

Research Paper

Attitudes and perceptions of students about work integrated learning (WIL) in the B. Ed Programme Abstract

There are principles, processes and procedures that inform the design and delivery of the programme not only in teacher education but also in other programmes in Higher Education. In teacher education it has been discovered that student teachers exhibit certain behaviour patterns during work integrated learning, which they were not taught by their teacher educators, but because they are ingrained in their hearts and mind, they find themselves using them in conducting lessons in teacher education. In mentoring students, the researcher realised a pattern of behaviour which is an “alarm bell” (Perkins, 1992) for teacher educators. It was discovered that students exhibit attitudes and perceptions during the evaluation and monitoring of their lessons that are different from what they were taught. This has negative impact on the effectiveness of the lessons they conduct. Furthermore, the discovery exhibits tension between “museum possessions of knowledge” as opposed to “workshop possession of knowledge”. Using a qualitative research design on sixteen student teachers, the paper explores the attitudes and perceptions that students possess in the design and delivery of their lessons against what policy requires them to do. The phenomenon is an indication of the “misfit” between what policy says and what is happening practically. Students find it challenging to break the barriers that existed between “Theory” and “Practice” and between head, heart and hand.

It is believed that work integrated learning is an important resource for students learning. Whilst this fact may be true, it needs constant monitoring and coaching for it to achieve the desired outcome. The new approach to teaching and learning is a shift significant enough to be called a paradigm shift. It requires a lot from student teachers. Students do not cherish what they were taught, instead they revert to the old ways, which they saw their teachers do in schools and rely on their experiences in terms of how they were taught. This is an indication of “restricted professionalism” as opposed to “extended professionalism”, the latter which we cherish in teaching and learning. For instance, students do not consider the importance of communicating outcomes to their learners. They think it is not important to unpack and discuss the journey that they embark on. This is an indication that the role of mediator of teaching and learning (Norms and Standards, 2000) is strongly sacrificed yet learners take the blame for failure and lack of understanding. The investigator intends to share the experiences she gathered over the years in monitoring and evaluating students’ lessons during work integrated learning (WIL).

Key words: , *reflective competence, foundational competence, practical competence, misfit between theory and practice, mentoring, teaching and learning, teacher educator, student teacher, work integrated learning.*

1. Introduction and Background

South Africa has experienced varied changes since 1994, when the country transitioned from the apartheid system to democracy. The Education sector has not been exempted from these changes. One of the visible changes took place in teacher education, in which the training of teachers was moved from training colleges to Universities, in the Higher Education Sector. This change also meant the review of the quality of educators, since then educators are now expected to perform several roles and competences in their professional practice. This has been a significant shift from the erstwhile trajectory, in which the main focus was on knowledge. Through the Norms and Standards document (2000) the policy of the roles and competences of educators was spelt out, and these encompassed the foundational, practical and reflexive competences.

Currently, the policy framework for teacher education is enshrined in the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ), 2015. The Centre for Higher Education (CHE), which is a monitoring body of the Higher Education sector only spells out the outcomes but does not provide direction on how those outcomes can be achieved. Accordingly, teacher education lecturers are left with the challenge of unpacking the pre-stated outcomes and making them meaningful in the design and delivery of the curriculum. In the schooling system on the other hand, teachers are required to adopt and teach using the new approach to teaching and learning. Furthermore, the new curriculum framework expects them to be familiar with the new configuration of subjects which are called learning areas and no longer subjects. This has implications in the way teachers are trained.

The policies mentioned above together created employment contract between educators and the Minister of Education, who is the legal employer of educators in public institutions. Whilst policies provide legal framework, they also make provision for the professional development of educators.

The legislative mandate relevant to this study is the Norms *and Standards for Educators* formerly produced by the Committee on Teacher Education Policy (COTEP), and still currently

applicable in (MRTEQ). This policy document says that the Education Programme should develop three competences in educators, namely, foundational competences, practical competences and reflexive competence (Norms and Standards for Educators, 2000). The three competences need to be integrated into a whole and assist the teacher to perform his/her seven roles effectively.

According to *Norms and Standards (2000)* foundational competences provide the educator with the knowledge base and understanding, which is needed in professional practice. Teachers in South Africa need foundational competence of the policies which support them in their daily practice. Practical competences, on the other hand are related to practice rather than theory. Educators who have good practical competence apply the knowledge they acquired to make sound judgement in their professional practice. This competence means that the educators acquire new skills and method for doing things.

