

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF ECONOMICS CLASSROOMS IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of the classroom experiences of pre-service Economics teachers may provide vital information for the designing, redesigning and improvement of pre-service programs. This paper investigates first-time pre-service teachers' experiences of Economics classrooms in Uganda. The study uses a qualitative research design using a case study. The sample comprised of twenty-eight (28) pre-service Economics teachers in their second year of the Bachelor of Arts with Education degree program at Makerere University. Data collection methods included focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, document analysis of students' files and journal reflections. Data were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis. The data revealed six major themes ranging from lesson preparation and planning, teaching methods, subject matter knowledge, instructional teaching aids, classroom management and student assessment.

Keywords: Pre-Service Teachers, Teaching Experience, Economics Classrooms

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers' experiences of Economics classrooms are vital in enhancing teaching practice and designing effective teacher training programs. The goal of teaching practice is to prepare teacher trainees to teach their classrooms. In Uganda, every student in a teacher training institution is expected to go for a practicum or field experience. This refers to the opportunity given to pre-service teachers to conduct teaching trials in Ugandan schools. Pre-service teachers on the Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts with Education degree programs at Makerere University normally have practicum twice during their studies and take their field experience out of the university and can go to any secondary school within Uganda. This practicum offers student teachers experience in the actual learning and teaching (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2013). However, few studies have examined pre-service teachers' experiences of teaching practice in general and Economics classrooms in particular in Uganda, although studies have been done elsewhere.

Furthermore, studies about teaching practice have focused on the perspectives of mentors and cooperating teachers (e.g., Chien, 2015; Thorsen, 2016), anxiety and the 'shock of reality' (e.g., Ngidi & Sibaya, 2013), and professional teacher

identity (e.g., Bekereci, 2017; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Consequently, there exists a dearth of relevant literature on the subject-specific classroom experiences of pre-service teachers. The present study addresses this concern by examining classroom experiences of 28 pre-service Economics teachers on the Bachelor of Arts with Education degree program at Makerere University in Uganda. The study focuses on the training of Economics teachers in Uganda because Economics is an important subject in the Ugandan secondary school curriculum and it is related in many respects to other subjects within the curriculum. This study aims to enhance the training of Economics teachers through the lens of their classroom experiences in the Ugandan setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Lesson Preparation and Planning

The importance of lesson plans in ensuring effective learning environments abounds in the literature (e.g., Johnson, 2000; Rusznyak & Walton, 2011). A lesson plan is a plan of action and it shows what the teacher intends to do at every stage of the lesson. Ruys *et al.* (2012) argue that lesson planning enables pre-service teachers to think through what they teach, how they teach, and how to evaluate their teaching. Planning is one of

the crucial skills that pre-service teachers should gain during training (Sahin-Taskin, 2017). Some studies (e.g., Boikutso, 2010; Gafoor & Umer, 2010; Sahin-Taskin, 2017) have shown that lesson planning is a challenging and problem area for student teachers. Research suggests that student teachers have difficulty in constructing objectives (e.g., Kagan & Tippins, 1992). Other studies have found lesson planning to be an easy task for pre-service teachers (e.g., Nzilano, 2013).

2.2 Teaching Method

Developing student-teachers' competence in teaching is one of the most important roles of teacher-training institutions. Pre-service Economics teachers can use a number of teaching methods such as the lecture, question-answer, textbook, discussion, demonstration, inquiry, project and case study. Studies in other subjects indicate the use of a variety of teaching methods by pre-service teachers. A study by Donmez and Basturk (2010) among mathematics pre-service teachers at Marmara University in Turkey found the lecture and question-answer technique to be the most commonly used method of teaching. In the Philippines, a study by Pambid (2015) among pre-service science teachers in the Pangasinan State University found the most commonly employed methods to be the conventional ones like open class discussion, demonstration, and lectures.

