Case study

Impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on Learning Experiences of Teachers-in –Training: Case of Second Year Student Teachers

Abstract:

This study was qualitative descriptive case study. The main aim of the study was to assess the impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on the learning experiences of second year student teachers on teaching practice during the Covid 19 Pandemic. Seven student teachers from a class of 55 were purposively sampled and interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were used. Data collected was transcribed and coded . Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Results indicate that there were both negative and positive impacts on the student teachers learning experiences due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. The major negative impacts were the disruption of the teaching practice sequence to the extent that they could not thoroughly master some of the competencies due to the limited contact time with the school pupils and mentors during the prolonged lock down, Some of the student teachers indicated that to some extent, there was also negative effect on their mental health and social life as they were continually under stress due to the unpredictableness of the outcomes of the pandemic. This resulted in learning gaps. On the other hand there were positive side of the Covid 19 Pandemic. The shift to blended learning and integration of technology in the assessment of teaching practice was a major advancement in the teacher training profession. In addition, the students developed resilience and a spirit of solidarity which gave them a sense of belonging and caring for each other during hard times.
Key words: Student-teacher; Teaching Practice; Covid 19 Pandemic.

Introduction

The Covid 19 Pandemic resulted in a lot of drastic disruptions in different sectors of life in almost every country. This includes health sector, economic and education sectors. Most educational institutions (Universities, colleges and even schools) had to be closed for some months. This resulted in great disruptions in the teacher training programs as they are linked to Primary, Secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Although teacher training institutions are classified as tertiary educational institutions, the teachers in training do their practical hands- on learning in secondary schools and primary schools. Hence any disruption

at primary or secondary level would have a ripple effect on tertiary educational institutions, especially teacher training institutions.

Literature Review

The process of training to be a competent classroom practitioner is follows a specific program with sequential stages. Each of these stages has some crucial significance. One has to follow the clearly laid out curriculum. Most Diploma Teacher training courses in Zimbabwe take 3 years, broken down into two theory components and one practical component. The 3-3-3 model of teacher training comprises of one year of theory, one year of practical and one final year of theory. Usually, the theory precedes the practical and then theory also comes at the end of program. This is designed in such a manner so that lecturers have an opportunity to visit teachers in training at their schools of attachment during the teaching practice so as to observe the actual teaching experience of each student teacher, point out and correct the errors made during practical teaching sessions. Usually second year teachers in training go out for teaching practice- where they teach under supervision of a full trained teacher for one full year or longer. Teaching practice is the core business of student teachers during the second year. According to the Collins Dictionary teaching practice is **a period that a student teacher spends teaching at a school as part of his or her training**.
(https://www.collinsdictionary.com › dictionary › english). This concept *teaching practice* is an umbrella term that represents a set of specific preparation for teaching and the actual hands –on teaching experiences which student teachers are expected to be actively engaged in as they work under mentorship and supervision in real life classrooms and schools (Marais and Meier, 2004)

The process of training to be a seasoned classroom practitioner hinges on thorough and well-grounded teaching practice. Teaching Practice is a pivotal and integral component of teacher training (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009), Without adequate experience during teaching practice, the product, (the teachers in trained) will come out as substandard professionals. As an integral part of teacher education, Teaching practice is expected to allow student-teachers to apply the theories learnt in the first year of training into practice (Mannathoko, 2013). This is the time to prepare them for the real world of the teaching profession. During teaching practice the student-teachers are given the opportunity to have pre-conference session with their supervisors, practice the techniques they learnt in real life teaching under observation or supervision of mentors, have post conference after a practical teaching supervision discussing areas of weakness and how

to improve. The student teacher should have several of these supervision and observation sessions, continuously improving their competencies. Hence the student teacher should be engaged in teaching practice for a full year or longer, being exposed to the classroom work, from first term to third term. It is similar to undertaking a long journey to some anticipated destination. However, although there may be a clear road map to guide, there may be surprises along the road such as land-slides, accidents and sometimes detours. Similarly, those who were enrolled for teacher training during the Covid 19 Pandemic era met with many unexpected experiences in their training process. Although some experiences threatened to be disastrous for some; for others, the training experiences during a pandemic turned out to be serendipities leading to great opportunities.