In the *Norms and Standards (2000)*, it is argued that reflexive competence is the ability of the educator to bring together the two kinds of competences. In it, the educator is able to reflect on his/her practice (practical competence) in light of the knowledge (foundational competence) that he/she possesses. In other words, the educator compares his/her theoretical knowledge with practical experience and uses a comparison to become more critical of his/her practice on the theoretical knowledge that he encounters. One of the characteristics of identifying a reflexive professional, (Hoyle, 2001) is that he/she possesses the ability to change his/her foundational as well as practical competences in response to the changing circumstances and also provide good reasons for his/her choice. This competence requires the ability to stand back and look at the situation as an outsider would do rather than clinging to what is known and what one is familiar with. It is argued that this is a rare kind of competence because it requires courage on the part of the educator and it requires the person who is reflecting the willingness to accept mistakes and take risks.

It is also important to note that the prime legal framework is the National Constitution, from which all other policies are embedded. The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108) aimed at a broad transformation of the education sector including, in more particular emphasis, empowering educators in their professional practice. Other legal frameworks have also

influenced the transformation and development of the education policy in a number of ways. These include: the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP); Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), and the recent; National Development Plan (NDP), to mention a few. These have largely positioned the education policy within the developmental framework, in which quality education is seen as an indispensable arsenal towards achieving certain developmental outcomes.

These various policy strands, although they may seem disjointed and disparate, they have contributed to the promotion of the principles of redress, nation building, and democracy. They have also significantly informed the new approach to teaching and learning, from traditional teaching pedagogies, which were teacher-centred to the learner-centric. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), formerly known as the Curriculum 2005, or C2005, had various forms including the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), and the newly instituted Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

Today these policies have been affected and developed further by the Higher Education Act (No.101 of 1997); National Development Plan (NDP); recommendations of the planning Commission; the White paper on Post-school Education and Training in South Africa, and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 2014-2019 Enrolment Plan. The transformation is still work in progress.

However, with all these frameworks and guidelines in place, as a teacher educator involved in the training of teachers, I discovered that students possess certain perceptions and beliefs which they inherited from the twelve years of schooling. According to Richardson (2003, p30), student teachers bring their beliefs and attitudes to the education programme. Consequently, in spite of the number of attempts to make students understand that there is a new approach to teaching and learning, students still exhibit behaviour patterns foreign to the processes and prescriptions of the education programme. This was observed by an investigator during the work integrated learning (WIL) in schools.

The WIL is an integral part of teacher education. Students spend nine months of their four year training in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programme in schools (DUT Handbook, 2015). Beliefs, alluded to earlier, that students possess is a form of cognition that has received attention in teacher education research and practice (Richardson, 2003,p2). Whilst we, as teacher educators , teach our students, we need to realise that they also possess some ingrained beliefs about what teaching and learning is all about. They hold values, theories, and images, which suggest beliefs in disguise. It is defined as all that a person knows and is believed to be true (Kagan, 1990 p423). Teacher beliefs is commonly known as cognition and is defined as pre-service teachers reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching students, content and awareness of problem-solving strategies endemic in the classroom learning.

In the training of students in the B. Ed programme, there are certain principles and procedures that students are expected to follow in the design and delivery of their lessons and lesson plans. As a person who monitors and evaluates students' lessons, I discovered that students exhibit behaviours that are foreign from what they were taught. I observed this behaviour for a number of years and I decided to conduct another research (Njozela, 2012:p249) to find out if students still exhibit the same behavioural patterns which are foreign from the way they were taught to design and conduct lessons. The objective of the research was to find out if student teachers adhere to the design features of the curriculum by communicating outcomes and objectives to their learners, and also ascertain if they still dominate classrooms as other research revealed (Harley, Betram, & Mattson, 1999).

2. Methodology

On the basis of what I observed on students' performance over a number of years, I decided to formalise my observation by conducting qualitative research on why students behave the way they do in spite of considerable amount of training on teaching and learning approaches. In my research, I adopted an interpretivist paradigm to ascertain the extent to which students adhere to the design features of the lessons by following processes and procedures of lesson presentation. An observation schedule was used to record teacher domination and learner domination in the classroom. The research was conducted in two phases. Phase one involved observing student

teachers delivering their lessons. Phase two was the reflection of the lesson with the student teacher and the discussion.

