Perspectives on Teacher Education Programme Preparation of Preservice Educators at A University in South Africa

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Abstract: This study explored perspectives on teacher education programme preparation of preservice educators at a University in South Africa. The purpose was to explore the perspectives of B.Ed Honours preservice teachers on how their programme at the university prepared them for the teaching profession. Positioned in the interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design through which data was generated using semi-structured interviews from 16 B. Ed. Honours preservice teachers who were purposively selected to form the sample. Thematic method was employed to analyse the data generated. The results revealed that B. Ed Honours preservice teachers whilst in their university programme acquired pedagogical competencies which also includes classroom management, problem-solving skills, inclusive education strategies as well as interpersonal relations and teacher professionalism. The study also revealed that preservice teachers had challenges with the implementation due to disparity between knowledge acquired at the university and what was expected on the field. From the findings, the study concludes that preservice teachers received some level of preparation from their university that assisted them in navigating the teaching practicum exercise. Thus, it is recommended that the training institutions partner with schools to ensure proper posting of preservice teachers as well as review their programmes to ensure alignment between theory and practice.

Keywords: Teacher Education Programme, Preservice Educators, Teaching Profession

1. Introduction

The Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 as the new vision for education was adopted by the World Education Forum that was organised in Incheon, South Korea (UNESCO, 2017). One of the critical components that forms an essential part of the declaration is the right to education which is to ensure that education is of sufficient quality that will result in relevant, equitable and effective learning outcomes at various levels and all settings. This has a lot to do with teacher education since "it requires trained, adequately remunerated and motivated teachers, using appropriate pedagogical approaches and supported by appropriate information and communication technology (ICT), as well as the creation of safe, healthy, gender-responsive, inclusive and adequately resourced environments that facilitate learning" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 30). On the basis that teachers are considered major factors in the achievement of inclusive, equitable, quality, and lifelong learning as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Nketsia et

al., 2020, p. 49), Incheon Declaration states that "teacher policies and regulations should be developed and implemented to ensure that teachers are empowered, adequately recruited, remunerated, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and efficiently deployed across a well-supported education system that is governed well" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 33). Thus, the need for both pre-service education and continuous professional development teacher-training to be evaluated and analysed quality (UNESCO, 2015).

South Africa like other nations of the world, in pursuit of the realisation of the SDG target have put several programmes and policies in place (Mngomezulu, Lawrence & Mabusela, 2021). However, it was argued that these efforts may prove abortive if teachers are not given due consideration with regard to teacher competence (Mngomezulu et al., 2021). Teacher competence is a product of quality education. Quality education is multidimensional and can be regarded as "an outcome or a property, or even a process" (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p. 2). Also, it is considered as the value of education (Babalola, 2004), and is used interchangeably with concepts such as equity, effectiveness and efficiency (Madani, 2019). Teachers are crucial to the attainment of quality education as noted in SDG4c (Cepal, 2018), thus, the emphasis on competent educators.

However, the issue of teacher competence in South Africa has been under serious contention (Ndebele & Legg-Jack, 2022). For instance, a global body of research conducted by government and academics have reported nerve-wracking trends of new teachers who are poorly trained to teach according to the Department of Education (DoE, 2009) as well as Fantilli and McDougall (2009). Similarly, a comprehensive study on the level of preparedness of beginner teachers to enter the teaching profession laments "the weak disciplinary knowledge resources held by the majority of South African teachers." (Taylor, 2019, pp. 263–282). Other studies reported such challenges as pedagogical knowledge and classroom management among others as all issues affecting preservice teachers (Botha & Rens, 2018; Jiyane & Gravett, 2019)

It is against this backdrop that the study explores the perceptions of Bachelor of Education (B Ed.) Honours students on how their teacher education programme prepared them to face the teaching profession. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with 16 B. Ed Honours preservice teachers. It is believed that the findings of this study will contribute to knowledge within and outside higher education on the extent to which teacher training prepares B. Ed Honours preservice teachers and other researchers in the field of pre-service teacher education.

