some student-teachers are not fluent in English and they practise in English medium school, or an English speaking student-teacher practise in school in which English is the first additional language (FAL) and learners are used to their home language (HL).

Ngwaru and Opoku-Amankwa (2010) also, notes that English as the language of instruction is a challenge even to teachers since they are not eloquent in using the language. Based on this statement, these authors concede that pre-service students face a double-barrelled chal-

lenge of being second language users of English with limited eloquence. Nevertheless, there is a lot of debate around which language learners should select as their LOLT, be it home language (HL) or the first additional language (FAL). Learning in Home language encourages parents to assist their children with homework, and also to communicate with teachers in a home language (Kioko 2015; Stein 2017). At the same time, English (FAL) is the most used language at tertiary level and in most countries in the world.

Kioko (2015) articulates that in countries like Burundi, English is formally accepted to be an official national language. The Sub-Saharan countries are persistent to introduce English as the language of instruction in basic education (Kioko 2015). Nevertheless, developing countries use other languages either than English as language of learning and teaching, says Kioko. Professor Kioko though, in her research emphasizes the prominence of using learners' home language in the classroom, and justifies herself by identifying the smooth transition between home and school whereby the learners' home language promotes cooperation and learning process, for better educational outcome.

A study conducted by Ahmad (2009) in Malaysia showed that sixty eight percent of the respondents indicated that they should support teachers' code-switching not only in their communication in the classroom but also in other English classrooms. Slightly above half (50.3%) indicated that future code-switching would help them understand teachers' instructions, help learners to understand meaning of words and ultimately, helps the learners to improve their English.

Besides in the process of learning, language is the most important factor by which the new information is shared in the classroom. Desai (2012) agrees that it is through language that the teacher presents new information to the learners and children demonstrate their understanding of the new information. Therefore, language is the most crucial subject because all activities performed in school depends on language to succeed.

Overcrowded Classrooms

In Marais's (2016) study, overcrowding was mentioned as one of the key issues that stu-

dent-teachers face during their school experience programme. Moreover, an implication of this is that tuition suffers due to the effects of teaching large size class. Also, Meador (2018) identifies this issue of overcrowded classes as one of the biggest issues in schools which affect teachers' instruction progress. Seemingly, the population is increasing and the no-fee school programme introduced by the Department of Education may be the reasons why numbers are escalating (Meador 2018). The challenges instigated by overcrowded classroom do not only daunt pre-service teachers only but successful teachers too are also affected (Meador 2018).

Regardless of the maximum recommended learner-educator ratio of 40:1 for primary schools and 35:1 for secondary schools, many schools in South Africa have far more learners in one classroom. Marais (2016) notes that one Eastern Cape school, in South Africa, has 1300 learners but only 24 teachers, while another school has 165 learners in Grade three and 140 learners in Grade two respectively. Opoku-Asare et al. (2014) state that large class sizes severely affect newly appointed teachers and student-teachers. It creates enormous challenges for pre-service teachers specifically as they are still undergoing in-service training.

On top of Opoku-Asare et al.'s (2014) view, authors such as Mustafa et al. (2014) see large size classes as an obstruction to classroom management in general, and classroom discipline specifically. Usually, most time for tuition is consumed and or wasted when the teacher controls the class than when he or she is teaching (Imtiaz 2014).

Although Meador (2018) views teaching in an overcrowded classroom as demanding, Marais (2016: 1) understands overcrowded classrooms as "part of South African education which will remain a part for the immediate future and perhaps even for the long term future." The author conceded that teacher training institutions should at least offer appropriate teacher training programmes that will enable student-teachers to deal with the critical problems of teaching in overcrowded classrooms.

Classroom Management and Disciplinary Problems

Classroom management and discipline consistently rank near the top of the list of the most

difficult problems first year teacher experience (Borden 2013). Erdoğan et al. (2010) posit that for teaching and learning process to operate successfully, classroom management and organisation is essential.