The purpose of this research was to ascertain the extent to which students adhere to the design features of the new approach to teaching and learning. The investigator observed eight third year students of the B. Ed programme and eight fourth year student, which were allocated to her during the work integrated learning (WIL) period which lasts four weeks and six months respectively. The research was conducted over a period of one year. Data was collected during the WIL period when students were in schools.

3. Results and Discussion

Results revealed that student teachers dominated teaching and learning. This was observed in fifteen out of sixteen students' participants. They talked for about seventy to eighty percent of the time and learners talked for about twenty to twenty five percent of the time. The design features of the curriculum do not require students to dominate the classroom. It requires them to talk for about twenty to twenty five percent of the time and leave learners to actively engage in doing activities in class. On the contrary, teachers exhibit traditional ways of teaching and learning, which was seen in observable features such as classroom arrangement.

The second observation which was noted by the researcher was that students failed to communicate outcomes to their learners. The design features of the curriculum requires educators to communicate learning outcomes to their learners among other things and watch learners as they perform task in order to reach the pre-stated outcomes. They need to stand back and observe learners as they work on activities and tasks that are given to them. Educators are supposed to appraise and motivate learners as they engage in their work towards reaching a pre-stated outcome. Learners should consult the teacher only when they need him/her. The teacher is supposed to be a reference person to his/her learners. H/she acts as facilitator. Learners are supposed to take responsibility for their own learning. Educators are supposed to intervene only when learners are not moving towards reaching the pre-stated outcomes or if they need help and clarity from the teacher on specific issues.

This research finding still agrees with research on teacher professionalism (Harley, Betram & Mattson, 1999). It revealed that educators do not function according to what policy requires, instead they use their experiences in teaching and learning. This is characteristic of ‘restricted professionalism’ as opposed to “extended professionalism” (Hoyle, 1975).

Teacher educators are expected to perform a dual role in their teaching and learning in order to display best practice to their students. While they must focus on the epistemological issues of teaching and learning, they need at the same time be mindful of the fact that students indirectly pick up certain pedagogical cues without them being consciously expressed.

The main policies regulating the education sector (the Constitution of Republic of South Africa, MRTEQ, Norms and Standards) and their auxiliary policies (RDP, GEAR and NDP) require the development of reflexive practitioners and not restrictive professionals.

When the investigator reflected on the lesson that was presented by the student, she made use of real world analogies and settings to assist the student understand the importance of communicating learning outcomes to learners. The first analogy that the investigator used was the driving of a car to demonstrate the importance of communicating outcomes/ objectives to learners. The investigator asked the student how he/she would feel if someone were to put him/her in a car and not communicate where she was taking him/her as a passenger. The students’ response varied from confused, angry, upset and so on. It was at that point that the researcher informed the student that that is how learners feel if the objectives/outcomes of the lessons are not communicated to them. The investigator also highlighted that this practice fits into the now-defunct traditional teacher-centred pedagogy, in which the teacher is the only one who possesses knowledge, and hence has privileged access to the next step in the development of the lesson in teaching and learning (Betrams, 2003).

Student teachers were also informed of the implications of this approach to the progress of the learners. Through poor teaching and learning approaches, it was argued that, it is not only learners who fail school but also teachers also fail learners at school by their actions in the classroom (Kagan, 1990). Consequently, student teachers were encouraged to promote active engagement of their learners in all classroom activities. This analogy and cautions were meant to

make student teachers change their attitudes and beliefs about knowledge they acquired on teaching and learning.

The second analogy the investigator used was from soccer. The investigator compared the expected expertise of an educator with that of national and international soccer stars. These soccer professional succeed at these levels as competent players because they possess the knowledge, skills and values required in soccer. Similarly in classroom, the teacher has to watch learners as they perform the task until they attain certain level of competence as pre-stated in the outcomes. Just like is soccer, it is through consistent and persistent practise that both the educator and the learner will attain these levels of knowledge, skills, and values befitting the teaching and learning practice.

