

Anxieties Faced by History Student-Teachers during Teaching Practice

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Abstract

Teachers are important inputs in the educational enterprise. Their level of competence largely depends on the training they receive. Teaching practice is the grounds on which prospective teachers gather enough experiences to make them better and effective teachers in the future. However, due to the over-engaging and multi-tasking nature of the profession, student-teachers on teaching practice encounter a number of anxiety inducing factors that often wear them down. As such, they describe teaching practice as the most stressful component of their training. This paper attempts to discuss three of such anxiety-inducing areas to the History student-teacher which are heavy workload, classroom management, and lesson supervision. It also puts forward recommendations to ensure that such anxieties are overcome to enhance the successes of future teaching practices.

Keywords: teaching practice, anxiety, student-teachers, heavy workload, classroom management, supervision.

1. Introduction

Education is seen the world over an important instrument for development in every human society. There is no single civil society which does not link its current state of development to the contribution of education. At the core of every educational endeavor is the teacher. Saban & Cokler (2013) point out that different factors have effect on the education of people and one of the most important of these factors is the teacher. They outline the roles of the teacher as including shaping the terminal behaviors of the students, helping the student to have positive relationships and making them skillful and disciplined. Ankuma (2007) also contends that the teacher is the vehicle on which education thrives, and is therefore indispensable. The quality of the human capital of any nation depends on the quality of education it offers, and that is also determined by the quality of teachers who teach (Republic of Ghana, 2002). It is therefore widely acknowledged that the role of teachers in the quality of education is vital. Teachers' competence, confidence, dedication, and general predisposition towards the profession are however informed by the kind of education or training they receive. Ankuma (2007) points out that teacher education is critical because it produces the right calibre of teachers to deliver.

To meet the professional standards of the educational field, various institutions have been established to produce high quality teachers. According to the Presidential Committee on the Review of Education Reform in Ghana, teacher education and training in Ghana is undertaken by the Colleges of Education who produce professionals for the basic level, and the University of Cape Coast and University of Education who are mandated to produce teachers for the second-cycle institutions (Republic of Ghana, 2002).

In the Colleges of Education, trainee teachers spend the first two years on the college campus and are taught academic courses in the subjects taught at the basic level. They are also exposed to curriculum studies integrated with methodology, demonstration lessons and campus-based practice teaching. In the third and final year, trainees embark on an off-campus teaching practice to gain practical experience (Ankuma 2007). In the Universities, a similar pattern is followed. In the first three years, prospective teachers are exposed to the theoretical issues and philosophical underpinnings of their various subject areas and also engage in micro-teaching sessions. In the first semester of the final year, students go out for the off-campus teaching practice in any lower level school to teach their major subjects.

This "Out" programme, as Ankuma (2007) posits, is envisaged to make trainees more effective for teaching after training. However, due to the complex nature of the profession, and its attendant demands, student-teachers mostly report various forms of stress and anxiety during their field experience in teaching. These anxieties, if not addressed, may affect student-teachers' performance during teaching practice and may in the long run affect their perception of the teaching profession.

2. The Problem

Teaching is an exciting and rewarding activity but it is demanding as its practitioners are required to clearly understand what should be done to bring about the most desirable learning in the pupil and be highly proficient in the skills necessary to carry out these tasks (Azeem, 2011). Bhargava (2009) argues that the teaching process is multitasking. Aggarwal (cited in Ghansah, 2009) notes that the teaching of Social Studies and History demands more ingenuity from teachers as these subjects demand well prepared conscientious teachers of sound knowledge. It is in a bid for teachers to meet the demands of the profession that their training do not only aim at "imparting theoretical but also practical knowledge and skill in teaching different subjects to prospective

teachers” (Azeem 2011, p. 309).

Teaching practice is the ground on which this practical skill or experience is gained. Teaching practice, also referred to as professional experience, practice teaching or field experience, is a period when student-teachers obtain a first-hand experience in teaching. “It

is the practical use of teaching methods, teaching strategies, teaching principles, teaching techniques and practical training and practice or exercise of different activities of daily school life” (Nwanekezi, Okoli, & Mezieobi, 2011, p.42.) To Azeem (2011), it is an opportunity for student-teachers to make their theoretical knowledge practical. Komba & Kira (2013) also contend that the overall purpose of teaching practice is to expose student-teachers to the actual teaching and learning environment.

