Exploring the trajectories of pre-service teachers’ preparation in Business Studies and its impact on their teaching practice experience in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

It has been discovered that pre-service teachers who teach Business Studies (BS) as one of the Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) subjects in South African schools during teaching practice (TP) do not get enough assistance from their mentor teachers as they ought to because they are overloaded with much teaching work at this time. Therefore, the study aims to explore the different trajectories that pre-service teachers take in their preparation for teaching Business Studies, the challenges 4th-year pre-service teachers who specialize in EMS subjects encounter, how they overcome them, and how these trajectories impact their teaching practice experience. Six fourth-year pre-service teachers who taught Business Studies in Grades 10 and 12 were selected for the study to reflect on their experiences during teaching practice; hence, reflection was used as the data source for the study. Experiential learning theory was used as the lens of the study. At the same time, the interpretivism paradigm was adopted to understand individual pre-service experiences. A case study was used as the design, and thematic analysis was adopted to analyze the data generated. The study found that pre-service teachers who teach BS during TP face challenges such as a lack of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), being assigned too much work to do, and the fact that BS has too much content to teach. Despite the challenges, these pre-service teachers were creative enough to develop solutions, like designing posters without teaching resources and using practical examples to explain content for better understanding and parental involvement in class decisions such as discipline. The research question was “How can pre-service teachers who teach Business Studies during TP mitigate challenges encountered”? With two objectives; identifying the challenges pre-service teachers faced while on TP and exploring how pre-service teachers who taught BS while on TP mitigated the challenges faced. Overall, the study seeks to contribute to improving the quality of Business Studies education in South Africa by providing insights into the preparation and experiences of pre-service teachers.

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Introduction

According to observations from pre-service teachers and literature, the teaching of Business Studies (BS) in South African high schools confirms some of the challenges business Studies teachers encounter while delivering the content of the subject and its relevance to students and in the real world (America & Skelly, 2021). The problem of the study is the lack of mentor teachers’ support towards pre-service teachers who teaches business studies during teaching practice (Jita & Munje, 2022). The study is essential to pre-service teachers specialising in BS and the country, especially in the economy. Business Studies empowers learners to be conscious of becoming entrepreneurs, acquire skills to be skilled specialised educators, know their rights as a citizen and many more. However, the South Africa Curriculum and Assessment Policy document (CAPS), BS is a subject offered at high schools from Grade 10 to Grade 12 to provide learners with the opportunities to create, be a problem solver and risk taker, acquire skills and principles of managing businesses both locally and abroad, apply managerial and leadership skills according to CAPS (Curriculum Assessment...
and Policy Statement) (MRTEQ, 2015) just to mention a few; this was implemented to help learners be their employers, create employment for other people, and grow the country’s economy. BS falls under the Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) category in South Africa and is offered by learners in the further education training (FET) phase, that is, between Grade 10 to Grade 12. Business Studies has much content expected to be taught during TP. Therefore, pre-service teachers who taught BS during teaching practice (TP) faced challenges such as workload, lack of teaching material, indiscipline among learners, and lack of content knowledge. Although the challenges do not apply only to Business Studies, as echoed by scholars from other fields of study (Celik et al., 2022), the researchers think BS is a subject with several benefits that both learners and the country’s economy stand to gain if mentors empower pre-service teacher who teaches this subject. So, the gap in the study is that much research has not been conducted in this area; hence, the study aims to explore the challenges pre-service teachers who specialise in BS encounter during teaching practice.

The main research question of the paper: How can pre-service teachers who teach Business Studies during TP mitigate challenges encountered?

This paper aims to investigate challenges pre-service teachers encountered while teaching Business Studies during teaching practice, with research objectives:

i. To identify the challenges pre-service encountered in teaching BS while on TP.

ii. To explore how pre-service teachers who taught BS while on TP mitigated the challenges faced.