The foundational competence alluded to earlier is related to knowledge possession, practical competence is related to skills and values, while attitudes are related to reflexive competence. These three competences should be exhibited through learner performance in class. It is in performance, that the teacher can ascertain understanding on the side of learners. It is argued that since attitudes and beliefs accompany and influence strategies and actions, it is important to make student teachers mindful of such behaviours (Richardson, 2003, p3). Since this intervention requires deeper learning processes, personal growth and flexibility, the investigator discovered that student-centeredness can be the best platform where student teachers can be inculcated with this new approach to teaching and learning. Research (Motsching-Pitrik, R. & Holzinger, 2002, p3) reveals that students who are accompanied in their learning by a supportive and understanding facilitator not only achieve superior academic results but also develop and grow in their profession.

Students also argued that they did engage with learners when they asked them to respond to questions. The counter argument, is that asking questions does not lead to real understanding. Students need to be actively engaged, if they respond to questions only, it only tests what learners know but when they were to be placed into a situation where they are expected to actively engage with the material, they will not be able to exhibit effectively what they learnt. The investigator also took liberty in alerting student teachers on different types of knowledge,

such as inert, missing knowledge and ritual knowledge, with their advantages and disadvantages (Perkins, 1992).

Improvement was noted when learners were given feedback but it was minimal. It is this finding which makes the investigator contend that WIL requires constant monitoring, coaching and reflection for it to be successful, effective and reach the desired outcome.

4. Conclusion

The behaviour patterns of both student teachers and educators in schools are consistent (Harley, Betram & Mattson, 1999). Students are negatively disposed to the requirements of the new curriculum framework because they do not follow the design features of curriculum. The ingrained mind-set that teachers possess about what teaching and learning is all about, is also prevalent in the training of teachers. It is therefore important to make teachers mindful of such attitudes and perceptions in order to prevent them from perpetuating the status quo. This is an alarm bell for teacher educators (Perkins, 1992). The proposed curriculum changes and revised values system should embrace a political ideology underpinning the changes, which provide the impetus for its development (Hargreaves, 1994). The training of teachers needs to embrace the innovations and professionalise their practice as well.

Research (Strauss, 1993, p23 & Richardson, 2003p 32) revealed that attitudes and perceptions that student teachers possessed have very little resonance with the learning and development that they were taught in education. It means that educators are exhibiting restricted professionalism. This is something that needs to be noted by policy makers if they do not incorporate educators in the design process of the curriculum. Certain things were inferred from the students' reflection of their lessons and certain things were explicitly observed and stated by the students. For instance, students were asked if they did communicate outcomes to their learners as the design and delivery of the curriculum framework requires them to do. Students' response was that they did

not. The investigator asked them if they did not know that they were supposed to communicate outcomes to their students. Students' responses were that they knew that they were expected to communicate outcomes. This indicates that the experiences of twelve year schooling about what teaching and learning is all about, has a bearing on students' performance in their classrooms. Communicating outcomes to learners is one of the distinguishable features of the new approach to teaching and learning.

It needs to be noted that the investigator wanted to judge students disposition to the new curriculum framework by looking at the design features of the curriculum and ascertain the extend to the student adherence to it. It can be concluded that there is a "misfit" between what theory says and what happen in reality. This was observed when the supervisor and the student teacher reflected on their lessons. In the discussion that the supervisor had with student, it came out that students' think that learning is about the delivery of the content only by them to their leaners (Njozela, 2012:263). This is an indication that student teachers have, what has been referred to as, "museum possession of knowledge" as opposed to "workshop possession of knowledge" (Lubisi, Parker &Wedekind,1998) .

This act by the students teachers (Richardson, 2003:5) revealed them as restricted professionals as opposed to extended professionals in their professional practice. He argues that what we need to do as teacher educators is to tell students that regardless of their belief, they need to be somewhat sceptical about their own beliefs and allow for the consideration of alternative conceptions in teaching and learning. Reflexive competence is one of the significant features in the new curriculum framework. It requires both the teacher and his/her learners to engage in critical discussion about their work in order to lead to a new understanding and appreciation. It makes action explicit to one another in an attempt to adopt best practice (Njozela, 2012: 266).

This study reveals that educators and teacher educators commit themselves to what works for them in their professional practice (Betram, 2003:157). It argues that when educators are accounted for their practice, they did not draw on the logic of formal educational theory so much as on experience. The same was observable with teacher educators, they commit themselves to what works and have seen and not on what theory or policy requires them.

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