

School Based Experience Assessment Tool Revisited: A Comparative Analysis of Two Universities in South Africa

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Abstract: Teaching practice is an integral part in the Bachelor of Education degree and Post Graduate Certificate in Education studies. During school visits, student teachers are assessed using the school-based experience (SBE) assessment tool. The SBE tool needs to assess student teacher quality, performance, and effectiveness in the teaching practice exercise. The study aims to evaluate the quality of the SBE assessment tool used by assessors. To achieve the aim, a case study of the comparative analysis of the SBE tool between two Universities was conducted. The comparative analysis applies content analysis that merge themes. It was found from the comparison that both tools contain themes such as teacher professional profile, lesson preparation, presentation of the lesson feedback and suggestions. These themes can be used as benchmark for the best SBE assessment tool to be used to indicate good quality of teachers produced by the Universities. Effective teachers are those who produce gains in learner achievement as measured by gains in standardized tests. Therefore, the tool needs to gather evidence for teacher effectiveness and display sufficient resources to produce high quality teaching and productive assessment. Moreover, the teacher assessment tool should entail theories such as transfer of learning, pedagogical techniques that cater for learner characteristics and the curriculum among others.

Keywords: Assessment, Curriculum, Quality resources, Teaching practice, Learner achievement

1. Introduction

The revised policy on what is required for a teaching qualification is stipulated in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (2008). This government gazette document the minimum credits that the student teacher obtains after completing a qualification such as the Bachelor of Education degree or Post Graduate Certificate in Education. For instance, among the total credits in the Bachelor of Education qualification teaching practise constitute about 50% (NQF, 2008). In teaching practise, student teachers are placed in schools under the mentorship of teachers. Therefore, teaching practice is an integral part in the Bachelor of Education degree and Post Graduate Certificate in Education studies and student teachers in their school visits are assessed using the school-based experience (SBE) assessment tool.

The SBE tool needs to assess student teacher quality, performance, and effectiveness in the teaching practice exercise (Cowan & George, 2013). In teaching practice, student teachers are given the opportunity to practice the theory they obtained during University lectures. One of the crucial elements of teaching practice is assessment. An SBE assessment tool is used by lecturers and teachers to assess student

teachers. A well-designed assessment tool should not only award marks to student teachers but also gives feedback to student teachers. Lecturers may have well prepared the student teachers and the teachers given the best mentorship to the student teachers but if the assessment tool is not well designed the student may not receive the feedback that relates to their performance. Dogan (2011) emphasized the need for evaluation of assessment tools as he alluded that the existing tools rarely emphasize creativity, understanding, performance and real-world application. This study intends to investigate whether the assessment tool measures what it is supposed to measure and if not suggests what can be done to improve it.

There are perceptions that student teachers use traditional teaching methods that apply narrative or telling methods (Korkmaz, 2011). These methods are more teacher centered, encourage more memorization and boring. Furthermore, it has been observed that even if the University curriculum empowers student teachers with theories and pedagogical methods to fit in schools, however student teachers show diverse behavioral patterns when they are in teaching practice (Dogan, 2011; Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Since the SBE intends to provide student teachers

with opportunities to apply what was taught at the University to reality at schools, the study evaluates the tool used for assessment by Lecturers. It is expected that student teachers visit schools to gain experience in managing and evaluating class activities and be acquainted with the school organization and administration (Hathaway, 2014). Moreover, student teachers need to gain experience from the real situation and learn how to work with teachers and learners in schools. On that note, we need to evaluate if the tool used for assessment serves the purpose that Universities produce teachers of good quality.

Based on the seven practices of good practice alluded in Chickering and Gamson of 1987 and other theories such as constructivism and progressivism, the paper analyze if the tools used by selected Universities serve the purpose. The novelty of the paper is to evaluate the existing tools, compare them and establish if they incorporate learner centered approach and meaningful transfer of learning. Hence, the study aims to evaluate the quality of the SBE assessment tools used by assessors when they visit schools and make a comparison of the tools between two Universities. The paper is structured as follows, this section is followed by literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and finally conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The literature review section comprises of theoretical literature and empirical literature debates chosen to form the bases of the study.