**Literature Review**

The successful training of pre-service teachers in South African universities will be incomplete without the intervention of high school teachers, principals, and other stakeholders in education. Although researchers have conducted studies on teaching Business Studies (Dube, 2019; Meintjes et al., 2015), it has revealed little research on teaching BS at the school level. America and Skelly (2021) explained that Business Studies as a school subject should allow the youth to be self-employed and create employment, as envisaged by South Africa’s Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document (Dube, 2019), which means that students who offer the subject have an advantage over those who do not become self-reliant after university. In contrast, Meintjes et al. (2015) explored Business studies from the United States of America education perspective. Because of several benefits associated with this subject, pre-service teachers should work closely with mentor teachers to be knowledgeable and deliver the content since it is confirmed that Business Studies is a school subject and a source of employment opportunities for learners after high school. Again, Business Studies contribute to the county’s economic development if well taught and monitored under the supervision of mentors.

Unfortunately, according to the participants in the study, who were final year pre-service teachers for BS attest that learners who take this subject at school level lack content knowledge, relevant insights, previous knowledge, and the inability to implement CAPS content (Sithole & Lumadi, 2012) which is, therefore, the gap that necessitates this study.

Sometimes, it is believed that Business Studies teachers were found incompetent in delivering content effectively (Mtshali et al., 2022), affecting pre-service teachers under their supervision while on TP. According to Akerman (2012), high school learners who take BS complained of being loaded with too much homework and projects and that BS is comprehensive in content. Hence, they do not enjoy the subject as indicated by the selected participants in the study; this is a pointer to the lack of mentor teachers who would have assisted the pre-service teacher in dealing with the problem. One is the acquisition of problem-solving skills, leadership, strategic thinking, and pedagogical knowledge skills (Wye & Siraj, 2013). These skills help in teaching BS impactfully with the assistance of their mentor teachers. Pre-service teachers who taught BS during teaching practice highlighted the challenges they faced and also how they were able to overcome them; hence for more details on how they overcame the challenges, the researchers adopted qualitative methods, a case study design for the study, while experiential learning theory was used as the theoretical framework (Ndubele & Legg-Jack, 2022; Wye & Siraj, 2013).

This study focuses on fourth-year pre-service teachers’ challenges in teaching Business Studies during their final teaching practice in South African high schools. It aims to investigate the challenges and how they overcome them. Pre-service teacher education is a type of teaching training offered to student teachers for a specific period of years, depending on the institution, after which they would be issued a certificate to become professional educators (Dejene et al., 2018). While in training, they are expected to go for several compulsory teaching practicals where they take up the role of teachers under the supervision of a subject teacher, also known as a mentor. Hence, this study contextualises final-year pre-service teachers who teach BS while on TP, the challenges they encounter, and how they mitigate them.

**Theoretical Framework**

Experiential Learning Theory was adopted to theorise the study because it argues that learning is much achieved, meaningful, comprehensive, and last long while self-examining individual thoughts, actions and feelings (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning theory (ELT) is learning through experience and support. It aligns with this study as pre-service teachers who are still under teaching training but in teaching practice are expected to learn from their mentor teacher. ELT allows pre-service teachers to learn by doing; that is, they acquire learning when they lay their hands on an activity, and as a result, learning becomes real and meaningful and can keep the memory for a long time (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Under ELT, learners are assumed to be actively involved in learning, making
learning life-long. Experiential learning theory is relevant in the study because it allows pre-service teachers to learn by doing through experience, allows learning to occur in a circle, and makes learning reflective and analytical. Despite the benefits of EL, scholars have criticised that it requires time for pre-service teachers to learn by experience, it needs the attention of lecturers and that, if not well monitored, pre-service teachers could lose focus (Andresen et al., 2020). Since the creation of ELT is to provide an academic foundation for the practice of experience learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2017), it will address the problem of the study, lack of support from Business Studies teachers during teaching practice.

Methodology and Research Paradigm

A qualitative approach will be adopted in the study because it is a social phenomenon that allows the natural setting experience of individuals, groups, or people. In other words, the researchers can get in-depth information from people’s perceptions, opinions and thoughts regarding a particular topic. The qualitative research approach is flexible, giving the researchers a clear vision of what to expect. Again, the qualitative approach allows people to share their experiences without being restricted to how much information they can give; in other words, pre-service teachers who took part in the study were asked to reflect on the challenges faced while teaching BS (Mohajan, 2018). In this paper, six final-year pre-service teachers who specialised in EMS and taught Business Studies during their teaching practice were purposefully asked to reflect on the challenges encountered while on TP and how they overcame them.