Like any other event of life, the Covid 19 Pandemic has both positive and negative impacts (Magomedov Khaliev· and Khubolov, 2020). The aim of this study was to explore the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on the learning experiences of second year teachers-in-training. The Covid 19 Pandemic resulted in drastic disruptions in the teacher training program, particularly the second year students who had just started their teaching practice. It is during this second year of teacher training that the student teacher is expected to carry out an action research project at a school. The closure of schools was declared in March, 2020, towards the end of first term. This meant that the teachers on teaching practice had barely completed their first term of practical hands on teaching. They were still in the process of deciding on a feasible research project to embark on during the second term. This disruption due to this sudden lockdown stretched for almost 6 months. Schools were reopened for the last two months of the year. Hence instead of teaching for 3 full terms, these second year students had the opportunity to practice teaching under the supervision of their mentors for only the first three months and the last two months of the year. The major challenge was on how they could cover up for lost time, closing up this large gap and yet they were still novices or amateurs in the field. According to (Yin, 2017) cited in Moss, case studies are designed to answer specific research questions. This case study sought to find answers to the following questions: What challenges did the second year students face during the Covid 19 Pandemic. How did the Covid 19 affect different students in teacher training programs? What coping strategies did the students develop during the Covid 19 Pandemic. What lessons were learnt for disaster preparedness through the Pandemic experience?

The Covid 19 Pandemic had drastic and extensive impacts on education that both educators and the students were greatly affected. School closures due to COVID-19 brought significant disruptions to education across the globe resulting in major learning losses (Donnely, Patrinos & Gresham, 2021). In order to reverse these long-term negative impacts there is an urgent need to adjust to the new normal and map the way forward. The adjustments being made to the 'new normal' mean having to find new ways to work and live, and this includes new approaches to education and training.

Another new development associated with the impacts of Covid 19 Pandemic was the incorporation of **distance learning or remote learning as some describe it. T**he shift the traditional face to face, to remote learning (learning from home) had both positive and negative impacts on educational outcomes and wellbeing of students (Brown, Riele, Shelley & Woodroffe , 2020). While some students enjoyed the benefits of remote learning such as reducing on transport costs and being with family, remote learning is also associated with greater pressure on the students' time due to several demands from their home bubble and other commitments. This had significant impacts and exacerbated their stress levels. (Godber & Atkins, 2021). In brief, Covid 19 Pandemic had both negative and positive impacts. These impacts of COVID-19 have great significance especially in the education and training of teachers, as this may have ripple effects, especially thinking of post pandemic adjustments and the quality of the product produced from the teacher training institutions.

Methodology

This study was carried out at a University that trains teachers for a Diploma. It follows a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study to explore the lived experiences of teachers in training. A descriptive case study focuses on responding to propositions and questions pertaining to a specific phenomenon. The ultimate goal of a descriptive case study is to carry out an in depth assessment of a sample based on well-articulated questions on a descriptive theory (https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyc-of-case-study-research/n108.xml). A case study was the best for the nature of this study as it could allow the researcher to carry out in depth interviews with the participants. The uniqueness of the curriculum component of second year teacher training program (designed to have the students engage in practical teaching to Primary school under the mentorship of an experienced

teacher) requires an in depth interviews involved in a case study. In depth interviews solicit for detailed, thick descriptions of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2017). This case of student teachers affected by the Covid 19 Pandemic while they were at the Teaching practice stage is a unique case hence the findings may not be generalized to other situations. However, there are great lessons learnt for the experiences of these second year students, how they managed to cope, resilience developed and disaster preparedness

The participants of this research were a class of 55 second year students in a teacher training program in Zimbabwe. Seven second year students (consisting of six females and one male) were purposefully sampled as participants of this study. This was representative enough since the whole group of 55 students consisted of 54 females and one male student. These research participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The impacts of the Covid 19 Pandemic were so tragic that some of the respondents were emotional and very reserved and brief in their responses. However, in some cases, the researcher gently probed and had some follow- up questions so as to get a holistic understanding of the case. Since the aim of the study was to get an in-depth understanding of a specific situation of second year teachers-in- training during the Covid 19 Pandemic context, interviews were carried out with several students till the point of saturation when the responses were more or less similar then the sample was enough. This gave a representative view of the population under study. However, these findings may not be generalized to a different setting.