In the next sections, an overview of related literature on preservice teacher education, teaching practice and empirical research on preservice teacher education is presented. This is followed by the methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

2. Preservice Teacher Education

The centrality of a teacher to the success of students is incontrovertible (Momanyi & Muchimuti, 2020). The implication is that students' failure is also attributable to the level of skills possessed by the teacher. Consequently, only a well-trained teacher possesses the competencies to deliver quality and effective teaching (Junias et al., 2022). And a teacher with the desired skills to deliver quality teaching is a product of a good teacher education programme. Hence, this has necessitated the investment in several education

systems in the development of high-quality teacher education programmes as seen globally (Chong & Ho, 2009). It is argued that a relationship exists between the professional training of teachers and the quality of teaching (Blömeke, Olsen & Suhl, 2016). In the words of another scholar, one of the components that determine the quality of a teaching force is the kind of teacher education available for the training of educators. The right kind of teacher education today will produce not simply teachers who can teach in the traditional sense of transmitting a prescribed corpus of knowledge to students but who can partner as co-learners with students to help them learn how to learn, to learn how to construct their knowledge, and to learn how to determine for themselves as they grow and mature what is essential for them in their lives ahead (Connell, 2013, p. 6).

The essence of such training is to ensure teachers are equipped with the necessary competencies that guarantee the delivery of quality teaching since this is part of the crucial determinant of the growth and learning of students (Junias et al., 2022). As argued by some scholars, teacher education has been at the centre of discourse at the global level (Abdul & Ahmed, 2012). Thus, this calls for quality preservice teacher education.

Preservice teacher education offers an opportunity for new teachers to gain knowledge that encompasses their professional intellectual capacities and ensures that, what they can teach is both appropriate and rigorous (Reid, 2017). Accordingly, preservice teacher education is the junction where a novice and a professional teacher meets in the teaching vocation (Taylor, 2016). The journey of a preservice teacher begins with enrolment into a teacher training programme, then progresses into becoming a qualified teacher after few years of practice in a school (Deacon, 2012). An important part of any preservice teacher training programme is the teaching practice, otherwise referred to work-based learning (Mensah, Boateng & Pillay, 2018).

3. Teaching Practice

For preservice teachers, going out to schools for professional experience is one of the most significant learning events in their teacher training (Beutel, Tangen & Spooner-Lane, 2019). This professional experience, referred to as teaching practice avail preservice teachers the opportunities to apply the theory gained in the university into practice is real classroom settings (Buckworth, 2017). During this period, preservice teachers put their academic knowledge into practice in a real world of work, thus, during this period, they test out their skills in classroom management, lesson planning, presentation and professional development (Mashau, 2012), under the supervision of a school-based teacher or mentor who provides the student-educator with guidance, feedback and other needed support (Mena, Hennissen & Loughran, 2017). During teaching practice, preservice teachers develop diverse experiences in the profession, some of which include the confidence to deliver their pedagogical content knowledge as well as to professionally approach tasks as required (Mensah et al., 2018).

4. Empirical Evidence in Preservice Teacher Research

Several studies have been conducted around teacher education programmes in South Africa. For instance, study was conducted to establish the experiences of pre-service teachers from the University of Limpopo placed in different schools during Teaching Practice and how these could be used for curriculum

improvement (Modipane & Kibirige, 2015). Amongst the chief findings of the study was the identification of a disconnection between what preservice teachers studied in the university and what they were expected to implement during teaching practice. Similarly, another study which explored the experiences of pre-service Foundation Phase (FP) Life Science teachers during their teaching practice in South Africa also highlighted among others, difficulty in the implementation of FP curriculum, support from mentors and lack of awareness (Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021). Another study was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal which explored the views of third-year student teachers' capabilities of classroom management. The findings revealed that the pre-service teachers were less confident about classroom management skills because they were struggling to manage their classrooms while the efforts by subject mentors had little impact on how classes were managed (Mkhasibe & Mncube, 2020).

Analyses from the studies reviewed above point to the fact that there is a missing link in the body of knowledge in that the objectives and units of analyses of all the research highlighted above differ from that of the current. All the studies reviewed focused on the experiences of preservice teachers gained during their teaching practicum whilst the current study is on how the training received in their pre-service training impacted the work-integrated learning exercise. Besides, the units of analyses for all the studies conducted revolves around undergraduate, whilst the current employed postgraduate preservice teachers.

5. Methodology

The research question posed for the study is; What are B.Ed Honours students perception of how their teacher training programme prepared them before teaching practice? To respond to the question set in the study, a qualitative case study design was considered appropriate. Qualitative research entails the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as case study, personal experience, and life story among others in the description and routine as well as problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 2). This approach to research explores things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 2) thus, the integration of interpretivist paradigm as a component of qualitative inquiry (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Therefore, this design is adopted to understand the reality of the subjective views of preservice teachers in the role of the university in equipping them with the competencies required to prepare them for the teaching profession before embarking on teacher practice.