The study adopts the interpretivism paradigm because of its complements with a qualitative approach, it allows the researchers to gain a better understanding of the challenges they encountered during TP and how they were able to overcome them, and it helps to interpret multiple knowledge (Pervin, & Mokhtar, 2022; Pham, 2018). The interpretivist paradigm in research is rooted in the understanding of the individual and the interpretation of their world. It is based on the assumptions and perceptions shared by a group of people or individuals. However, despite the benefits of the interpretivism paradigm, such as flexibility, subjectivity instead of objectivity and generalization of findings from the limited data collected, were reported to be some of its weaknesses (Hokroh, 2022).

Research Design

The study is qualitative, and it adopts a case study research design. A case study research approach can be used to explore a social phenomenon in a specific situation to have an in-depth understanding (Remenyi, 2022). The case study is appropriate because it allows the researchers to ask for information on the “what and how” questions, as indicated by (Hancock et al., 2021). The case study deals with the social experience of real-life scenarios. Because questions like ‘What the challenges pre-service teacher face while on TP, and how do they overcome such challenges was deemed fit and relevant. The pre-service teachers selected in the study were asked the above questions on a naturalist ground, as emphasised by the case study, while on TP (Calandra et al., 2022).

A case study allows researchers to focus on specific participants rather than using any available participants, enabling the researchers to have in-depth information on the topic. Despite the wide usage of case studies as a research method, it has been criticised for lacking vigour (Coe et al., 2021). Case studies are divided into collective, descriptive, and explanatory. Still, for the sake of this study, an explanatory case study which helped the researchers to explore challenges pre-service teachers who teach BS encounter during TP and how they overcame them would be adopted. With the adoption of the interpretivism paradigm, which is concerned with understanding the world by emphasising the coming together of certain people who are in a situation to provide solutions to an existing problem, the study, therefore, hopes that the suggestion provided to the challenges could change their position, (too much workload) for good.

Data Collection and Selection of Participants

Reflection, as one of the data collection tools, was used to gather data in the study to make sense of pre-service teachers’ experiences during a teaching practice exercise. Reflection is defined as the process of examining oneself from the thing that is visual to abstract (Chang, 2019). In this study, reflection as a means of data collection is a process whereby the selected BS pre-service teachers were asked to share their teaching experiences regarding challenges and how they overcame them. Through reflection, pre-service teachers are in the best position to share the challenges they encounter while teaching practicals and how they mitigate this hurdle; in this process, as much as they take up the teacher’s place, they also learn. Reflection, a means of data collection in the study, puts participants in a critical thinking space. They have no option but to devise solutions to their challenges (Simmons et al., 2021).

As Business Studies pre-service teachers, questions include ‘What challenges were faced when teaching BS during TP? Moreover, how did they overcome the obstacles?’ Among several benefits of reflection consists of the learner-centred method, which allows pre-service teachers to be self-reflective, which leads to professional development and innovation (McGarr, 2021), and the fact that reflection makes pre-service teachers improve their profession while in-service makes it appropriate in the study. Six pre-service teachers who specialise in EMS but teachers in Business Studies and who were in their final year were selected to reflect on their experience during TP; the research question was how can pre-service teachers who teach Business Studies during TP mitigate challenges encountered?

Since the study focuses on the pre-service teachers who taught Business Studies during teaching practice, selecting people outside the specialisation will be irrelevant. Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was adopted for the sampling to be relevant and meet
its target. Purposive sampling means choosing certain people because they are positioned to share or provide truthful information about the topic under discussion (Ames et al., 2019).