2.3 Subject Matter Knowledge

Teachers' knowledge of subject matter is essential because the teachers' understanding of subject matter means that they are capable of teaching the subject-matter main points to the students (Jadama, 2014). Pre-service Economics teachers' subject matter knowledge can be valuable in helping students to learn difficult Economics concepts. In a study on two problem-based learning strategies for teaching Economics, Adu (2012) found that while effective teaching can lead to better achievement by the students, this depends on a teachers' confidence and in-depth knowledge of subject matter. In another study among pre-service science teachers in Gazi University of Turkey, Mihladiz and Dogan (2011) found that the pre-service science teachers had adequate content in some areas, while in other areas they were lacking.

2.4 Instructional Teaching Aids

Instructional materials are important in attaining the lesson objectives (Acero *et al.* 2000) and arousing students' interest in the subject. Pre-service teachers can use a variety of teaching aids which include the audio, visual and audio-visual aids. A study by Nzilano (2013) on the experiences of practicing teaching in secondary schools and teacher colleges in Tanzania found the dominant teaching aids to be visual aids. Similarly, a study by Pambid (2015) among pre-service science teachers in the Pangasinan State University in the Philippines found the materials often used were the chalkboard, charts and self-made drawing. Another study by Ulla (2016) on pre-service teacher training programs in the Philippines found that student teachers lacked teaching resources, which prompted them to recycle the strategies and methods they learned during their in-class practice teaching.

2.5 Classroom Management

Classroom management refers to the actions taken by teachers to create an environment that facilitates and supports both academic and socio-emotional learning (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Effective teaching and learning are directly or indirectly influenced by organized classroom management (Mastul & Hajilan, 2017). The teacher should manage the classroom effectively in order to attain the educational purposes at the highest level possible (Oral, 2012). Ineffective classroom management can be a source of student-teachers' frustration (Nkhata *et al.* 2016). Research has shown that many pre-service teachers have challenges in managing disciplinary problems in their classrooms (e.g., Grothe, 2013; Major & Tuo, 2012; Nkhata *et al.* 2016). Other studies have instead found student teachers to have positive experiences of classroom management (e.g. Kiggundu, 2007).

2.6 Student Assessment

Pre-service Economics teachers are expected to apply a variety of assessments and provide evidence that students achieve the intended learning outcomes. Assessment can be divided into formative and summative. Summative assessment refers "to summary assessments of student

performance – including tests and examinations and end of year marks” (Looney, 2011, p.7). Formative assessment refers to “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 10). In a study among pre-service teachers in Tanzania, Nzilano (2013) found that about 50% of the pre-service teachers prepared assignments and exercises for students at the end of the lesson.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative case study research design (Yin, 1994). The sample comprised of twenty-eight (28) second year Bachelor of Arts with Education degree students offering Economics at the School of Education, Makerere University, in the 2016-2017 academic year. All participants were in the evening program, attending night classes. Out of the 28 pre-service teachers, 17 were male and 11 were female. The average age of the respondents was 23 years. The pre-service teachers taught Economics in Senior Five classes across the districts of Kampala, Masaka, Mukono, Mpigi, Luweero, Jinja, and Wakiso. On average, the Senior Five classes had about 70 students. The average age of the students was 17 years.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

The study used four (4) focus group discussions: A, B, C, and D to examine pre-service teachers' experiences of Economics classrooms. A total of 28 Economics pre-service teachers participated, 17 males and 11 females. The students had undergone field experience between the months of June and August 2017. Data were collected in the month of September during the first lecture following the field experience. During the lecture, the students were divided into four discussion groups which formed the focus groups. Each focus group discussion comprised seven (7) students and they were asked to discuss their experiences of Economics classrooms with respect to lesson preparation and planning, methods of teaching, subject matter knowledge, instructional teaching aids, classroom management, and student assessment. After the discussions, each group was asked to present to the class for further discussion. The purpose was to obtain the general views of the whole group about the issues raised rather than for

a few students. The discussions were audio-taped and then transcribed. The small sample size and the qualitative approach made the quantification of results inappropriate. The analysis sought only to identify the issues important to a group of pre-service teachers and to illustrate their opinion in detail.