Purposive sampling was adopted as a technique is selecting the sample for the study. This type of sampling technique, also called judgment sampling is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses, especially those that are in the best position in providing the information required to answer the research question (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Thus, the sample of the study consisted of sixteen Bachelor of Education Honours preservice teachers undergoing training at a university in South Africa. The choice of this category of participants is that they have all attended initial theoretical training and are therefore equipped with the necessary information needed to answer the research question.

The research tool used for data collection was semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are one of the most common ways and recognised forms of qualitative research methods (Ruslin et al., 2022),

that combine a pre-determined set of open-ended questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore a bit more particular themes or responses (Bailly & Nys, 2018). Thus, semi-structured interview was employed to engage preservice teachers undergoing training at the university on the impact of the training programme in the development of skills needed in the profession before their commencement of teaching practice exercise.

Data analysis in the study was conducted using thematic method (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This method, according to some scholars is considered appropriate and important when the intention seeks to understand a set of experiences, thoughts or behaviours across a data set (Braun & Clarke 2012). In the application of thematic method as a means of data analysis, consideration must be given to six stages associated with this technique. This includes, familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, as well as producing the manuscripts (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, pp. 848-852). The stages outlined above were strictly followed in analysing the data generated from the semi-structured interview administered to the sixteen Bachelor of Education Honours preservice teachers. Triangulation was adopted as a measure to achieve credibility in the study. Data generated from semi-structured interviews with each of the participants was triangulated using the themes that emerged in the analysis as a measure to achieve trustworthiness of the finding.

Although, no ethical clearance was officially applied for; however, the researchers made use of informed consent to ensure the rights of participants are not violated. Thus, participants were made aware of the purpose of the study, their willingness to take part as well as withdraw, that their identities would not be disclosed whilst their confidentiality were assured.

6. Findings

This section presents the findings from the analysis of data generated from the study. In all, seven themes emerged from the findings namely, accommodation of learner diversity, development of problem-solving skills, pedagogical and self-confidence, classroom management and learner discipline, professionalism and interpersonal relations.

6.1 Pedagogical Skills and Self-Confidence

Participants articulate the development of diverse competencies in relation to pedagogy as well as self-confidence. These, they expressed in the comments below.

> "At university we are taught to use learner centered teaching method and this was much helpful to engage learners in lessons". P8

> "The example that I can give is that of the learner centered method. This method helped me to get a high participation of learners, since learners do most of the work i.e., 75% of the work while the teacher is acting as a mediator between learners and the content". P3

> Teaching skills-in foundation phase we have our lecturer Doctor X …". P7

"What helped me here is the university that helped me to conquer or to enjoy my teaching practice is micro teaching because our Profs, lecturers taught us to write a proper and best lesson plan so that when they come and asses us, they do not struggle". P6

"Some modules that we have learned in the university helped a lot during the teaching practices e.g., EDCC 112 helped us on how to use teaching aids, how to teach and how to choose relevant teaching aids" P12

From the analyses of the various comments above, one can deduce that the participants who are pre-service teachers were prepared on diverse pedagogical skills during their training in the university. The pedagogical competencies developed include using the learner centred approach and teaching skills for foundation phase, where such learner centred approaches are critical. According to P3, the learner centred approach encouraged high participation of students during their lesson. On the other hand, the university equipped preservice teachers with effective skills on lesson planning, choice of relevant and effective use of teaching aids.

"What helped me during my teaching practice was presentation that was usually held during lecture time. That increased my confidence and courage to stand in front of people". P2

"With how to write lessons or how to prepare for lessons not forgetting that micro teaching has helped me to boost my self-esteem". P14

The analyses of both excerpts above indicate that preservice teachers during their training in the university developed the confidence needed to face their learners in class. From the first comment, it is indicative that the development of the needed confidence and courage resulted from the regular presentations held at the university, whilst the building of self-esteem as highlighted in the last comment emanated from the impact of micro-teaching on how to write and prepare for lessons.

6.2 Problem-Solving Skills

Participants articulate the development of diverse strategies in tackling different challenges related to them and their learners. Evidence of this is indicated in their comments.

"The teaching approaches that I learnt from education principles in the university helped me understand and helped to be on a good side with learners, solved many problems of learners and even helped the other learners to tackle some questions in a new way". P5

"The teaching practice was easier because of the things we have learned from the university such as the strategies to use in order to solve problems in class". P15

Both comments above highlight the impact of university education programme in the preparation of pre-service teachers. According to both comments, the principles learnt in the university aided the development the understanding required in solving the problem of learners in class, especially innovative ways to tackle questions posed students as indicated in the first excerpt.