2.1 Theoretical Literature

School based experience (SBE) is acquired in a specific time by student teachers where they apply skills and knowledge received from the University in an appropriate school of choice. Theories adopted in this study include those that are applicable to the teaching experience in the school. Therefore, the study focuses on theories that are applicable to the assessment of student teachers on the day the assessors come for evaluation. Among many educational theories, the following will be discussed as a point of reference for the SBE assessment tool: Constructivism, progressivism and perennialism (Ellis, 2013; Crooks, 2010); Transfer of learning (Simons, 1999); Schema of cognitive and ethical development (Rodríguez & Cano, 2006); Seven principles of good practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

Effective teaching and learning involve quality teaching, engagement with the theory of teaching and learning, innovation and leadership in teaching and developments. To strive for excellence, teaching and learning process should adopt a number of philosophies of education including constructivism, progressivism and perennialism. Constructivism is the theory that says learners construct knowledge rather than just passively take in information (Brandon & All, 2010; Fosnot, 2013). When knowledge is constructed Armstrong (2016) believe that Bloom's taxonomy should be applied to categories knowledge into different levels. As people experience the world and reflect upon those experiences, they build their own representations and incorporate new information into their pre-existing knowledge. Bada and Olusegun (2015) believed that constructivism result to learner centered approach, where learners construct knowledge and put meaning to their experiences. In progressivism, the belief is that people learn best in real life activities with other people. The problem is identified, propose hypothesis to solve it, evaluate consequences from one's experiences and test the likeable solution (Ellis, 2013). In perennialism, topics are chosen to develop people and principles on how to solve problems (Crooks, 2010).

The transfer of learning theory is applicable in the lesson planning and presentation phase of student teachers. Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow (2008) suggest that transfer of learning theory entails characteristics of task, learners, organization and social context. The task characteristics encourage learners to be provided with meaningful tasks that have lifelong experiences. The characteristic of the learner is about how learners reflect in their lives and relate what they are studies to problem solving strategies in their lives. Characteristic of the organization and social context include all factors such as workplace positive atmosphere, economic and political factors (Barnett, 2005; Harris et al., 2008). Transfer of learning theory include strategies of hugging where there is learner participation and bridging where learner participation analysis past testing behavior to prepare learners for upcoming test taking strategies (Simons, 1999; Barnett, 2005).

Schema of cognitive and ethical development involve Perry's schema of 1970 where learners learn by acquiring knowledge to what they pay attention to (Rodríguez & Cano, 2006). This assist learners to exhibit long term scales of learning interacting with

others in a way that enhances all our lives. Perry's development schema has components such as dualism, multiplicity and relativism (Beck & Kosnik, 2012). In dualism, knowledge is viewed as truth, the teacher is the resource available, and learners memorize what is taught for tests. In multiplicity, knowledge, opinions and statements are correct, the teacher is an additional resource and learners understand what the teacher wants in order to score marks. The most preferred component is the relativism where knowledge is supported by reasoning, the teacher guides learners to discover issues, learning is accompanied by facts and knowledge affects personal actions outside the classroom. So, in relativism the teacher is a source additional to other sources and learning include creative thinking, problem solving, making choices and being responsible for choices made.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) alluded that there are seven principles of good practice, and the principles are applied in evaluating if the SBE assessment tool is suitable to indicate readiness of student teacher for the real practice. The principles are as follows:

- Encourage contact between student teachers and the faculty.
- Develop reciprocity and cooperation among learners. There should be collaboration, sharing of ideas, interaction among learners, social than competitive context, and learners can complete assignments (Blignaut & Trollip, 2003).
- Encourage active learning. Student teachers should relate the study material to their lives, talk about what they are learning, and write about it, memorization should be discouraged. This pedagogy is within the constructivism realm and is a learner centered approach.
- Give prompt feedback. This encourages non-participating learners to follow and also encourage future learning effort. The student teacher can suggest areas of improvement.
- Emphasize time on task. This refers on time management implying time spent on learning.
- The student teacher should communicate high expectations, self-fulfilling prophecy and motivate learners.

- Respect diversity in learner talents and ways learners think.

2.2 Empirical Literature

The SBE assessment tool is used to investigate teaching practice phenomena and is believed to play an important role in the education process. Looking at the professional profile of student teachers, some studies indicated that some teacher qualities such as teacher appearance (dress code), teacher enthusiasm and motivation, organizational skills and friendly attitude (rapport to learners) are important for the success in the lesson (Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley & Vincent, 2003; Jung & Choi, 2016). This encourages learners to interact with the teacher, even engage in debates affecting learner personal lives and learners attempts at high order tasks. Therefore, the professional profile is relevant to create a conducive environment for learning to take place in a meaningful way.