3.2 In-Person Interviews

Out of the 28 students, 7 were selected to take part in the in-personal interview using the accidental sampling technique. The interviews took place in the researcher's office and they were conducted using an interview guide. The purpose was to get personal experiences from individual students of their Economics classrooms. This provided in-depth information about each student's experiences. This information was useful in augmenting the data obtained from the focus group discussions.

3.3 Document Analysis

Two documents were analyzed: the pre-service teachers' record files and their reflective journals. Campoy (2010) sees the reflective practice in teaching as a teachers' critical thinking about what is happening in the classroom where the teacher teaches. Reflective or learning journals are the most common strategies because of their practical utilization (Goker, 2016). Pre-service teachers at the School of Education Makerere University are required to record their in and out of class experiences, including their successes and difficulties on a daily basis during field placement. Pre-service teachers were asked to present their reflective journals for analysis. Also, the record files which contain the lesson plans, record of work and scheme of work were analyzed.

3.4 Data Processing and Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). The transcripts from the focus group discussions were analyzed to identify emerging themes. The main themes were discussed, citing data from the personal interviews to further explain the findings from the focus group discussions. Pre-service teachers' reflective entries were also analyzed to capture data on the main themes. To enhance the

validity of the analysis, one research assistant analyzed the transcripts independently.

3.5 Findings and Discussions

Theme 1: Lesson Preparation and Planning

Data from pre-service teachers' personal files, journal entries, focus group discussions and interviews revealed that most pre-service teachers prepared and planned their lessons well. Reports from all discussion Groups A, B, C, and D indicated that preparation and planning involving making personal files which contained the school profile, the timetable, students' marks, notes, the record of work and the scheme of work. Analysis of the data further revealed that most pre-service teachers prepared the scheme of work and lesson plans according to the correct formats. Referring to drawing a scheme of work and making a personal file, one pre-service teacher who took part in the interview said thus: "...I used the first 2 weeks of orientation to prepare my file. I got the school profile from the headmaster. The Director of Studies gave me the class to teach and the former Economics teacher gave me the topics I was to teach. I made the scheme of work easily ..." (pre-service teacher 4). Another pre-service teachers' journal entry regarding making a lesson plan read: "Today is my first time to teach Economics in Senior 5. I taught inflation ... Drawing the lesson plan was easy." This finding is similar to Nzilano (2013), who found that lesson planning was the easiest task among pre-service teachers in Tanzania. Even in Nigeria, Andabai (2013) found that trainee teachers were able to build confidence in lesson planning. However, the findings differ from Heeralal and Bayaga (2011), where pre-service teachers at a South African university reported that lesson planning was a tedious task.

Theme 2: Teaching Methods

Pre-service teachers used a variety of teaching methods and skills while delivering their Economics lessons. The most common methods listed in the schemes of work and lesson plans; and reported by all focus group discussions (A, B, C, and D) were the traditional chalk and talk or lecture, question-answer, discussion and demonstration. One pre-service teacher who used the discussion method wrote this in her journal entry: "I was teaching on unemployment. I divided

the students into four groups. Two groups discussed the causes of unemployment; the other two groups discussed the solutions to unemployment in Uganda." Another pre-service teacher explained during the interview that whenever he used the discussion method, students actively participated (pre-service teacher 1). A pre-service teacher who used a combination of methods had this to say during the interview: "... One time I was teaching on inflation. I introduced the topic using the lecture method. I then used the discussion method for students to discuss the problems of inflation ..." (pre-service teacher 6). These findings resemble Pambid (2015) study among pre-service science teachers in the Pangasinan State University in the Philippines, who found the most common teaching methods to be lecture, open class discussion, and demonstration.

