

Exploring Perceptions of Preservice Teachers' Preparation and Challenges in Lesotho

Dr Mamosa Thaanyane

Email address: thaanyanem@yahoo.com

Article Detail:	Abstract
<p><i>Keywords</i>— preparation, mentors, challenges, teaching practice.</p>	<p>This qualitative study was conducted to explore perceptions of preservice teachers and challenges in Lesotho. Six preservice teachers were purposively selected to participate in the study. A total of six teachers were purposively selected to participate in the study from six schools. Semi-structured interviews were used to probe for responses from these teachers individually about the quality of their initial training and the challenges that they face in real teaching situation. The findings of the study revealed a range of perceptions and challenges that result from outside themselves and from inside such as skills and abilities that allow them to accomplish tasks assigned. From the outside, these include: university structure to take courses from different faculties; short period of teaching practice, lack of support from mentors and school administrators, dragging and repeating courses as well as subject matter and pedagogical knowledge as skills and abilities they possess. When these challenges are not considered, preservice teachers will keep on leaving their chosen careers.</p>

1. Introduction

A number of studies have been conducted around the world on the challenges that the novice teachers experience during their first years of teaching career (Yonca & Özkan (2015). Novice teachers are faced with challenges in aspect of self, teaching profession, students, school community and as well as students' parents (Yee & Hassan 2019). These are the teachers employed to to serve the growing education demands that include replacement of teachers expected to retire. They usually have great expectations in their first years of teaching but practically get frustrated as reality sets itself in (Woodhead 2021). They are described as teachers with less than one year of service or recently qualified teachers with little or no teaching experience (Heyns 2000). They are also described as the new graduates from the formal teacher preparation programs with no past experiences and knowledge of solving a wide range of teaching problems (Yonca & Özkan (2015). Like any other beginning teacher, novice teachers bring with them different backgrounds and knowledge gained from their initial training institutions before

transiting to their careers. These novice teachers experience pitfalls and dilemmas which result from their teacher preparation, training and development (Li, Zhu & Lo 2019). This is supported by Steyn (2004) that novice teachers frequently complain that colleges of education do not prepare them enough for actual teaching. In return, this impede them from being effective teachers especially in their first years of teaching. In reality, problems also arise from the fact that school settings are different. Some would be difficult to achieve. All these problems of poor teacher preparation can be solved by provision of induction programs or an on-going assistance can be offered in their respective schools.

These teachers enter classrooms with high expectations for themselves and for their students. Unfortunately, they are expected to assume all the same responsibilities like the more experienced teachers and often assigned the most difficult and challenging students which they cannot manage. They are faced with many problems in terms of the emotional or physical aspects required to adapt to the new situation. These cause them to leave their career

as early as their first years of teaching (I). Hence, this study explores EE teachers' perceptions of their preparation and challenges that arise in their first years of teaching.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study intent to answer the following questions in relation to the initial training they received:

- a) How do the EE novice teachers perceive their teacher preparation during their first years of teaching?
- b) What are the challenges that novice teachers are faced with during this period?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adapted the qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with individual teachers. Since the intention was to generalise the results across all novice teachers' perceptions, representatives from three regions of Lesotho were used as sample (van Wyk 2015). These novice teachers were purposively selected to provide rich information for in-depth investigation about their preparation and challenges that face in their first years of teaching (Creswell 2014). The face to face interviews with novice teachers were audio-taped where novice teachers were comfortable with to express their perceptions about their initial training and confidentiality was considered for teachers and schools they come from. Data was analysed using themes that emerged from it following steps necessary for this approach (thematic approach) (Creswell & Plano 2018).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teacher efficacy

This theory is developed by Gibson and Dembo (1984) from self-efficacy of Bandura. Teacher-efficacy is looking at a teacher's belief in his or her ability to impact change in the educational setting. Gibson and Dembo believed a teacher-efficacy scale measures two distinguishable factors. They believe that teacher efficacy's ability to bring about change is limited by the factors that are outside his or her control. The second factor represents whether or not a teacher's sense of whether or he or she personally has the skills and ability necessary to enhance student's learning (Gibson & Dembo 1984).