Results Data Analysis
The impact of Covid 19 impacted almost all sectors of the student learning. Data collected through interviews was coded and transcribed in order to find themes and patterns. Each participant was coded with a "D" for Diploma and a number. The researcher used inductive thematic data analysis. This involved organizing the data with similar concepts first in broad clusters then further analysis narrowed these into few key themes. Other unique themes that emerged were also noted. The impacts of Covid 19 have been grouped into themes based on the responses to the main research questions. These are discussed in the following passages.

Impact on Academic life
The major goal of the student at any educational institution is optimal learning. The Covid 19 Pandemic had both positive and negative impacts of the educational experiences of the

participants. Anything that disrupts the learning process and jeopardizes the chances of achieving this supreme goal is considered a negative impact or a major challenge. In this study, the major challenges encountered by learners are; academic, financial, social and personal challenges and Health challenges. These are discussed below as reported by the respondents.

Most of the respondents echoed similar sentiments such as academic disruptionsS, finances, social and health aspects as the major academic challenges. The academic challenges repeatedly pointed out by most respondents are; inadequate contact hours for teaching practice, less assistance from mentors, disruptions in the research project, sudden transition to go and finish at the main campus, switching to online learning using unreliable internet and challenges with communication, especially language barrier in communicating with early childhood learners, tackling backlog of assignments. This was evidenced in some of the responses from the participants; as noted by some respondents. One such student (D2) put it this way "*l could not have enough time to learn from my new mentor. I spend the whole term sitting at my parents' house".* Another respondent (D5) described their experience as "half-baked training"; She said; *"Covid has affected my teaching practice. We failed to finish properly, this means we are not fully baked… Research project also was supposed to be done during teaching practice but it all failed to finish it".*

Due to the prolonged lock down, these students on teaching practice were in limbo for almost half of the year. They could not work on schemes and lesson plans, neither could they work on research projects because they needed use the learners as research participants yet they could not gather these learners during the lockdown. They could not interact directly with their mentors nor be assisted to carry out the research project. Remaining in this state of uncertainty for long resulted in mental strain. As pointed out earlier, the second year students had their time for practical teaching extremely shortened yet they still needed to cover the teaching material according to the syllabus as well as complete the project before the end of the year. This could mean putting in extra hours in order to finish the project in time or mean that their graduation timeline would be affected by the pandemic.

Impact on Finances

Covid 19 Pandemic resulted with many compounded financial challenges for most people. One challenge would lead to another and hence the problem became compounded. Some

sponsors got infected with the Corona virus and so had to be quarantined and meanwhile incurring unexpected expenses. Some eventually lost jobs. Some of the students whose sponsors were thus affected could not afford rental charges so they had to relocate as indicated in the following reports from some of the students; Respondent D4 said "I could not finish my TP due to financial problems, i could not afford accommodation in Bulawayo, so I had to go back home". Another respondent, D6, testified that; there are two ladies who dropped out the school in our department of teacher training program. First reason was that one student lost her both parents due to Covid 19 Pandemic since they were the ones who were paying her school fees. She discovered that she was there were no one who was to pay for her. She decided to drop out the school and started to look for her young brothers and sisters since she was the eldest of the family."

D6 went on to cite another painful incidence as follows; "In another family there were two brothers who worked in South Africa. These two brothers were stricken by COVID 19 and were quarantined there. Unfortunately these two gentlemen eventually lost their jobs. These two boys are the ones who were paying school fees for their sister… so she ended up dropped the school due to financial problems".