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the study to make sense of the data generated. Thematic analysis is an analytical tool used in qualitative research to arrange and analyse data. According to Braun and Clarke (2016), for data to be well analysed, there are six steps that researchers should follow after data have been collected and they include; step 1 is getting to know and understand data; researchers need to have a deep understanding of the data; hence this can be achieved by reading and re-reading for correct and accurate transcription of data, step 2 is the coding; this the stage after data transcribed that the researchers try to code by sorting the meaningful and the joint statements together. Step 3 is the generalising theme; hereafter coding, the researchers search for a suitable theme that fits well with each category; step 4 is the reviewing theme; the researchers ensure that articles are coherent. Step 5 is the defining and naming stage, where researchers identify what each theme describes. In contrast, step 6 is the final stage, according to the named author, which is the written report, the final stage of thematic analysis, where the researchers produce the report of the findings in a readable, concise, and understandable manner.

The study followed all ethics procedures by seeking the consent of the selected sample. Although the researchers sent out informed consent forms to ten pre-service teachers doing their TP in school, out of ten, only six people showed interest because, according to ethics, participation in a research process is by willingness; hence, nobody was forced to take part (Dar & Shairgojri, 2022).

Findings and Discussions

Lack of resources is a challenge in the teaching of Business Studies

Pre-service teachers who taught BS in some South African high schools during TP identified a lack of resources such as teaching aids, textbooks, and stationeries as one of the challenges faced due to the lack of subject teacher support. The researchers see this challenge as something mentor teachers could solve since they have been teaching the subject for a while. Below are some of the comments from participants:

S1: Sometimes, we fail to understand the content we are teaching due to a lack of resources, such as textbooks.

S3: As a student teacher, I struggle a lot due to a lack of resources such as study materials, stationeries, and teaching aids.

S5: Learners not performing well in Business studies due to lack of resources and lack of motivation.

S6: My challenges were that the school did not have the material for learners, e.g. textbooks or notes.

S2: Lack of Effective Communication is another challenge for Mentor teachers. They do not communicate with us nor assign us classes.

The above reports confirm that pre-service teachers who specialised in and taught EMS during TP encountered challenges from a lack of support. As students who undergo teaching training, they need all the necessary help and support both from the school where they are posted and the university. Otherwise, this could limit their effectiveness. Business Studies novice pre-service teachers teaching without a textbook, or a copy of what is being conducted both for themselves and their learners could lead to frustration and failure (Mewomo et al., 2022) to know the subject matter, according to S1, S3, S5 and S6, with the support of subject teachers, they believed this problem could have been solved.

According to these participants, lacking resources such as textbooks, notes, writing material, and teaching aids jeopardised BS learners’ performance and demotivated them to teach effectively. Despite the criticism about the textbooks, the researchers agree that the place of the textbook cannot and should not be replaced with the teacher because of its values, especially in the hands of novice BS pre-service teachers (Okongo et al., 2015). While according to S2, lack of effective communication from the BS subject teacher was another challenge encountered while on TP. Communication in every sphere of life, especially among education stakeholders, is necessary for effective teaching and learning. Still, unfortunately, BS pre-service teachers who shared their experience during TP said their subject teacher, also known as a mentor teacher, failed to communicate appropriately with them regarding the content to teach and a section to work from in the classroom.

This challenge is supported by Malek et al. (2016), who mentioned that ineffective communication is a barrier to effective teaching and learning. For pre-service teachers to teach as expected, they must work hand-in-hand with their mentors to know what needs to be taught, bearing in mind that these students are new in the profession and fresh in the environment. Therefore, their unavailability or lack of communication poses a challenge (Bakar et al., 2020).

Work overload as a challenge/time management

The selected BS pre-service teachers’ reflections mentioned workload as one of the challenges they face while on TP. The workload challenge means that BS pre-service teachers teach more than the expected subjects while on teaching training. According to the participants, this resulted from a lack of support from their subject teachers. Below are what they said:
S2: Extended paperwork and extra time; business studies is one of the subjects with too much content to teach. Because I was given so many classes to teach, I became frustrated and felt like giving up.

S4: Teaching business studies during my teaching practice was stressful and demanding due to some hiccups here and there, especially because I am teaching a large class

S1: Despite our limited time to teach, we are given many BS classes to teach; hence we fail to participate actively in our major subjects.