TEACHER PREPARATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LESOTHO

In Lesotho, teachers are trained from two institutions: Lesotho College of Education (LCE) and Faculty of Education (FED) from the National

University of Lesotho (NUL). The training of teachers or teacher preparation model of FED is a four-year academic programme, of which first semester of the fourth year is put aside and dedicated for teaching practice of preservice teachers to increase their teaching experience in the real classroom settings instead of doing observations from their peers. During this period, preservice teachers are expected to teach their two major subjects in the junior and senior levels of secondary. These practising teachers are left in the hands of the cooperative teachers to guide and help them in this period. However, their respective lecturers make planned visits to schools where their preservice teachers are placed as the means of assistance and support that would enable them to cope with the problems that they may encounter. Finally, these novice teachers are expected to write and submit a report of their experiences during this time of their preparation. On the side of the college, preservice teachers go for their teaching practice on their second semester of the second year and do their teaching practice reflections during their third and final year. Likewise, their lecturers visit them during this period to offer assistance and support. Opportunities to reflect on the teaching practices strengthen the experiences of a novice teacher and result in retaining an ability to transfer knowledge gained (Sutton 2011).

2. Literature Review

The first years of teaching are defined by Yonca & Özkan (2015) as a sobering experience for most novice teachers, that result in experiencing a decreased strength of belief in their own efficacy and learning potential of their students. These experiences consist of problems and challenges. Yee & Hassan (2019) explain the term problems and challenges, as the situation which include: cannot cope, impossible to achieve, block from proceeding, cannot be resolved, and also hard to resolve. This implies that novice teachers for one reason or the other, cannot cope or achieve their expectations in their first years of teaching. These are the problems that impede them to be effective in their teaching. Even if novice teachers can be eager to implement what they learned during their training, they frequently encounter difficulties when they experience the practical realities of schools because they need assistance from others (Izadinia 2016). For effective teaching and learning to take place, teachers have to have a strong teacher training background and adequate teaching experience. These are

challenges that the Entrepreneurship Education teachers perceive as consequences of the poor preparation they received.

Though Mupa and Chinookeka (2015) confirmed that freshly trained teachers are sometimes more effective than the more experienced teachers because they are still fresh with ideas from training, on the other hand, preservice teachers experience difficulties during their first years of teaching. Poorly prepared teachers experience challenges when they get into the real teaching situation. Contradictorily, Mupa and Chinookeka (2015) confirm that newly trained teachers have a lot to offer since they may have new knowledge, skills and experience which some experienced teachers with obsolete skills. This is because newly trained teachers are often inspired to change and to take orders from the authority. This would suffice if novice teachers are given adequate training and support during their first years of teaching.

Meanwhile, novice teachers may also experience periods that are problematic such as insecurity and self doubt on important decisions that need their attention during their early years in teaching. Consequently, the experienced teachers normally set themselves apart from these novice teachers believing that they lack rich knowledge base, deeper understanding of students' needs and learning (Yonca & Özkan 2015). In some instances as classrooms are isolated from one another, novice teachers have limited opportunities to observe the behaviour of veteran teachers. Hence, they lose confidence, feel inadequate and subsequently become uncertain of their feelings towards the school and teaching as a profession. If this feeling is not appropriately addressed, novice teachers are likely to experience more problems in their careers because they might feel that they have made a mistake choosing the teaching profession as their career when they are in schools and are now facing unexpected situation.

It is also argued by Dube (2008) that apart from from isolation, these teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of responsibility at work as they assume full responsibility for disciplining problem students, motivating students who lack enthusiasm and assessing students' work. In addition, novice teachers are often required to teach subjects for which they have not been prepared to teach. Consequently, they find that they are emotionally exhausted and think that it is most unfair that they leave school every day feeling angry and depressed (Dube 2008). Reducing

the workload of these novice teachers to cope with their duties can be a supportive mechanism of supporting novice teachers to their new profession. They can also use their spare time for more planning and preparation of their lessons or for analysing their students' work which would result in better teaching.