6.3 Accommodation of Learner Diversity

This theme highlights the development of inclusive approach that caters for learner diversity, such that the teacher creates room for the accommodation of all in the learning process ensuring that student is left behind. This, three of the sixteen participants expressed in their comments below.

> "…. how to accommodate learners with different barriers in my class". P10

> "What I have learned from the university really helped me how to accommodate learners with different learning abilities". P16

> "…how to deal with handicapped learners leaving with disability and learners suffering from stress". P9

> "…. how to teach a struggling learner as well". P7

> "Some concept I have learned at the university helped me in my teaching practice. Educational psychology helped in how to diagnose learning difficulties in learners". P11

From the comments above, it is indicative that the university teaching programme equipped all three participants with the inclusive approach to cater for learners with special needs. For the third participant, in addition to the ability to handle learners with special needs she also developed the skill on how to handle learners suffering from stress, whilst for P7 benefit was on on how teach a struggling learner. On the other hand, the last participant articulated that the knowledge gained at the university helped in discovering learners with special needs.

6.4 Classroom Management Strategies

Preservice teachers in the study developed diverse classroom management strategies that made their teaching practice experience easy, whilst undergoing their programme in the university. They stressed these in the various comments below.

> "What I learned at the university helped me during teaching practice in such a way that I learned from EDCC which is professional studies a lot about the classroom set up". P10

Evident in the excerpt above is that the student teacher whilst in the university developed classroom management strategies on how to set-up a classroom. On the other hand, others developed classroom management strategies on the aspect of handling learner behaviour as shown in the comments below.

> "…. for example, during my teaching practice I managed to overcome so many challenges for example learner behaviour". P16

> "…. yes, it did help me. Before I came to the school, I was very aware of what I must experience in schools like learners' behaviour towards student teachers". P1

> "I learnt to control my class easily. Maintaining class discipline becomes easy when I am better prepared for my lessons". P13

"I leartn n how to deal with different behaviours of learners …P9

"She taught us everything on how to handle a child which is naughty on how to teach a struggling learner as well. "P7

Analysis of the comments highlight the development of diverse classroom management strategies in relation to learner-teacher relationships, classroom discipline as well as accommodating learner diversity.

6.5 Interpersonal Relations and Teacher Professionalism

Some participants articulated the development of interpersonal relation skills and certain professional ethics that guide the teaching profession in the aspect of how to look as a teacher as well as relate with others. Those who were beneficiaries of this stated that in the comments below;

"…. prepare myself to be a professional teacher and how to work with staff members… how to be a responsible teacher". P10

"I was able to look presentable and professional as a result of what I have learned in the university". P12

"I also learn not to go to school and make friends and start to create enemies. I just need to go there and do what I am there for". P9

Analyses of the excerpts above reveal that participants in their training as educators in the university developed some professional ethics around the teaching profession in relation to appearance and relationship with others. According to P10, the skill developed hinges on being a responsible teacher, whilst for P12 and P9 it focuses on appearance and interpersonal skills respectively.

6.6 Implementation Challenges

Participants in this category speak of the variation between university developed knowledge and what they experienced during their teaching practice, thus making implementation challenging. This, they expressed in their various comments.

"There was little to nothing that happened that matched what I was taught at the university. The school is very different from what the university makes it. The theories we learnt are not relevant to the current situation at school". P4

"Based on designated areas of specialisation (physical science and mathematics) some topics were not effectively important towards student's concept learned from educational studies". P11

From both comments above, there is the indication of diversion between university gained knowledge and that which preservice teachers experienced during their teaching practice.

This section presented the analysis and findings from the data generated. As revealed from the findings, preservice teachers whilst undergoing training in the university developed certain knowledge that was

helpful to them during their teaching practice. Thus, the shock other preservice teachers experienced when they embarked on teaching practice were not encountered with these student-teachers.

7. Discussion of Findings

In this section, we discuss the findings on the themes that emerged from the analyses. Three major themes emerged namely, pedagogical skills and self-confidence, professionalism and interpersonal relations as well as curriculum implementation challenges. The rest of the themes that emerged are sub to the main categories. We begin the discussion with pedagogical skills and self-confidence, then, conclude with curriculum implementation challenges.

Pedagogical skill has as its sub-themes development of problem-solving skills, classroom management strategies and inclusive education strategies.