Theme 3: Subject Matter Knowledge

Data from the focus group discussions revealed that while some topics were relatively easy to teach, other topics were quite challenging for the pre-service Economics teachers. Group A, B, and C's reports indicated that some pre-service teachers struggled with teaching the concept of price discrimination. In Groups B, C, and D, the hardest concept to teach was the cobweb theorem, while market structures were reportedly hard to teach in Groups A, C, and D. One pre-service teacher's journal entry confirmed this: "Today I had a double lesson in Senior 5. I was teaching the cobweb theorem. I found it difficult to explain to the students." However, other pre-service teachers did not get challenges in delivering Economics content. The easiest topics to teach were the structure of Uganda's economy (Group A, B, and C), unemployment (Group B, C, and D) and inflation (Group A, B, and C). One pre-service teacher's journal entry confirmed this: "I taught inflation to Senior 5. I had prepared my notes very well because I wanted to show I am from Makerere. They had just had a student teacher from Kyambogo University. The students were understanding and I really enjoyed the lesson." A pre-service teacher who participated in the interview had this to say "Hmm, teaching Economics is not a joke. Some topics are hard; others are easy. I hard to read hard to be able to teach effectively" (pre-service teacher 5). These findings were in line with Mihadiz and Dogan (2011) study, who found that pre-service science

teachers in Gazi University of Turkey had adequate content in some areas while in others they were lacking.

Theme 4: Instructional Teaching Aids

Analysis of data from the focus group discussions (A, B, C, and D) and student's files revealed that the majority of pre-service teachers illustrated Economics concepts using charts, pictures, drawings, illustrations on the chalkboard and real objects. One pre-service teacher who participated in the interview narrated his experience with using charts thus: "... I used the chart when I was teaching about market structures. I drew the short run and long run equilibrium curves on the chart ..." (pre-service teacher 7). Another interview participant explained how he used pictures of different industries while teaching about Uganda's industrial sector (pre-service teacher 3). Other pre-service teachers used real objects as teaching aids. For example, one pre-service teacher's journal entry showed that he used tomatoes while teaching about perfect competition. Two pre-service teachers' journal entries reflected the use of paper notes and coins while teaching about money and banking. These findings parallel Nzilano (2013), who found the dominant teaching aids among pre-service teachers in Tanzania to be visual aids. Even Pambid (2015) study in the Pangasinan State University in the Philippines found the most common instructional materials used by pre-service science teachers to be the chalkboard, self-made drawings, and charts. The analysis further revealed that pre-service teachers faced challenges, which included 'expensive instructional materials' (Group B and D), 'inadequate materials for the large class sizes (Group A, B, C, and D) and lack of appropriate teaching aids for certain topics' (Group A, B, C, and D). This finding concurs with Ulla's (2016) study, where English student teachers in one private university in Mindanao in the Philippines lacked teaching resources.

Theme 5: Classroom Management

Economics pre-service teachers had varied experiences of classroom management. While some struggled with managing their classes, others did not experience any problems. One pre-service teacher who did her practicum in a Catholic founded school narrated her experience during the

interview thus: "... *The school trains nuns and they are disciplined. In class, they are very quiet. When you ask a question they put up their hands. Even when they are walking around the school compound you don't hear noise...*" (pre-service teacher 6). Reports from all focus group discussions (A, B, C, and D) indicated that the most common classroom management problem was undisciplined students. One pre-service teacher who taught a large class confirmed this in her reflective journal: "*I was teaching and one student Ntege kept talking. I told him to stand up but he kept sitting. I told him to get out, he refused. At first, I wanted to leave the class. But I imagined the class will make noise. After the lesson, I told their class teacher and he said the students in this school are like that.*" These findings were in agreement with other studies (e.g., Merc and Subasi, 2015; Nkhata *et al.* 2016; Ulla, 2016; Yusof *et al.* 2014), which found that student teachers struggled with discipline and classroom management. However, the finding differs from Kiggundu (2007) study among student teachers in the Gauteng province in South Africa, where learners were found to be well behaved.