Literature showed that mentoring is a factor that matters in teacher preparation. It further revealed that pre-service teachers need to be given mentors in their content areas in their first years of teaching so that they can learn the nuances of their specific content area to help them become successful in their profession (Izadinia 2016). Weber, Waxman, Brown & Kelly (2016) argue that maintaining a discipline-specific mentoring increases high or moderate levels of self-efficacy in those years of teaching. It is also recommended that school district mentorship that emphasize collaborative teaching and pair novice and veteran teachers based on their content area need to be in place (Weber et al 2016). They also recommend that policymakers adopt focus legislation on mentoring and education for new and practicing teachers with a belief that it will ensure children are receiving the highest quality education possible.

In Goodin, Bartos, Caukin & Dillard (2014) study, it is revealed that novice teachers are faced with the realities of the practice, due to their college training which did not adequately prepare them. These novice teachers are reported to suffer from frustration and a feeling of insufficiency as a result of poor preparation. This lack of professional self-efficacy often evidences itself in a dearth of instructional methods, a limited use of instructional resources and a decreased professional commitment compared to their peers with higher self-efficacy (Goodin et al 2014). Teacher's beliefs, teacher classroom practices and teacher self-efficacy are the threefold conceptualization of teacher self-efficacy as they all include motivating uninterested learners, helping them to understand the value of learning (Berger, Girardet, Vaudroz, & Crahay 2018). This study tries to find the challenges that novice teachers perceive as the result of their preparation.

Dvira & Schatz-Oppenheime (2020) argue that another aspect of transition of the novice teachers is personal-emotional. It is argued to involve the transitioning from being a student to becoming a teacher, during which the novice teacher has to redesign his or her professional identity and self-efficacy. This stage involves emotional overload of positive and negative feelings of a teacher. In addition to the two aspects that relate to novice

teachers' transition is ecological-systemic-organisational which involves adjusting to the organisation's norms, regulations and expectations. Technological knowledge is the last aspect of the professional development path for novice teachers. Technological knowledge is needed in the 21st century to integrate technology skills into teachers training in colleges and universities. Teacher training programs should provide all the necessary training so that their graduates can go out and cope with pedagogical challenges.

Literature also shows that school procedure, policies, and organization may be challenging for novice teachers when they start teaching. The challenges include low or no cooperation between novice teachers and experienced colleagues who are found unfriendly and upsetting most of the novices (Sutton 2011). The novice teachers' confidence in class is also much dependent on the students' attitude and behavior. If students could behave well in the class, then teachers can work comfortably at the same time increase the efficiency of the teaching and learning process (Yee & Hassan (2019). Consequently, poor teacher preparation and lack of in-service training workshops are argued by Abdelhak and Ladi (2019) to impede the learners' preparation in their future. Adequate training of the mind is argued by (Mupa and Chinookeka 2015) to be the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical that need to be considered as the tools for the novice teachers to contribute to the progress of the learners. Sutton (2011) found three main difficulty with novice that result from their preparation that make the ineffective is a lack of content-area relevance. He argues that novice teachers' training should be relevant to their broader teaching objectives which would increase value of their training. Results of these study further revealed that preservice teachers were forced to take courses that are not relevant to the particular content of their areas.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings revealed that novice teachers perceived their preparation as inadequate due to internal and external factors. As Gibson and Dembo (1984) suggested, internal factors are the skills and abilities that teachers possess to accomplish tasks they are assigned to. Subject matter wise, these teachers felt they do not have enough content to teach because they were grouped and taught together with students who were not prepared for teaching. Possessing appropriate skills and abilities like Mupa and

Chinookeka (2015) from literature areas the tools for the novice teachers to contribute to the progress of the learners. Consequently, this made their training weaker for trainers did not care about their comprehension of topics taught of which, to them it is their mandate because their are to transfer it to students. For these reasons, they felt they are not able to fully the novice teachers to experience real school life situation, but the limited time period for practical training did not make the novice teacher familiar with the real teaching situations. This concur with Goodin et al (2014) that when preservice teachers are faced with the realities of the practice, due to their college training it implies which inadequacy of training.