As perceived by Darling-Hammond, Burns, Campbell, Goodwin, Hammerness and Low (2017), learning to teach becomes coherent, realistic and methodical when it is combined with theoretical knowledge that is examined when student teachers undergo a teaching practice. White and Forgasz (2016) are of the same view as they argue that diverse countries around the world ensure that practising student teachers obtain better exposure to teaching processes when the actual act is administered in a classroom environment through coaching and support by mentor teachers. As the students obtain all this necessary support from experienced teachers who model the expected practices necessary for learning, the bottom line becomes assessment of such practises. In this study, its interesting to concur on the assessment procedures, nonetheless, the concern is whether the tools used are designed to adequately capture components with regards to teacher quality, performance and efficiency.

Despite arguments by the previous literature, assessment instruments used for monitoring students as they undergo their teaching practise have been proved to opportune student teachers to navigate, practice, demonstrate and reflect on own teaching methodologies (Hudson & Hudson, 2011; Hollins, 2015; McNamara, Jones & Murray, 2015). Therefore, the study acknowledge other researchers' viewpoints as they indeed lead to improved teaching approaches

intertwined with concerns that students in different environmental constituencies have varying learning styles that also need to be catered for when student teachers undergo processes of redefining their teaching methodologies and approaches to teaching and learning.

Tools as instruments used by various institutions to assess student teachers is debateable as research reveals that students who practised in well-functioning schools were identified to be more effective, when compared to students who had undergone their teaching practise on the so-called disadvantaged schools with limited teaching and learning resources (Whitford & Metcalf-Turner, 1999; Cherry, 2015). On a different angle White & Forgasz (2016) maintain that student teachers need to be allocated in realistically dissimilar contexts around the country for institutions to aim at obtaining authentic outcomes when students are evaluated. We are of the same view as authors that indeed placement and evaluation of student teachers during practice teaching is likely to lead to realistic benefits if procedures of exposure to diverse, disadvantaged, yet with limited resources could be maintained, as is the current the status quo for voluminous South African schools.

3. Methodological Approach

This section discusses the adopted methodology to achieve the set objectives, which is to evaluate the quality of the SBE assessment tools used by assessors when they visit schools and make a comparison of the tools between two Universities.

3.1 Approach

For the purposes of this paper authors embarked on using a qualitative approach as this method provided us with perspectives as we studied systems of assessment when SBE was administered (Creswell, 2009). The study thereby pursued a detailed understanding of the tools of assessment as anticipated by the relating participants' perspectives. Prominence was on quality coupled with the tool's information depth (Seal, 2015).

3.2 Research Design

For reasons that a case study provides tools to study complex phenomena within their contexts, this design was used by the authors (Fick, 2014). This

research design proved to be a valuable method because through it a theory determined and bound by the case under study was developed since authors were interested in comparing the uniqueness of the tools used by varying institutions.

3.3 Sampling

Neuman (2013) argues that the aim of sampling is to determine features of a population by directly observing only a portion of the population. For the purposes of this paper, only two universities were conveniently identified as the sample because they were regarded as the ones likely to generate useful data for the project (Brinkman, 2013).

3.4 Research Instruments

Seal (2015) perceives data sources such as interviews, observation, questionnaires, and documents as research instruments. This inquiry used documents analysis to obtain a better view and obtain rich data pertaining tools being compared. Document analysis was embedded to closely study the case under investigation. Mackey and Gass (2016) concur that document analysis is a form of qualitative inquiry where systemic techniques are applied as a way of analyzing documentary evidence. Authors used both the case study and document analysis as it would have been difficult to measure the case of revisiting tools of assessment without the context of teaching practice.

There is limited literature on document analysis (Karppinen & Moe, 2012; Casey & Wong, 2020). The document analysis gathers documents and analysed the document to enhance validity of the results. This methodology is more relevant with policy documents; hence it is adopted here to compare the SBE tool between the two Universities (Casey & Wong, 2020).