Classroom misbehaviours observed in Turkish classrooms included disrupting noise by learners, moving up and down, and some learners disturbing others during teaching time (Trnkl and Galton 2001). The same Turkish classroom misbehaviours observed by Trnkl and Galton (2001) were observed in England by the same researchers. Noise is observed as the most dominant disruptive behaviour in Turkey and England based on the findings in a similar research carried out which reveals that fifty one comma four percent and forty nine comma five percent are engaged in this disruptive behaviour in Turkey and England respectively.

In UK learners displayed the same unbecoming characters as in Turkey and England, such as, moving up and down interrupting teacher and learners, and disturbing friends during instruction time. For inappropriate movement, twenty seven comma one percent of learners were identified in Turkey whereas twenty-seven percent was identified in UK. The percentage identified for disturbing learners was far less by nine comma three percent in Turkish classrooms and seven comma nine percent in UK classrooms. These results indicate that noise is dominating in Turkish and England classrooms. Therefore, pre-service teachers have to pull up their socks to fight this inappropriate behaviour (Trnkl and Galton 2001).

Current research conducted by Bennet (2017) indicates that students in classes of teachers classified as effective can be expected to gain fifty-two percentile points in their achievement over a year's time. Teachers need to be flexible and develop a series of plans to deal with anticipated classroom disruptions, (for example, school nutrition program), which rob students of precious in-class time (Bennett 2017). To add, Bennett says that good classroom management goes hand in hand with student discipline. Educators from the novice to the experienced need to consistently practice good classroom management to reduce student behavioural problems.

Then, Bennet (2017) suggests some points on preparing for transitions and potential disruptions, which are as follows: Diffuse conflicts

(student-to-student or student-to-teacher) in the classroom with a series of steps: by re-tasking, by engaging in dialogue, by temporarily relocating a student to a designated “cooling off” area or, if a situation warrants, by speaking to a student as privately as possible. He says established rules must cover behaviours that specifically interfere with the learning and engagement of the learners.

This paper therefore seeks to find out student teachers’ initiatives to turn challenges which they experienced during school experience program into strengths.

Objective of the Paper

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the way that the pre-service teachers transformed the challenges they encountered during school experience into strengths.

Statement of the Problem

The pre-service school experience programme is intended to give student teachers opportunity to implement theory attained from the university/ college in the classroom. It incorporates a variety of experiences to student teachers and so they react differently to the situation. To mention a few, it creates a mixture of anxiety, excitement, and frightening experiences for teacher trainees. Rawat (2016) confirms that most teachers become anxious before the school experience program commences.

Most of the studies were done on students’ challenges encountered during school experience programme. Findings from various authors were reported as: Less motivating lesson presentations, inability to consider Bloom’s taxonomy in questioning, failure to address diversity in the classroom, lack of classroom management skills, language of instruction, and lack of resources (Watzke 2007; Sariçoban 2010; Meredith 2016).

Once they start teaching, most of them find school experience program very interesting and rewarding because they are able to apply what they have studied at the university or college (Rawat 2016).

Therefore, this paper seeks to find out how did the pre-service teachers turned the challenges they encountered during school experience program into strengths.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks used for this paper are Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-constructivist learning theory and Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory. For Vygotsky (1978) and Du Plessis et al. (2011) state that socio-constructivist learning theory construes knowledge construction as the process that takes place in social contexts. In lieu of school experience programme, context referred to the school and within the school are teachers, learners and parent component. Pre-service students learn by observing their mentors whilst in turn pre-service teachers teach learners in implement what they have observed and learnt from the university.

It is commended that learning is more influenced if teachers, student-teachers and the community build relationships. This relationship is key to learning as learning is influenced if there is collaboration between teachers, learners and parents (Du Plessis et al. 2011). These are the crucial stakeholders in the learning at classroom level whereby student teachers and the community are the central issues that influence learning. Fitzmaurice (2010) and Kemmis (2011) also associate teaching practise to a sociocultural and mediated process which encompasses collaboration of peers, learners, teachers/lectures and mentors.

Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory as a learning theory suggests that people learn through observation. People therefore model the behaviour they have observed, hence student-teachers observe their mentors to learn some skills and tactics on how to deal with all classroom situations during their practise teaching. This theory focuses on the interactions among personal factors, behaviours, and the environment (Bandura 2001).