They further put that since they were mingled with a different group, they were tricked by courses that they had to drag behind every year if they fail to pass them or even made to repeat courses irrelevant to the classroom situation. Dragging and repeating of courses were due to decisions regarding timetables and tests and other activities that are taken without them because they are always a small group and always clashing with big groups they belong to. If the structure of the university does not fully allow teacher trainers train their own teachers from both subject matter and pedagogical sides, novice teachers will always lack content knowledge relevant for classroom situation. This concurs with Maimela (2015) that teachers encounter many challenges that include, among others, inadequate training which leads to confusion and attempts to cover too much content within a short space of time. In such manner, teachers prove their incompetence and inadequacy of the training that they have received which impact negatively on the side of a learner on the other hand. Like it is indicated earlier, it is vital that FED fully prepares their own teachers so that they develop deep knowledge of their content areas too.

It is not enough to measure teacher's capability in the classroom by subject knowledge and acquired skills; rather, a teacher is argued to be capable if he is able to use his subject knowledge and applies his or her skills effectively and purposefully. The external factors that are perceived to prove the poor and inadequacy of teacher training include short period of teaching practice. The preservice teachers presented that the period allocated to teaching practice is very short. Teaching is also core to teacher preparation as it gives a training teacher a sense of real teaching situation before actual teaching. Denying them the

opportunity to fully practise to implement the appropriate teaching methods and strategies during teaching practice weakness the preparation. Furthermore, they are not allowed to teach some grades, especially upper grades. This conforms with Sutton (2011) that when practising teachers are denied opportunity to practice, they are likely not to see relevance of the content area they learned hence will not master it. Novice teachers have to spend most of their time observing expert teachers during their teaching practice, hence it has to be lengthened to give them real classroom experience. Furthermore, school visits by their lecturers are irregular and sometimes none are done until teaching practice ends. When field visits occur early or towards the end of TP, it gives minimal opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect and strengthen the preparation as well as giving them time for mastery.

In the case where it is shortened, several visits must follow to compliment it when they are already in the field. When these teachers are not allowed to practice teaching well, it can paint a decisive picture for them that they are able to teach while they have not been observed, evaluated and rectified where they may have gone wrong and eluted where they are perfect. This agrees with Yonca & Özkan (2015) idea that when teacher preparation is strengthened it will assist beginning teachers cope and comply with all the challenges that may be faced with in their early years of teaching. For this reason, they do not have the classroom experience and their training is perceived inadequate. Sometimes they were placed for teaching practice in the most remote schools which were hard-to-reach with insufficient resources and support from their colleagues and university. Therefore, they did not do their teaching practice smoothly as some of the content may need resources that were not even available in such areas. The structure of the university will not suffice for teachers' training when teachers' trainers are not full training their own teachers because they are know what they demand from teachers as well as fulfilling goals of the education system.

The other external factor presented relates to support and mentoring that are lacking from verterans. When relationships with mentors and preservice teachers are not positive, expectations will not be met as confidence is also lowered on the side of novice teacher. They will not even make an impact in the learners' learning. Since teaching is a very complex, unpredictable and difficult work, school administrators and experienced teachers need to

provide adequate assistance to these teachers in order to cope and comply with all challenges as a way of strengthening their preparation. This might concur with Sutton (2011) that preservice teachers should be introduced to policies and procedures of their respective schools so that they form positive attitudes about their colleagues and learners because they are still at the survival stage. When they feel this way, they are likely not to adjust to the norms and policies of their respective schools when experienced teachers isolate themselves from them overloading them with many new responsibilities. They need to succeed in this stage of survival. They are sometimes isolated from these experienced and this is the time that weakness their preparation and need support and mentoring mostly. It is also time of insecurities and confusion as indicated from literature and when isolated, they feel confused and likely to leave their chosen careers.