The above statement from participants indicates that BS pre-service teachers were overloaded with the workload by their subject teachers, which clearly shows a lack of support from BS high school teachers towards the pre-service teacher who were posted to their schools to practice. From my understanding, S2 worked on extra time to meet up with the syllabus, and I think this is unfair and unprofessional for the student in training to be overloaded with teaching work. Meanwhile, according to South Africa CAPS, BS as a subject is loaded with so much content that it requires speed to finish the necessary content within the time frame. Assigning a large class with so much content to teach within a short period to a student teacher is a challenge, as echoed by S2 and S4, which could push students to the verge of giving and discouragement. I feel that BS subject teachers purposely abandon their work to student teachers posted to schools knowing fully well that these students are novices who need their support from time to time. To support this, Dlengezele (2020) said that student teachers need help from the subject teacher, especially in methodologies and professional expertise.

Suggested Solutions to the Challenges

Despite several challenges pre-service teachers who taught BS during their TP encountered, they were creative enough to manoeuvre the challenges by suggesting three solutions; overcoming workload, parent involvement as a solution/ set class rule, and designing posters as a bridge for lack of resources as a solution.

Designing posters as a bridge for lack of resources as a solution

The poster is a resource used in BS class to teach specific content with pictures printed or designed (Rosanti & Seman, 2019). The poster has been suggested in this paper as one of the resources pre-service teachers used while teaching BS due to a lack of resources such as a textbook. Below is what the participants said:

S1: For my learners to understand and be able to remember the content, I designed posters for them to work with.

S5: For learners who are not performing well, I re-arrange them with those students who are gifted to work together then and do presentations/demonstrations on the topic; sometimes, I use objects and posters to teach content.

S2: For resources, I used posters to arrange the information for them so that they could understand.

S4: I just made posters to explain and asked them to sit in groups to analyze after I explained the poster to them.

S3: To teach, I had to use a lot of visual aids like pictures and charts instead of the chalkboard to demonstrate what I was teaching.

The above statement from the participants indicated that using posters by pre-service teachers who teach BS during TP assisted them in delivering content and effective teaching. According to S5, S2 and S4, they use posters to explain concepts and teach specific topics, which were used in place of the textbook, which means that posters can be of great value without teaching resources such as textbooks. In other words, these participants overcame the challenges faced in the classroom by creatively designing posters to explain critical concepts for presentations either as a group or individually. For S1, it is believed that what the learner sees in the class can be easily remembered; hence they designed a poster where pictures related to content were drawn and shared with learners; this is supported by (Truan & Dressel, 2022), posit that poster as teaching aid have several benefits to learners; it motivates the learner to learn, helps them to focus while catching and fun, makes content understandable, and is it retains the information, to mention but few. Additionally, in the case of S3, they use visual aids such as pictures and charts to navigate the challenges faced in the class. The use of visual aids in the teaching and learning of BS has been proven to be effective.

Parental involvement as a solution/ set class rule

From the data generated in the study, parent involvement and class rules were suggested as possible solutions to the challenges pre-service teachers face while teaching BS. Two out of six participants highlighted that by setting class rules, they have learners under control, while one participant mentioned parent involvement; below are the statements from participants:

S2: In dealing with discipline, I implemented a justified consequence in which parents got involved and created intervention plans

S6: I ensured effective communication between myself, my mentor teacher and concerned parents.

S5: I had to ensure that I set out a stance with learners and that they understood the ground rules of the classroom.

According to S2, they deal with ill-disciplined learners in the class by implementing inevitable justifiable consequences in which parents were involved meaning that even though these students are still under training, they can develop classroom management
skills for disciplining learners. According to (Lumadi, 2019), parental involvement improves learners’ moral development, maintaining discipline and improving academic performance. For S6, they are saying that there is a need for effective communication among the people concerned, like the mentor teacher, pre-service teacher, and the learner’s parents; this is still about parental involvement in ensuring and maintaining discipline among learners. In support of the fact that discipline is needed in the classroom among learners (Barger et al., 2019) said that when parents get involved in their children’s school life, learners develop good behaviour, higher-order thinking, and improved mother-child relationships, to mention but a few. Setting out class rules is another strategy that can be used to manage a classroom, as echoed by S5. Class rules are a situation whereby a teacher usually, from the onset of the term, sets out the dos and do not in class with the consequences; whosoever breaks the rule will be dealt with as written down and agreed upon by learners and teacher. So, the S5 experience set out class rules during their TP.