Pre-service teachers in the host schools interact with different people with different behaviours and personalities from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Hence, there will be challenges which they have to face and they must strive to learn to transform such challenges so that they learn from their attempts to transform the challenges into possibilities of empowerment and strengths before they graduate as professional teachers.

Research Question

How did the pre-service teachers transform the challenges they encountered during school experience into strengths?

Sub-Research Questions

1. How did the Language of teaching and learning (LOLT), and code-switching affect pre-service teachers' classroom practice?
2. What impact did lack of classroom management had in pre-service teachers' practice?
3. What impact did lack of time management had in pre-service teachers' practice?
4. What effects did self-control have in pre-service teachers' practice?
5. How did pre-service teachers build relations with learners and teachers?

METHODOLOGY

The research underpinning this paper sought to examine the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice, with the broad aim of the study to establish how these challenges were transformed into strengths.

Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing document analysis.

Research Design

Maree (2013: 70) commends that "A research design is a plan or strategy which moves from understanding philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of respondents, to choosing data-gathering technique to be used." An exploratory research design to understand the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice was then preferred by the researchers.

Research Instrument

Document analysis was used to gather data. The researchers collected data from fifteen files of the year three students who were from the school experience program in term one. Pre-service teachers were from different host schools around the university so the experience differed absolutely. The procedure was that; they wrote report on what they experienced when they were doing teaching practice in various schools. The report was compiled in a file with other documents, and submitted to their respective lecturers.

Sample and Sampling

The researchers used random sampling to select fifteen teaching practice portfolios from a total of seventy which were representative of male and female students. The reason for selecting third year students as participants in this research was to use these experiences as a reflective process that will assist them to transform the challenges experienced into strengths, thus, strengthening their overall teaching experiences and making them more mature in their fourth and final year of training as professional teachers.

Data Collection

Data collection was done by means of written reflective reports on their experiences set out in the compulsory teaching practice portfolios that all students had to complete during their teaching practice periods. Pre-service teachers were hosted in different schools, with diverse contexts in terms of quintiles, infrastructure, and language of teaching and learning.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The data was thus analysed through the use of content analysis. The findings suggested an exposure of the student teachers to a learning environment. In content data analysis similar data are gathered under themes; these themes are presented and interpreted in a format that readers can easily understand (Yildirim and Simsek 2013).

Data was analysed manually, organised into various codes which facilitated the identification of categories or ideas which belonged together. The categories were compared and analysed using domain analysis leading to the identification of patterns or themes. The researchers identified the major themes after content analysis of data in which student teachers' challenges turned to be strengths. The challenges which were identified were:

Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) and Code-switching, Class Control, Self-control, Time Management, as well as Good Relations with Learners and Teachers.

Theme 1: Language of Teaching and Learning (LOLT), and Code-switching

From the information that was read from fifteen pre-service teachers' files, almost all had

some challenges with LOLT. The challenges were from both teachers and learners. This is what some of the students wrote in their reports,

“I had a challenge with code-switching because the school in which I was teaching was a Xhosa based school and I did not know pure IsiXhosa” (ST 5).

ST 8, ST11, ST13, and ST15 experienced the same challenge as ST5.

The same thing applied with some other student teachers who happened to be located at the school in which English was articulated inside and outside the classroom. So the problem was with the teachers. But with this group they eventually turned their problem into strength,

“I challenged myself that I need to go to the model c school/ multiracial school whereby I’m forced to speak English without code-switching. I was afraid to make mistakes or pronounce words in a wrong way but as the time went by, I became confident with myself” ST 3.

Some few student teachers such as ST3, ST5, and ST6 had a challenge to express themselves as they were from rural areas where English is mostly taught in home language. This is most common even with experienced professional teachers which in return affects learners’ language proficiency.

Theme 2: Classroom Management

For most of the student teachers, class management was a very serious challenge. Failure to manage the class, leads to the failure of the core business (teaching and learning) of the school. Factors which contributed to lack of class management by the student teachers, to mention some were: age (student teachers were more or less of the same age as their learners in some schools), voice (soft or very loud), lack of confidence, lack of class control skills, lack of appropriate teaching and learning strategies and/or teaching and learning material, lack of discipline from the learners and overcrowded classrooms.