7.1 Pedagogical Skills and Self-Confidence

Evidence from the findings reveals the development of different pedagogical competencies by preservice teachers during their university education. This is consistent in literature, as exemplified in a study that explored the teaching skills assessment in teacher training in Physical Education (Aparicio-Herguedas et al., 2020). The study reported the development of skills in managing the teaching and learning process in Physical Education (Aparicio-Herguedas et al., 2020). The study also highlighted preparation in the aspect of lesson planning, choice and use of relevant teaching aids as benefits gained from initial theoretical lessons. This corroborates a related finding on the impact of teacher education programmes in the preparation of preservice teachers in effective planning of their lessons using the right materials and activities for their class (Tamir, 2020). Also, it was revealed that preservice teachers in the study by Tamir, (2020) that student teachers developed self-esteem from their training institution, and this helped them navigate effectively in their teaching practice exercises. This corroborates the finding of another study which compared the performance and confidence levels of preservice teachers in their readiness to teach (McConnell III et al., 2021). The study reported increased confidence in preservice teachers which was because of planning, instruction and assessment. In a study conducted earlier, it was found that a teacher's content knowledge and teaching competencies both have bearing on their feelings of self-confidence, with experience being a key factor in the educators' perceptions of their knowledge and skills (Sadler, 2013). On the contrary, lack of confidence in a teacher has been reported in a study to be due to poor knowledge of the subject, planning, or acting as a substitute teacher (Aspelin & Jonsson, 2019), and this results in poor classroom management (Mkhasibe & Mncube, 2020).

7.2 Development of Problem-Solving Skills

As part of the pedagogical competencies, preservice teachers in the study affirmed the development of different problem-solving strategies in their university education which helped them during the teaching practice exercise. For instance, this finding agrees with another result presented by a scholar on how student-teachers at an institution in Thailand developed their problem-solving skills after enrolling for teacher training programmes, improved their Physics teaching (Tientongdee, 2018). Participants in the study whilst undergoing their university education developed some innovative approaches to tackling learners' problems in class. According to Meilinda (2021), problem-solving skill is one of the important

competences a prospective teacher needs alongside critical thinking that equips them with the ability to manage learning in the development of thinking skills. This skill when applied helps the development of learners' ability to face daily problems as well as be able to solve problems in the subject area. Problem-solving skill is one of the important skills provided to prospective student teachers because, in addition to developing thinking skills, it also trains students' ability to manage learning to develop thinking skills.

7.3 Classroom Management Strategies

Teachers' competency in nurturing students' engagement and limiting disruptive behavior is important for maintaining a safe, productive, and effective learning environment (Stevenson et al., 2020). Thus, effective classroom management strategy is a necessary component of the teaching profession, especially for beginning teachers (Dicke et al., 2014), in the maintenance of students learning and the sustenance of academic achievement (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). As found in the study, preservice teachers developed diverse classroom management strategies during their university education which assisted them in navigating the teaching practice exercise. This finding corroborates that of Pomerance and Walsh (2020) whose study revealed strong preparation of preservice teachers in classroom management strategies in teacher education programmes. However, the result of this study is surprising when juxtaposed with that of Cooper et al., (2018) who reported that teacher training programmes do not equip preservice teachers with classroom management strategies. This study highlighted the equipment of preservice teachers with classroom management strategies in a classroom set-up, handling of learner behaviour, handling learner relationship with student-teachers as well as managing discipline. Accordingly, effective classroom management strategies are believed to increase student engagement as well as academic achievement thereby decreasing disruptive behaviours (Cooper et al., 2018).

7.4 Inclusive Education Strategy

The ability to understand learner differences in the leaning process also considered as aspect of pedagogical knowledge was flagged in the study. This finding is key to one of the areas of concern of the Department of Education (DoE) in South Africa, in addressing the needs of all learners in the classroom. Preservice teachers on teaching practice articulated their preparation on how to accommodate all learners in the teaching process to ensure none was left behind in the learning process. Consistent with this in literature, is the work of Tamir (2020) whose study reported that the teacher education programme in Australia supports the development of skills in preservice educators on how to meet the needs of all learners as well as possess the ability to differentiate lessons to suit individual learners. Similarly, Bachelor of Education students in a study conducted at one of the universities in South Africa, felt positive of their university preparation to practice inclusive education (Banoo, 2021). Thus, this finding aligns with the inclusive education policy of White Paper 6 which is aimed at strengthening education support services where all categories of learners are catered for (DoE, 2001), through the additional care provided for those with special needs (Mintz 2019). This finding is promising because in the past it was reported that part of the challenges to poor implementation of inclusive education (IE) had been traced to lack of educators training (Jama, 2014), inadequate specialist and incoherent understanding of IE among others (DBE 2015). A reflection on the finding also indicates that higher education institutions are in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), which states clearly in Section 29 (1) that everyone has the right to a basic education and planned programmes should ensure this goal is met by