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data was analysed through comparative analysis (Boland, 2010). In this inquiry authors analysed assessment tools used by two different institutions. The study embarked on this exercise to scrutinize, compare then identify disparities and similarities pertaining SBE assessment logistics within the two institutions. It was found that it necessary to compare these distinct assessment tools hence comparison is essential for scientific inquiry. The logic of

assessment coupled with mark allocation during the time when student teachers were administering their SBE became a key focus of what was addressed by the authors throughout the discussion. Responses were then transcribed under prescribed headings, this leading to formulation of themes, as discussed in the preceding sections (Fick, 2014).

4. Results and Discussion

The SBE assessment tool between two Universities is compared and the first observation is that University A provided a 5-point Likert-scale, while University B provided a generic Likert scale. University A's assessment tool has a rating which clearly details mark allocation. This is one of the areas University B should include as the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (DoE, 2007) clearly stipulates that teaching practise must be formally assessed. A formal and complete assessment tool has a standard to be assessed and the rating of such standard. The difficulty with the generic tool is to find the total mark that the student teacher obtained after finishing assessment and whether the evaluation is a failure, a pass or excellent. However, the generic tool for University B is informative of what to expect from the sub-sections. Although the naming may be different, the

assessment tools of the two universities covered largely similar assessment criteria.

4.1 Professional Profile

Both SBE assessment tools have a section on the professional profile of student teachers with similar sub-sections. Table 1 represents the professional profile of University A and Table 2 represents that of University B.

The difference is that University A included the dress code while University B included rapport with learners. The consensus is that both Universities include both sub-sections as they are important to increase ease of engagement with learners. For instance, the dress code that is formal and comfortable to the teacher make learners respect the authority of the teacher (McDonald & Toglia, 2010). In addition, a teacher that shows respect and is friendly to the learners makes the learners comfortable to understand teacher instructions (Bouras & Keskes, 2014). The professional profile in the SBE tool is in line with the findings of researchers such as Dolezal (2003) and Jung and Choi (2016) as they alluded that motivated learners could complete tasks and can attempt challenging tasks with some effort.

Table 1: University A

1. Dress Code	5	4	3	2	1
2. Confidence levels	5	4	3	2	1
3. Enthusiasm and motivation	5	4	3	2	1
4. Organisational skills	5	4	3	2	1

Source: Extracted from University A

Table 2: University B

Category	Exemplary	Accomplished	Attention Required
Professional attitude	Keen and committed / fully responsible manner	Reasonably keen & committed / Co-operative	Does only the minimum necessary / cooperation is grudging
Confidence / projection	Completely at ease / Clear speech all through	Fairly confident / Voice audible & intelligible	Ill-at-ease / Voice inaudible at times / intelligible
Enthusiasm / presence	Very positive / Commanding	Positive / Good presence	Little impact / Boring
Rapport with learners	Friendly & positive atmosphere / Good "vibes"	Reasonably pleasant atmosphere / Learners quite cooperative	Strained / Uncomfortable Learners don't relate to teacher & vice versa

Source: Extracted from University B

4.2 Lesson Preparation

A criterion in the introduction of the lesson where a learning relationship environment is created, and learners are referred to prior knowledge is only available in University A. The Bloom's taxonomy also encourages learning and teaching which moves from simple to complex hence it is advisable that University B should also consider including this criterion in their assessment tool (Armstrong, 2016).

The SBE assessment tool in University A comprises of subsections such as lesson design, statement of aims and objectives, and lesson phases. In University B, the planning phase comprises of sections such as formulating outcomes, knowledge in methodology and subject, scope of activity and appropriate assessment. Both tools measure the same thing, except that University A is using older terminology when compared with the CAPS documents used at schools. This might cause confusion to student teachers in the teacher practice. With respect to learning outcomes or objectives, student teachers are expected to provide action verbs that are clear, lucid, realistic, appropriate, and attainable and both tools indicated that. In the lesson plan tool, teachers should show content and methodologies that are fully informed, well researched, comprehensive, exciting and challenging and both SBE tools measure that. Teaching methods should be aligned with theory of constructivism, progressivism, perennialism and transfer of learning (Harris et al., 2008; Crooks, 2010; Ellis, 2013). Student teachers should engage learners into debates that affect the lives of the learners. The planning tool should show how the teacher matched the assessment standards with the learning outcomes.