4. CONCLUSION

Since teaching is a very complex, unpredictable and difficult work, it is presented with problems that are out of teachers' control coming from outside and inner (personal). Teachers perceive their preservice training as inadequate when they got to the real teaching situation. Consequently, the inadequacy is caused by the university structure that force preservice teachers to be trained by two faculties which do not relate in the sense that whatevr content is delivered from bith, serve different purposes. Hence need to stay separated. It is also found that teaching practise was very short with problems isolation by the mentors and expert teachers which make teachers not to feel the real teaching as it is meant to. For this reason, they do not have the classroom experience and their training is perceived inadequate. Sometimes they were placed for teaching practice in the most remote schools which were hard-to-reach with insufficient resources and support from their colleagues and university. Furthermore, teachers felt isolated becasue they were overloaded and could not adapt to the policies and norms of the schools they are assigned to. Hence felt they need to leave their careers because of insecurities and confusion at work, during these first years of teaching.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abdelhak, E & Ladi T. 2019. A study on the factors affecting teaching and learning. Iwgnñã1-18.
- [2] Berger, JL, Graretc & Vaudroz. 2018. *Teaching experience, teachers' beliefs and self reported*

classroom management practices: A coherent network. SAGE. London.

- [3] Creswell, CW. 2014. Research design. 3rd edition. SAGE. London.
- [4] Creswell, CW & Clark, PV. 2018. Designing and conducting mixed methods research. 3rd edition. SAGE. London.
- [5] Dube, SW. 2008. The induction of novice teachers in community Junoir secondary Schools in Gaborone, Botswana. Masters dissertation, University of South Africa.
- [6] Dvir, N & Schatz-Oppenheimer, O. 2020. Novice teachers in a changing reality. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4): 639-656.
- [7] Gibson, S.; Dembo, M. (1984). Teacher Efficacy: A Construct Validation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 76. 569-582.
- [8] Izadinia, M. 2012. teachers educators as role models: aqualitative examination of student teachers's and teacher educators' views towards their roles. *Qualitative Report* 17(47): 1-15.
- [9] Li, C, Zhu, X & Lo, LNK. 2019. Teacher education and teaching in China, 25(7): 753-756.
- [10] Maimela, HS. 2016. Impact of curriculum change on primary experience teachers in Seshego Circuit, Limpopo Province. Masters dissertation, University of South Africa.
- [11] Mupa, P & Chinooneka, TI. 2015. Factors contributing to ineffective teaching and learning of primary schools: Why were schools in decadence? *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(9): 125-133.
- [12] Steyn, MG. 2010. Implementing continuing profession teacher developement policy and practice. *Acta Academia* 12(4): 211- 233.
- [13] Sutton, SR. 2011. Pre-service technology training experiences of novice teachers. *Journal of Digital learning in Teacher Education*, 28(1): 39-47.
- [14] Van Wyk, MM. 2015. Educational Research an African approach.
- [15] Weber, ND, Waxman, HC, Brown, DB & Kelly, LJ. 2016. Classroom instruction differences between first-year teaching interns and experienced classroom teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 43(1): 91-106.
- [16] Yee, TY & Hassan, ZB. 2019. Problems and Challenges Met by Novice Teachers in Johor. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, 8(32): 689-694.
- [17] Yildirim, K & Ates, S. 2012. Turkish Pre-Service Teachers` Perceived Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Knowledge about Using Expository Text as an Instructional Tool in Their Future Classroom Settings. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37 (8): 12-31.
- [18] Yonca, F & Ozkan, Y. 2015. Exploring experienced and novice teachers' perceptions about professional development activities. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1 99: 57 – 64.