Although there were such disruptions, some student teachers found some ways to manage the situation.

“I realized that when instilling manners in learners, one does not need to be hard on them, rather to just lay down rules from the beginning and be firm about it” (ST8). ST5, ST13, and ST11 also noted this. On contrary, ST6 and

ST15 did not manage due to overcrowding in their classes.

Voice

In classrooms with large numbers, soft voice can cause disruption in class because learners cannot hear what the teacher says. At the same time shouting does not make sense to learners. Some female student teachers had a challenge of soft voices and age because learners could not pay attention.

“Before developing my voice, learners would be busy making noise while I am standing in front of them teaching lesson because they could not hear my voice until I lifted up my voice. I explained the dos and don’ts and built up relationship with my learners” (ST15).

ST4, ST7, ST9, ST13 and, ST14 were faced with the same problem which had solution.

“I tried to tell them to keep quiet but I overheard them saying that I am young. I can’t tell them; their siblings are of my age.” (ST13). Same as ST3, ST9 and, ST13. The learners then moved around the class and rearranged the seating arrangement.

Out of 15 student teachers, seven of them managed to maintain discipline by introducing reading corner, asking learners to stand in front of other learners and other strategies. One learner said,

“I learned to raise a hand to keep them quiet because when I shouted, they were louder than me so there was worst chaos in my class” (ST4).

Lack of Confidence

“I would be nervous in such a way that I would be out of context when I teach the learners. It was hard to ask learners some difficult questions because I was thinking they would ask me to explain. Since I developed confidence, I can now even communicate with staff without fear” (ST6). Concurred with ST7, ST10, ST11, ST13, ST15.

All the factors mentioned above affected class discipline but some learners found ways to deal with them efficaciously, like making class rules, assigning roles to group members, practising some control strategies, like teacher raising hand and when one learner sees him/her tells others to keep quiet and all that. So students experienced the deterioration of moral values in schools and a neglect of discipline.

Theme 3: Self-control

Some of the student teachers were irritated by the learner's misbehaviour and loose temper. They revealed short temper when the learners made noise in class, and moving up and down when the teacher was presenting the lesson.

"I could not control my temper. If the learners make noise, I would be so angry and feel like hitting them. But after I have learned some new techniques on giving them punishment called "scooter", I was relieved" (ST11). ST9, ST6, ST10, ST12 and, ST1 also mentioned same. Some student teachers mentioned that they had anger problem especially when a learner is stubborn but tried and moderated their anger.

Theme 4: Time Management

Most students could not manage time during presentation. In some schools the time table was not CAPS compliant. Some were unable to plan in time or they over planned at times. However, they practised to plan on time and make lesson plan which will fit on the allocated time.

On the side of the school, school nutrition program was also time consuming. Late coming by learners and, at times, teachers was negatively affecting curriculum time. This was not seriously attended to by class teachers.

Theme 5: Good Relations with Learners and Teachers

Host teachers can be good mentors and warm welcoming to student teachers, but some of them show negative attitude towards them. Among student teachers' reflections on host teachers, there was this comment,

"Whenever my teacher had to complete a task, like filling in marks or making reports, she would call me and sit with me and explain exactly why she is doing it. She would let me physically do whatever she was doing to make sure I learnt from her" (ST7). ST6, ST1, ST10, ST8, ST9 and ST15 acknowledged good mentoring.

Alternative to the comment above,

"As a student teacher, being in someone's space is difficult. There were some days where by I could see that my host teacher needs her own space, you don't feel comfortable even in asking her a questions. At the end, I knew what

I'm there for and I could ask her even if I see that." (ST2) with ST11, ST3 and, ST4.

In some instances, they were introduced to host teachers only and not to the whole staff members. So they heard to introduce themselves to other teachers and learners.

"Every time I went to the admin's office, staffroom, or any other classes, some teachers would be surprised to see me and they would always ask, Are you one of us Miss? Oh! You are a student teacher? What is your name?" This made student teachers to feel isolated at some schools.