During teaching practice, student-teachers are expected to exhibit the highest level of professionalism. They are regarded as part of the teaching staff and are supposed to act in accordance with the established structures of the school. Like any other teacher, History student-teachers are expected to prepare lesson notes and appropriate teaching aids, deliver lessons, give and mark exercises and assignments, and manage their classrooms. They are also to be regular and punctual at school, exhibit acceptable personality traits, and develop good inter-personal relationship with other mentees and permanent staff. (Ankuma 2007; Bhargava 2009). Bhargava (2009) further observes that these demands constitute a heavy workload which exhausts the student-teachers. As a result of these demands, teaching practice is seen by many student-teachers as the most stressful component of the undergraduate teacher curriculum. This is because student-teachers have to struggle with the emotional stress generated by the realities of classroom teaching such as learner behaviour, teaching colleagues and time constraints as well as the demands of academic life (Wagenaar, 2005). These student-teacher experiences create a number of worries and anxieties, sometimes resulting in high levels of stress and restlessness (Turan 2011). The researcher, having experienced similar conditions in the school where he taught History during the teaching practice, deem it expedient to explore the anxiety that History student-teachers experience while on teaching practice.

3. Related Literature

3.1 The Meaning of Anxiety

Anxiety could be defined as the uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future (Cambridge, 2012). Barlow (2002) viewed anxiety as a future-oriented mood state associated with preparation for possible upcoming negative events. Anxiety could also be seen as the apprehension or excessive fear about real or imagined circumstances (American National Association of School Psychologists, 2004). From the foregoing, anxiety can thus be explained as an emotion characterised by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes which can affect performance. Lang (1968) classified the symptoms of anxiety into a system of three-responses: verbal-subjective, overt motor acts, and somato-visceral activity. In this system, the symptoms of anxiety include worry, avoidance, and muscle tension.

The American National Association of School Psychologists (2004) also points out that anxiety affects people’s feelings, body response, behaviours, and thoughts. According to the Scottish Department of Clinical Psychology (2005), an anxious person experiences physical feelings and worrying thoughts which make it hard to do even simple tasks. Eyesenck (cited in Gelman, 2004) contends that anxiety comprises two distinct components: worry and emotionality. According to her, worry is the cognitive aspect of anxiety while emotionality relates to the physiological aspect. She adds that these two components of anxiety create a feeling of tension and nervousness among student-teachers. This view is supported by the American National Association of School Psychologists who posits that the central characteristic of anxiety is worry, that is, an excessive concern about situations with uncertain outcomes.

Sammephet & Wanphet (2013) observe that teachers’ anxiety is a major concern not only to experienced teachers but also to student-teachers. They add that the negative impact of anxiety always has a strong influence on the teaching performance of student-teachers particularly in the first encounter with students in the History classroom.

3.2 Areas of anxiety to student-teachers

According to Ngidi & Sibaya (2003), findings of empirical studies indicate that a high level of anxiety among student-teachers may be tied to various negative consequences such as class control problems and classroom disruptions. McKeachie (cited in Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013) divides student-teachers’ anxieties into three stages including ‘before teaching hour’, ‘while-teaching hour’, and ‘after teaching hour’. During the ‘before-teaching hour’, the student-teacher is worried about planning lessons or preparing materials for a successful lesson. During the ‘while-teaching hour’, teachers are worried about unexpected situations, among which are the teachers’ anxiety over interaction with students, over time management, over classroom management as well as over the presence of a supervisor. In the ‘after-teaching hour’, the anxieties still remain because the teachers are worried about feedback from their supervisors especially if the feedback is unfavourable.

MacDonald (cited in Wagenaar, 2005) identified the following factors as the main reasons that make student-

teachers feel constant pressure: lack of role clarification, not knowing the expectations of the host teacher, feeling the need to fit into existing practices and teaching styles, the lack of time to talk to the host teacher as well as the actual evaluation procedure. Bhargava (2009) also cited six anxiety inducing areas for student-teachers during teaching practice. These are lesson planning, classroom management, heavy workload, timetable of the school, evaluation by a supervisor, and less preparatory time before teaching practice.