Theme 6: Student Assessment

Data from the focus group discussions, document analysis of pre-service teachers' files, reflective journals and in-person interviews indicated that student assessment in Economics classrooms took various forms. The most commonly used assessment types across all focus group discussions A, B, C, and D were formative and summative. Formative assessments included tests, quizzes, and exercises. Summative assessments included the end of term examinations. While commenting on the use of tests, one pre-service teacher narrated her experience during the interview thus: "... *In that school, we had to give weekly tests. You had to mark and show students their marks ...*" (pre-service teacher 2). Another pre-service teacher wrote this in her reflective journal regarding the end of term examinations: "*I was asked by the class teacher to set the final Economics exam. I didn't know I was supposed to set it. This was my first-time to set an exam.*" Analysis of data from the lesson plans further revealed that most pre-service teachers indicated assessments every after a lesson. The most common assessments were the exercises and assignments given at the end of each lesson.

However, some pre-service teachers did not indicate any assessments. These findings were in conformity with those of Nzilano (2013) who found that about half of the pre-service teachers in Tanzania prepared assignments and exercises for students, while the remaining half did not.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the classroom experiences of 28 pre-service Economics teachers on the Bachelor of Arts with Education degree program at Makerere University in Uganda. The data revealed six major themes namely: (1) lesson planning and preparation (2) teaching methods (3) subject matter knowledge (4) instructional teaching aids (5) classroom management and (6) student assessment. The study found that lesson preparation and planning were easy tasks for the pre-service Economics teachers in this study. Economics education instructors should continue imparting the necessary skills in lesson planning so that teacher trainees master the art of lesson planning. The findings indicated that pre-service teachers used a combination of student-centered and teacher-centered methods of teaching Economics. The most common methods of teaching were the lecture, discussion and question-answer. However, teaching methods such as project, problem-solving, case study, games and simulations were not commonly used. Economics instructors should experiment with these methods during teacher training so that student teachers can see their application in Economics classrooms. With regard to subject matter, the study found that most pre-service teachers had the requisite knowledge, although they were lacking in some areas. Economics instructors should identify the gaps in subject matter knowledge, especially in the concepts of cobweb theorem, price discrimination and market structures and work towards addressing them.

Furthermore, the study found that the commonest teaching aids used were the visual aids, which included illustrations on the chalkboard, charts, pictures, and real objects. It is apparent that the pre-service Economics teachers were only exposed to these during their training. Economics instructors should experiment with the use of other teaching aids such as audio, audio-visual, information, communication and technologies (ICT), and the latest web 2.0 technologies to

enhance the learning experience for pre-service Economics teachers. The teacher-trainees are likely to employ them in their teaching only if they are exposed to them during their training. The study found that classroom management experiences of pre-service teachers varied, with some experiencing undisciplined students while other students were well behaved. There is need to strengthen teacher training in the area of classroom management for better Economics classroom learning environments. Pre-service Economics teachers in this study used a variety of tools in assessing and evaluating student learning. The most common were exercises, assignments, and examinations. Pre-service teachers need to employ other assessment techniques such as student self-assessment (McMillan & Hearn, 2008), performance assessment (Nitko, 2001) and student observations.

Although the study findings are limited in some respects: small sample size, focus on one specific subject Economics, and one institution Makerere University, they still offer insights into the actual pre-service teachers' experiences of classrooms in the Ugandan context. It is recommended that future studies should employ a larger sample of pre-service Economics teachers to address the limitations of this study. In addition, future studies should extend the present analysis by incorporating a larger set of teacher training institutions in Uganda. For instance, it would be of interest to learn about the experiences of pre-service Economics teachers from other institutions for a comparison across teacher training programs and institutions in Uganda. It would also be of interest to learn about the classroom experiences of pre-service teachers in other subjects, which is particularly missing in Uganda's case.

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