4.3 Presentation of the Lesson

Both SBE tools assess similar concepts in a greater extent except for different terminologies used in the tool. For instance, University A have a concept called "classroom climate and management" while University B would call it "adaptability"; and "conceptual accuracy. In addition, the following concepts were common in both Universities: teaching strategies; learner participation, use of LTSM/ TLSM; communication and language usage; achievement of lesson outcomes/ objectives, mastery of subject matter. University A placed "achievement of outcomes" and "use of assessment strategies" separately while University B has placed it once

as "assessment / achievement of outcomes. The following concepts appear in University A only: in introduction, linking with prior of pre-knowledge; in lesson development, meaningful chalkboard summary; in conclusion, summarizing the lesson and revision of learning content. The following concepts appear in University B only: questioning skills; explaining; group work; giving instruction; discipline.

Both Universities can include all concepts that appear from both. This is supported by the seven principles of Chickering and Gamson (1987), Perry's schema of 1977 and other theories discussed in literature review. For example, University B can adopt the concept of linking pre-knowledge when introducing a lesson and University A can adopt in the SBE tool to evaluate teacher questioning skills and how they maintain discipline in class. The SBE tool from both Universities encourages the application of the discussed theories. For instance, in Perry's schema it is mentioned that in relativism the teacher believes that reasoning and guide learners to meaningful learning support knowledge, and this is illustrated by the chosen strategies that are learner centered. Moreover, in the seven principles on encouraging active learning, the tool measures learner participation.

4.4 Feedback and Suggestions

Each University has its own way to give feedback and suggestions. University A has a section on constructive feedback and suggested improvements; and this is discussed with the student teacher after conducting the lesson. In University B, each section in the SBE tool provide space for general comment, and after the lesson is conducted the student teacher is assessed on the ability to evaluate own performance and ability to respond constructively. Both ways from the two Universities are commended to give meaningful feedback and should motivate the student teacher to improve and contribute to be a better qualified teacher. This aligns with the seven principles of Chickering and Gamson (1987) that assessors should give prompt feedback to encourage future learning efforts and suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, evaluation of student teachers should communicate high expectations, self-fulfilling prophecy and confidence to them.

University B's assessment tool requires feedback at the end of each criterion. This is very important as assessment is not all about rating the performance

Table 3: Recommended Questionnaire

Category	5-Excellent	4-Outstanding	3-Exemplary	2-Accomplished	1-Needs Attention
Professional attitude & dress code	5	4	3	2	1
Confidence levels & audible	5	4	3	2	1
Enthusiasm, commanding and motivation	5	4	3	2	1
Organisational skills	5	4	3	2	1
Rapport with learners	5	4	3	2	1

Source: Own compilation

but is also about developing the person being assessed. University A rates the performance and only allows general feedback at the end of the assessment. University A should also consider explaining the meaning of each rating. Currently, each criterion is rated between one and five and no explanation is given on what is meant by the numbers one to five. The student teacher being assessed has no way of knowing what the numbers mean and there is no space for a comment that would at least clarify the rating, except the rating scale at the end of the tool.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study aimed to evaluate the quality of the school-based experience (SBE) assessment tool used by assessors when they visit student teachers at schools. To achieve the aim, a case study of the comparative analysis of the SBE tool between two Universities was conducted. The comparative analysis applies content analysis that merged themes.

The results of the comparative analysis indicate that both tools address common themes except in different terminologies and some aspects not found across tools. For instance, items like dress code are in University A, items like rapport with learners found in University B are written with a different terminology in University A. It can be recommended that a revised tool be done as proposed in Table 3. Furthermore, dress code, confidence, enthusiasm, motivation, organizational skills, and rapport with learners be included in the SBE assessment tool in the professional profile. University A should align the terminology in lesson preparation with new terminology as indicated in the Department of Education documents such as CAPS. University B should use a five Likert scale.

Both tools should measure concepts that can encourage learner centered approach. The study results can be used as benchmark for the best SBE assessment tool to be used to indicate good quality of teachers produced by the Universities. Effective teachers are those who produce gains in learner achievement as measured by gains in standardized tests. Therefore, the tool needs to gather evidence for teacher effectiveness and display sufficient resources to produce high quality and productive assessment. Moreover, the teacher assessment tool should entail theories such as transfer of learning, pedagogical techniques that cater for learner characteristics and the curriculum among others. It is recommended that a combination of the two tools would make a better tool as illustrated on developing a Likert-scale questionnaire.

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