Turan (2011) revealed that student-teachers are anxious about factors such as evaluation, classroom management, pedagogy and staff relations and that female student-teachers are more anxious compared to their male counterparts in the teaching practicum. He again found inconsistencies in the way student teachers are assessed, varying expectations of supervisors related to their performance in class, and the poor quality of feedback given to student-teachers by their mentors and supervisors as other areas of anxiety for student-teachers.

The following paragraphs of the literature dwells on three major anxiety inducing areas which are heavy workload, classroom management, and supervision.

3.2.1 Heavy workload

The History student-teacher, like any other student teacher, is expected meet the standard required of a professional teacher. As such they engaged in all forms of activities, be they academic or non-academic, that are part of the school system. According to Kyriacou & Stephens (1999), coping with the general workload of being a teacher tend to scare many student-teachers. They opine that despite the fact that student-teachers normally have a much reduced timetable, they are faced with having to undertake many tasks as well as teaching topics for the first time. This means that the time they need to devote to planning and preparation, finding and developing appropriate teaching materials, mastering the subject matter, and conducting the necessary assessment of pupils' progress, including marking any written work, all takes much longer than it would for an experienced teacher (Kyriacou & Stephens 1999). Ghanaguru, Nair, & Yong (2013) identify lesson planning as a problematic and anxiety inducing area especially for student teachers. Bhargava (2009) explains that lesson planning induces anxiety when what is planned fail to match up with what actually transpires in the classroom and student-teachers have to mentally re-adjust or replan their written lesson plan. According to her, some student-teachers report of sleepless nights during teaching practice, as they have to prepare lesson plans and teaching aids for a number of periods the next day. This is enough to make student-teachers nervous.

Turan's (2011) study also found that planning, preparation, teaching, testing and doing some office work was agreed upon by 80% of student-teachers as an important source of anxiety. Again it was found that some supervisors preferred simple lesson plans while others expected a detailed lesson plan. Detailed lesson plans was found to be boring and stressful to the student-teachers as they had to rehearse the plan many times and implement it in the classroom, thus, adding up to their anxiety.

Ankuma (2007) also points out that the anxiety level of student-teachers are increased by the demand to spare time for and be involved in all co-curricular activities of the school as well as write their projects. In a study on student-teachers' concerns during teaching practice, Kyriacou & Stephens (1999) reported that student-teachers indicated a sense of tiredness and, in some cases, sheer exhaustion. Also, most of them imagined how they would cope with a full-time teaching post on taking up a first appointment.

Similarly, Tomlinson (1995) pointed to how the sheer intensity of the experience of being a student-teacher, based on the physical demands it makes and the high level of uncertainty they face, can lead to high levels of stress. Capel (1997) in a study on changes in practicum students' anxieties and concerns after their first and second teaching practices also pointed out that student-teachers complain of too many instructional duties making them feel under pressure most of the time. These studies indicate how heavy workload during teaching practice induces stress and anxiety in student-teachers, not excepting those in the field of History.

3.2.2 Classroom Management

Effective classroom management is defined by Chamundeswari (2013) as a climate emphasizing and conducive to proper learning, good behaviour and positive inter-personal relationships. She adds that classroom management is a major area of concern for teachers as ineffective management leads to serious conditions of indiscipline causing damage to the conducive climate for learning. Kyriacou & Stephens (1999) support this view by noting that a major area of concern for practice teachers is maintaining good discipline in the classroom and dealing successfully with pupils who misbehave. They reported in their study that the student-teachers referred to misdemeanours such as noisy behavior in class, cheekiness in corridors, talking when the teacher is talking as management issues that caused them exhaustion.

Preece (cited in Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999) reported that discipline problems often led to high levels of anxiety in student-teachers. He also found that in some cases, a high level of anxiety by students during teaching practice actually appeared to be a cause of discipline problems. Another study by Tuli (2006) showed that student misbehavior in school served as a de-motivative factor that discouraged student-teachers to accomplish their task effectively.

Mapfumo, Chitsiko, & Chireshe (2012) studied teaching practice generated stressors among student-teachers in Zimbabwe and reported that the introduction of the mentees as 'student-teachers' posed management problems

in their classrooms. According to the report, the fact that they (mentees) were introduced to the learners as student-teachers demoralised the student-teachers and also gave learners in the school the courage to undermine the authority of the student-teachers in and outside the classroom. The respondents thus attributed difficulty in managing classrooms to difficult learners who disrespected especially the female student teachers.