providing recipients with skills on how to respond to this advocacy. This thereby showcases the production of an expert teacher. According to Guerriero, (2014), the characteristic feature of an expert teacher is one with sensitivity to context and better adaptation of diverse learner needs.

7.5 Interpersonal Relations and Teacher Professionalism

The knowledge base of a teacher is said to extend beyond pedagogical skills to include teacher interpersonal relations and professionalism. The study found that preservice teachers developed certain interpersonal relations competencies and teacher professional ethics that helped them navigate their teaching practice exercise. This finding is consistent in literature with the work of Ofojebe and Akudo (2021) who found that teachers exhibited interpersonal skills in the discharge of their duties. Although, the focus of their study was on in-service teachers, however, it is important to mention that interpersonal skills which is an important predictor to a successful educational process was developed in preservice teachers from their training institution, and this points the level of preparedness in them. Accordingly, the successful management of any school system to achieve high performance is a product of quality interaction with all within the educational process (Ofojebe & Akudo, 2021). Also, effective educational work is only feasible within the atmosphere of quality communication (Petani & krajinovic, 2019). As averred by these scholars, high quality interpersonal communication signifies the skill that is progressively considered as a requirement for a developed and successful school (Petani & krajinovic, 2019). On the hand, teacher professionalism as found in the study confirms the assertion of Roy et al. (2016) that as part of the skills and knowledge developed by preservice teacher during their formal training are the skills necessary to work in a contemporary classroom and school. Teacher professionalism is an ongoing process that extends beyond the training process to actual practice (Roy et al., 2016). The promotion of teacher professionalism is the current focus of educational reform in South Africa, captured in the vision of South African Council for Educators (SACE), a legal body which monitors professional conduct of teachers and manages continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) in the country (Roy et al., 2016).

7.6 Implementation Challenges

On the implementation of subject curriculum, some preservice teachers articulated the experience of diverse challenges. It was revealed that a disparity exists between training gained at the university and what was obtainable at the school of teaching practice. That is, what they met during their teaching practice had no relationship with the knowledge they acquired in the university, especially, the educational theories learnt. This finding agrees with a study that reported similar results where student-teachers on teaching practices lamented the difficulty they experienced in implementing Life Sciences curriculum due to the disparity in the knowledge acquired and that which was required (Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021). In a similar study conducted at the University of Limpopo, it was also reported that in some areas, teaching practice students found little connection between what they were taught in the university and what they were expected to implement during the exercise at the place of practice (Modipane & Kibirige, 2015). The implication of this finding highlights the existence of gap between training acquired in teacher education programme and actual classroom practice. What makes for the development of the needed skills in preservice teachers during the teaching practice exercise is the alignment between theory and practice. In a situation where there is variation in both, it makes the entire teaching practice exercise futile and results in frustration and demotivation to pursue the profession as an educator. To tackle such disparity, there is

need for the teacher training institutions to partner with schools where preservice teachers are posted to ensure alignment in the posting as well as revamp the university curriculum to directly reflect what student-teachers are meant to implement during the exercise; thus, their programme will be responsive to the need of the classroom.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explored the perspectives of 16 B. Ed Honours students on how the training they received from their university prepared for the teaching profession. A review of related literature was carried out on preservice teacher education and teaching practice. The study employed a qualitative case study design and a thematic approach in data generation and analysis. The findings of the study revealed that preservice teachers developed certain levels of pedagogical competencies such as classroom management strategies, problem-solving skills and inclusive education strategies. Also revealed is the acquisition of skills in interpersonal relations and teacher professionalism. Contrary to earlier reviewed studies, where it was reported that preservice teachers lack proper preparation, the current research from its main findings concludes that preservice teachers received some level of preparation from their university that assisted them in navigating the teaching practicum. However, the study also reported challenges with curriculum implementation such as lack of alignment between university training programme content and that atthe school of teaching practice Thus, it is recommended that the training institution partner with schools to ensure proper posting of preservice teachers as well as review their programmes to ensure alignment between theory and practice.

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