The use of practical examples as a solution

Business Studies is a subject loaded with content, so pre-service students always complain about this. Hence, one way to overcome this challenge is the use of practical examples to explain specific contents, as said by the participants below:

S5: Using examples in class helped me a lot because learners became actively involved in the lesson because they had an idea of the businesses I was referring to while I taught them.

S6: Coming up with a practical example that aligns with businesses; as my mentor would say, I have to use examples for learners to understand the content I deliver clearly.

S1: I organise extra classes, such as morning classes and afternoon classes, as a teacher.

S3: I had to work hand in hand with my mentor.

The statements above are from participants selected to share their experiences teaching Business Studies during practical teaching in South African high schools. From S5 experience, using relevant examples to bolster their point makes teaching Business Studies easy and actively engages learners to participate. In my opinion and supported by the literature, I believe that by using examples to explain content, learners understand better faster and have information retained for a more extended period (Dawson et al., 2019; Shana & Abulibdeh, 2020). S6 shared almost the same experience as S5, except with the involvement of a mentor teacher. In overcoming challenges faced in teaching during TP, the place of a mentor cannot be ignored but is essential. According to S5, they were advised by a mentor teacher who has been teaching Business Studies for years to always use practical examples to bolster their point for clearer understanding. I concur that using examples helps a lot, especially with learners struggling to understand better what is being taught. Scholars such as (Bolkan, & Goodboy, 2019) said that using examples in class to deliver content helps learners apply their skills beyond the classroom. As for S1, who noted that organising extra classes for learners helped overcome the challenges in teaching Business Studies during TP, this means that, for this participant to meet up with the curriculum as soon as possible, they had to arrange extra classes for Business Studies learners in the morning and afternoon. Lastly, S3 said they were able to overcome challenges encountered in teaching Business Studies by working with a mentor teacher. The implication is that, according to the participant experience, the presence of a mentor teacher is crucial (Jita & Munje, 2022).

Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study and its findings. Final-year pre-service teachers who taught Business Studies during their teaching practice were asked to share their experience in the selected topics. However, the challenges pre-service teachers who taught Business Studies during their teaching practice and how they overcame such challenges were the focus of the study, where lack of resources and workload were identified as challenges. They were asked to reflect on how they manoeuvre these challenges; hence, solutions such as using practical examples to buttress content, parental involvement, class rules, and poster design were found. Therefore, the study concluded that pre-service teachers who teach Business Studies during teaching practice need the support of both mentors and the in general. For instance, mentor teachers teaching Business Studies for years are better positioned to guide pre-service teachers on the methodologies, skills, and everything they need to teach effectively.

The study aligns with experiential learning theory’s assumption that students learn better by doing, that is, through experience, either by observing their mentor teachers or being involved in teaching. Therefore, mentor teachers and schools must provide the needed support for business studies pre-service teachers during TP. However, the study recommends the following:

i. Pre-service teachers are posted to schools for teaching practice, and Business Studies should not be given too much work because Business Studies has too much content to teach; this has been confirmed empirically and by literature that mentors teach take advantage of TP and push all their teaching work to pre-service teachers to teach (Pacalo, 2021).

ii. Pre-service teachers who teach Business Studies at schools should be given a thorough orientation of the school and the class being assigned in the teaching and class management. This exposure would assist them while teaching Business Studies and dealing with learners, as echoed by (Chen et al., 2017).

iii. Mentor teachers are available, especially when pre-service teachers are in the classroom teaching, to encourage, guide and see their strengths and weaknesses to know how to correct them. According to Jita and Munje (2022), the availability of mentor teachers is essential in preparing pre-service teachers to become professional teachers.
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