According to respondent D5, the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic hit hard on the self -employed, hustlers, as she put it : " Financially we were greatly affected, some of us our parents they are hustlers and because of Covid 19(lockdown) … paying of fees was a big struggle." The little income available had to be spread so as to cover transport, of traveling to school, transport was limited, too expensive because they were trying to cover up for their loss. School assignments were also a challenge, there was no money to print out since our source of income was affected". Respondent D7 shared similar sentiments; "*because of the pandemic we were forced indoors leading to the fact that we nolonger had the opportunity to go out and manage our daily finances that we obtained before the pandemic making it hard for the payment of school fees ,travelling to school as the bus fares were now high"*. Respondent D3 expressed that the situation was so dire that they had to learn to prioritize school work " *I had no pocket money the money l was sent would go straight to buy meal tickets, or to print out assignments. Sometimes l would not buy bread this means l would eat porridge until l received enough money to buy bread"*

Although the second year students went through tough financial challenges, they students learnt to be economic and prioritize their education. They learnt to spend money responsibly.

Impact on Social life

The social impacts of the Covid 19 Pandemic were both short term and long term. As the lock down was extended, the prolonged stay at home in idleness resulted in early marriages for some of the students. Respondednts D 1, pointed out that *" l have 2 friends who dropped out during the pandemic...by residing at home for a long time they had a peer pressure of getting married (kutizira) and their husbands failed to pay fees for them to continue with school.*" Others were affected to extent that they became withdrawn and could not open up to their colleagues as reported by respondent D2.*" Yes, I have , 2 friends, both of them dropped out . The reasons where not clear . They did not wish to share".* This was indeed painful to see class mates dropping out of the teacher training program, according to respondent D3 " *If there is something that pained me most it was the dropping out of two members from my group. My prayer always was, "please dear God help us to finish together. This dropping out of these two members affected me a lot ...One girl dropped out because she had eloped to a man without being pregnant. The man would not allow her to go to school, so we did not see her again...The other girl did not come back to school and the reason is not known."* Respondent D7 also indicated that there were more than two students who dropped out; "*a number of students dropped out as they were no longer financially stable ,life became hard for the payment of school fees and other personal needs .Due to the long process that we stayed at home some students could not make it back because some became mother's and some father's hence responsibilities forced them to drop out ".*

Although there were some sad incidences, the group learnt solidarity and altruistic behaviours. They care for each other and shared food and cared for each other's financial and material needs. One respondent D4, stated that "*When my money ran out I stayed without food for one meal then next day l was given a meal tickets by my friend, the money was then send on the after two days".*

Impact on Health

The host of challenges posed by the Covid 19 Pandemic, if not well managed lead to stress and mental health challenges. As the infections were escalating many were living stressful lives fearing contracting the virus; as respondent D1 stated it, *The cases of COVID 19 were increasing and many children in my class were coughing, l would teach but with fear . There was a time l had flu, prior that l would see my mentor scolding a child who coughs in the class saying go home do you want to give us Covid. l had a hard time l tried by all means to suppress that flu inorder to make my mentor comfortable for she did not want to hear anyone coughing or sneezing".*

Some of the students were also stressed about the financial issues. Respondent D4 reported that *"I once received a message that was saying if you had not paid fees by the end of the month*

your Moodle would be closed. I kept on calling home reminding my father about the school fees. l then called home to my mother, she was so stressed until l was directed to my uncle, this is where l finally got my fees"…. "I managed to finish my teaching practice with the grace of the Lord" she added. The stressful situations through which the second year teachers in training faced helped them to become resilient, bold and prepared should any disaster come up. Both respondent D1 and D3 concurred that . According to D1. although the sudden shift to e-learning was stressful she confesses that; *"I now have knowledge with the online learning so that students will continue learning when disaster comes".* Then D3 added that *"the use of e-learning greatly helped us as teachers in training for we would learn at home during the peak of COVID 19. I really appreciate".*

In brief it could be concluded that although the Covid 19 Pandemic had both positive and negative impacts; the negative impacts far outweigh the positive impacts. The pandemic resulted in job losses for different employees, with low-paid workers, young people, women, ethnic minorities, the self-employed and informal and fixed-term workers among the hardest hit by the crisis (Fana, Torrejón Pérez, & Fernández-Macías, 2020).