Sammephet & Wanphet (2013) adds that the reason for the anxiety in managing student behavior is the unfamiliarity with secondary school students as student-teachers had microteaching experience with university students. Also, according to a study by Turan (2011), 72% of the respondents reported that having lack of knowledge about the pupils they worked with and lack of experience as to how to cope with various problems regarding classroom management created anxiety.

In her study, Bhargava (2009) also found that in some of the schools visited by student-teachers, the impish behaviour of the children caused disturbance in the class and impeded effective classroom management. She attributed classroom management problems to student-teachers inability to identify with the children, or the fact that the topic to be taught by them was already covered in the class by the regular teacher. Goh & Matthews (2011) also noted that participants reported that classroom management was their most worrisome issue. The foregoing classroom management scenarios add up to the tensions and anxieties the History student-teacher goes through during teaching practice.

3.2.3 Supervision

Supervision is an essential component of teaching practice. According to Bashir, Malik, & Bashir (2004) teaching practice is basically the act of teaching under the supervision of an experienced teacher. They add that the task of supervisor is to help the interns make sense of their experiences as well as help each intern find the pattern in his or her success or failures. Oppong (2013) explains that in the University of Cape Coast, supervision is done by the University lecturers who observe student-teachers and give remarks on their lessons. He adds that the remarks of supervisors are important in shaping trainees to turn out into effective History teachers.

Marais (2013) points out that the reality of assessment causes anxiety brought on by being observed and criticised by a mentor teacher. Again, the pressure of acting and teaching in a correct and proper way makes student-teachers tense and causes fear and anxiety. Kyriacou & Stephens (1999) described it as 'evaluation anxiety', that is, "anxiety induced by being observed by one's university tutor and by teachers at the teaching practice school" (p.18).

A study by Capel (1997), reported that the main cause of anxiety for the student teachers during teaching practice was being observed, evaluated and assessed. Another study by Sannephet & Wanphet (2013) reported that student-teachers' anxiety levels increased when their supervisors went to observe their teaching, especially the first class. The study also showed that the student-teachers were afraid that the supervisors would notice their serious mistakes while teaching and that their composure was absolutely affected by the supervisors' reactions. Another finding of the study was that the practice teachers were greatly concerned about the evaluation from supervisors because it would directly affect the final grade.

Bhargava (2009) noted that the pressure of doing things correctly and managing classroom activities properly in the presence of the supervisor make student-teachers tense and apprehensive while teaching. She adds that mental and emotional stress is also felt when comments written on student-teachers' record sheets by their supervisors are unsavoury.

Turan (2011) also reported that student-teachers (100%) rated their major source of anxiety as the feeling of being observed by either a mentor or a university supervisor, or sometimes by both, and the feeling of being assessed and evaluated. This according to the study made student-teachers monitor themselves more than necessary as they were afraid of making mistakes. These studies ascribe much of the student-teachers' anxiety to supervision. It could be deduced from the above that History student-teachers experience 'evaluation anxiety' which emanates from being observed by their supervisors during teaching.

4. The way forward

The following recommendations are suggested.

1. History student-teachers should be made aware of the over-engaging nature of teaching the subject before they embark on teaching practice. The teacher-producing universities should implement a compulsory pre-teaching practice attachment for all prospective History teachers during vacations. This would enable the students to come to terms with the demands of the profession and better prepare them for the actual teaching practices. This will in turn reduce their anxiety with heavy workload.
2. Student-teachers should be introduced to the various mechanisms of managing every classroom situation. History students should also take their classroom management strategies during micro-teaching seriously as this would help them gain some experience before the teaching practice.
3. Supervisors should also exercise some restraints in the kind of comment they make on students' lessons. They should conduct the teaching supervision by viewing the mentees as students and not as

experienced teachers. Student-teachers should in turn try and overcome the tensed atmosphere that comes with the presence of the supervisor by using various methods and resources that would engage them and their students. Again, History subject lecturers should train prospective History teachers not only how to teach the subject content but also how to cope with anxiety effectively.

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