RESULTS

The main results were that more challenges were encountered than strengths by student teachers during school experience program. Nevertheless, some of them were willing to learn because by the end of the program, some of the challenges turned to strengths. The challenges which the student teachers encountered were the common challenges which the professional teachers were faced with in their teaching fraternity.

The most important challenge was lack of classroom management. Classrooms were so congested and that resulted in most pre-service teachers losing confidence in their teaching because they could not practise discipline to the learners. For some student teachers, age and voice contributed to the unbecoming behaviour of the learners. The classrooms were overcrowded due to lack of accommodation for learners and that also resulted in the lack of discipline towards the learners. They become unruly when they are congested in one class.

On the side of the student teachers, some of them were still unable to present their lessons for a specific time allocated for the lesson. They had long boring lesson presentations which overlapped to the next period. In other words, the pre-service teachers affected could not manage time. They identified reasons behind as over planning from their side and mentioned disruptions like school nutrition program and late coming by learners, from the side of the school. In some schools, the time table did not comply with the time allocation in Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

Of course, language could not be left behind when discussing teaching and learning issues. Language of learning and teaching was also a

challenge to pre-service teachers. As they indicated, they struggled to present their lessons in English as they were not English home language students. Even with code switching, it was not easy because among the learners there were also Afrikaans home language learners. Mentor teachers behaved differently towards the pre-service teachers. Some mentoring process was done positively and with others, it was not good at all.

DISCUSSION

Classroom Management

Classroom management and discipline consistently ranked near the top of the list of the most difficult problems first year teacher experience (Borden 2013). Erdoğan et al. (2010) posit that for teaching and learning process to operate successfully, classroom management and organisation is essential. Lesson presentations were affected by the large number of learners under one roof due to lack of accommodation. Marais (2016: 1) understands overcrowded classrooms as “part of South African education which will remain a part for the immediate future and perhaps even for the long term future.” The challenges instigated by overcrowded classroom does not only daunt pre-service teachers only but successful teachers too are also affected (Meador 2018).

Various authors reported challenges facing pre-service teachers, among others, less motivating lesson presentations, inability to consider Bloom’s taxonomy in questioning, failure to address diversity in the classroom, language of instruction and, lack of resources (Sarıçoban 2010). Others were still struggling to assess learners. They were even having problems in dealing with learners who have learning barriers. Based on the facts mentioned above, lack of discipline on the side of the learners was experienced by the student teachers during their practice.

Host Teachers

In some cases, the host teachers were comfortable with traditional teaching (teacher-centered-approach) whereas the students were trained on learner-centred-approaches which are OBE compliant. This became a challenge because some host teachers did not take student

teachers seriously. However, Kent et al. (2012) commend mentoring as an integral part in the process of teacher training programme for student teachers to experience success in their journey to professionalism. This improves the student teachers’ professional skills and familiarize them with the socio-cultural structure (Felman-Nemser and Buchman 2013). Though, there may also be conflict of perceptions between mentor and mentee, whereby mentees expect mentoring which will be accommodative to their disposition and level of learning but receive the contrary (Leshlem 2012). Maphosa and Ndamba (2012) support the aforementioned researchers that some mentors have been accused of failing to assist student teachers with discipline.

CONCLUSION

School experience program resembles a system sort of as it involves people and materials to operate successfully. For an example, lecturers train student teachers and negotiate with school managers to accommodate student teachers in their schools. At schools, student teachers work with teachers as their mentors and learners to practise what they have learnt from the university. They need enough learning and teaching material during their lesson presentation. Therefore, without the aforementioned resources, student teachers face challenges during the school experience program, which they need to deal with in one way or another.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that:

- ◆ The Department of Basic Education (DBE) should consider the conditions which the learners and their teachers experience in their schools.
- ◆ The host schools should welcome student teachers as their colleagues and provide them with all the necessary guidance they deserve.
- ◆ The schools should take note of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT).
- ◆ The university or college should empower their students with strategies to deal with all the possible factors they will experience during their teaching practise, for example: overcrowded classes, work load and diversity in their classrooms.

- ♦ The university or college should check the condition of host schools.

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