Looking at the positive impacts; the Covid 19 Pandemic resulted with some beneficial outcomes, as pointed out by a Wharton School professor Adam Grant "About half of people will emerge from this pandemic with post-traumatic growth". This is the bright side of any stressful situation, (Thorpe, 2021). Every cloud has a silver lining. So we can build on the positives, using some of the stumbling blocks as stepping stones for progress. People learnt to explore new ways of learning such as adopting blended learning and taking e- learning seriously. Social platforms such as Whatsapp, were used for learning, reaching out to students in remote areas. Both student and lecturers had to up-skill, reskill or recharge their competencies. Some of the respondents made the following comments; Respondent D1 said. *"I now have knowledge with the online learning so that I will continue learning when disaster comes".* Respondent D3 also expressed appreciation *" I would like to appreciate the use of e-learning, this greatly helped us as teachers in training, for we would learn at home at the heat of COVID 19. I really appreciate. I would suggest that they should improve on the provision of better quality facilities in order to make e-learning effective. E-learning was a good way to go".*

Lessons learnt and Recommendations for disaster preparedness

The Covid 19 Pandemic was a wake-up call to most institutions which had relaxed about being alert and prepared for unexpected disasters. There are several lessons that were learnt through the Covid 19 Pandemic experience. Disaster preparedness is of paramount

significance in the development of resilience and post-pandemic recovery. Hence, the re-skilling and up-skilling of lecturers and students is of paramount significance so as to be able to deal with any other similar crisis should it show up in future. Both lecturers and students should be encouraged to be flexible in their planning, acquire additional skill sets through available short face to face or online courses. Educational institutions are encouraged to offer such courses free of subsidize these for their employees. In addition institutions are encouraged to always save for the rainy day and have alternative plans including flexible fees payment plans in case disaster strikes. Respondents also indicated that provision of adequate academic counselling, developing networks among students and teachers is also very necessary to strengthening relationships, moral support and a sense of belonging for the students. Respondent D3 pointed out that it would be good if "*the lecturers should also encourage the students to always finish what they have started in life if possible do some follow up on their student to see if they are still alive, if they are still coming back to school, to see the challenges their students are facing and if possible offer solutions and advice. The Lecturers should also pray with their students this will strengthen and motivates the students… would be of great help, even if another disasters strikes who knows*".

One of the most appreciated the strategies to alleviate the negative effects of this pandemic was the proactive role played Student Representative Council (SRC) by offering free lunch for all students through out the students stay on campus during the pandemic. In appreciation one respondent, D2 says; "*I thanked the Lord in one of the days l had no meal tickets and l would sleep without food were it not for the SRC and my friend. The SRC said we are offering everyone free lunch, on that day l was saved.*"

I had no pocket money the money l was sent would go straight to buy meal tickets, or to print out my assignments. Sometimes l would not buy bread this means l would eat porridge until l received money to buy bread. Through such rough experiences, the second year teachers in training learnt to be flexible, resilient and to prioritize their education.

Conclusion

The study sought to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the learning experiences of second year students teachers in training. The results from the seven interviewed students indicate that apart from the usual financial and academic challenges such as delays in payment of fees, poor academic performance most students experienced deep rooted problems emanating from

the Covid 19 Pandemic. Such challenges ranged from inadequate learning experience due to insufficient contact time with their mentors, inadequate exposure to real life classroom practical teaching and mental stress due to living in the pandemic era where the future is always unpredictable. Since most of the teachers in training are married, they also faced the challenge social and personal challenges due to conflicting roles. This led to mental strain due to failure to maintain a balance between school and home life since the pandemic affected some members of their families. Mental strain was also exacerbated by feelings of fear of contracting the Corona virus. The respondents also indicated a dire need for effective communication, prayer, moral support and sound academic counselling from the lecturers and responsible departments. Despite the negative impacts, the students developed a spirit of unity and solidarity, exhibited through communicating in a warm and friendly networking among the students which kept most of them going because it gave them a sense of belonging and connection to others at their institution so they feel they have shared burdens and shared vision. Most of the second year students indicated appreciation for the provision of free lunches when they were on Campus which greatly alleviated their financial burden. Although only 6 of the 55 students dropped out, amazingly, it seems none of them lost their lives to Corona virus. Through these experiences several lessons on disaster preparedness were learnt. The study recommends that that everyone, especially institution leaders should be prepared for the unexpected, have with plan B, save for the rainy day, learn to network with others, develop flexibility skills so as to be resilient should another unexpected disaster strike.

References

Brown, Riele, Shelley & Woodroffe (2020) Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians.
.https://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1324268/Learning-at-home-during-COVID-19-updated.pdf

Collins Dictionary, https://www.collinsdictionary.com › dictionary › english

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (pp. 77-83)

Donnelly, R. Patrinos, & Gresham, (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 on Education – Recommendations and Opportunities for Ukraine. OPINION APRIL 2, 2021 https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/04/02/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-recommendations-and-opportunities-for-ukraine

Fana, M. et al. (2020), *The COVID confinement measures and EU labour markets*, EUR 30190 EN 30190 IT, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, http://dx.doi.org/10.2760/079230. https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/an-assessment-of-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-job-and-skills-demand-using-online-job-vacancy-data-20fff09e/

Godber KA and Atkins DR (2021) COVID-19 Impacts on Teaching and Learning: A Collaborative Autoethnography by Two Higher Education Lecturers. *Front. Educ.* 6:647524. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2021.647524 **https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.647524/full**

Human Rights Watch, (2020) https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/26/impact-covid-19-childrens-education-africa

- Kiggundu, E.M. & Nayimuli, S.T. (2009).Teaching practice: a make or break phase for student teachers: South African Journal of Education, 29(3), 345-358. DOI: 10.15700/saje.v29n3a129 https://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/45174

Magomedov˙ I. A.   Khaliev˙ M S-U and Khubolov, S. M.; (2020)   The negative and positive impact of the pandemic on education. Published under licence by IOP Publishing Ltd Journal of Physics: Conference Series, Volume 1691, 1st International Scientific Conference «ASEDU-2020: Advances in Science, Engineering and Digital Education» 8-9 October 2020, Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation, I A Magomedov *et al* 2020 *J. Phys.: Conf. Ser.* **1691** 012134

Mannathoko, M. C. (2013) Does Teaching Practice Effectively Prepare Student-Teachers to Teach: Creative and Performing Arts? The Case of Botswana

Maphosa, C., Shumba, J & Shumba A. (2010) Mentorship for students on teaching practice in Zimbabwe: Are student teachers getting a raw deal?

DOI: 10.4314/sajhe.v21i2.25637

https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajhe/article/view/25637

https://www.voced.edu.au/focus-impact-covid-19-education-and-training

Marais P & Meier C 2004. Hear our voices: student teacher's experience during practical teaching. *Africa Education Review*, 1:220-233.   http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-01002009000300004

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (pp. 135-136)

Mills, Durepos & Wiebe (ed). (2010), Descriptive Case Study
In: Encyclopedia of Case Study Research. https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyc-of-case-study-research/n108.xml

Moss, S   CASE STUDIES - THE YIN APPROACH. **- Charles Darwin University**
https://www.cdu.edu.au › files › Introduction to c...

Thorpe, D. (2020) Prepare now for the post pandemic future of your career.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2020/05/15/prepare-now-for-the-post-pandemic-future-of-your-career/?sh=533955885587

Voced:Plus Learning At Home During Covid-19: Effects On Vulnerable Young Australians: Independent Rapid Response Report Https://Www.Voced.Edu.Au/Focus-Impact-Covid-19-Education-And-Training

.