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Engagement of Preservice Teachers in the Assessment of Their Work-Integrated Learning

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ABSTRACT
Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) stands as a formally supervised and assessed program designed for preservice teachers to apply and refine their teaching skills within school settings. This study addresses the inquiry of how to effectively involve preservice teachers in the assessment of their WIL experiences. Employing participatory action research (PAR) as the chosen methodology, the research engaged with nine preservice teachers actively involved in WIL, a teaching practice officer, and five teachers serving as mentors to the students. Data collection was performed utilizing the principles of free-attitude interviews and participant observation. The ensuing data underwent interpretation and analysis employing the framework of critical discourse analysis. The findings revealed a pronounced need for collaborative efforts among assessors, mentor teachers, lecturers, and preservice teachers. Establishing robust collaboration emerged as the most viable solution for engaging preservice teachers in the assessment of their Work-Integrated Learning experiences.

KEYWORDS
Assessment; teacher education institution; work-integrated learning; preservice teacher; teaching practice officer.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa (SA) introduced the Initial Professional Education of Teachers (IPET) initiative. This initiative aimed to transform teacher education, specifically addressing the challenge of providing meaningful teaching experience for new teachers during their first year in the profession. Subsequently, the minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualification Policy (MRTEQP) were instituted, mandating the incorporation of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) as a formal program for preservice teachers (PSTs). WIL provides these PSTs with the opportunity to gain authentic teaching experience in a school environment and undergo formal assessment (DHET, 2015). However, the WIL policy itself does not offer specific guidelines on how the assessment should be conducted. Instead, it delegates this responsibility to Teacher Education Institutions (TEI), tasking them with the design of assessment forms for the WIL program of PSTs. The underlying expectation for students is to apply their acquired knowledge from the university setting without fear of judgment. The Teacher Education Qualification emphasizes the practical learning of PSTs, emphasizing the importance of experiential learning within and from the practice of teaching.

Learning in practice involves teaching in both authentic and simulated classroom environments, as outlined by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2015. Consequently, teachers are expected to transform any learning environment into one that is engaging for learners, irrespective of physical infrastructure considerations. This transformation necessitates creativity, making it challenging to assess without a corresponding level of innovation from the assessor. The South African Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF) underscores the importance of recurrent processes for curricular revision to facilitate the transformation required for graduates to thrive in their future lives and workplaces. The primary objective of this study was to actively involve PSTs in the assessment of their WIL experiences. The research sought answers to two pivotal questions: first, whether assessors of WIL are adequately trained for the assessment task, and second, whether they understand the overarching purpose of assessing WIL. The study drew upon the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) as a conceptual framework to address these questions and to explore the inherent challenges associated with assessing WIL for university PSTs. Mayhew et al. (2016) posit that TLT fosters an environment that is both challenging and supportive, facilitating transformative learning. The following sections of this paper delve into an examination of relevant literature on WIL from a South African perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-integrated Learning

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) constitutes the hands-on acquisition of practical experience by education students, providing a firsthand understanding of the dynamics within schools and classrooms (Muyengwa & Bukaliya, 2015). This program is structured in accordance with the policy outlined in the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ) in

South Africa. The MRTEQ policy underscores the importance of WIL being systematically organized, supervised, integrated into the broader learning curriculum, and subject to formal assessment (DHET, 2015). Makura and Zireva (2013) articulate WIL as the embodiment of the art of teaching, offering a practice ground before entering the professional realm. This immersive experience not only enhances the practical knowledge of PSTs but also matures their epistemological beliefs (Alphan & Erdamar, 2014). Education PSTs engage in periodic visits to schools to apply the art of teaching acquired during their academic studies, ultimately preparing them for professionalism in their respective fields. The WIL program dictates that students be paired with experienced teachers serving as mentors during these school visits, and furthermore, mandates a formal assessment of students' performance within the program.

WIL serves as a pivotal mechanism in bridging the skills gap between the competencies possessed by university graduates and the practical requirements demanded by schools (Moalosi et al., 2021). Both schools and universities face escalating pressure to reconcile the disjunction between how teachers are taught in academic settings and the actual demands of teaching in schools (Chetty, 2012; Govender & Wait, 2017). According to Garve (2020), WIL plays a vital role in imparting generic skills such as confidence, courage, innovation capacity, leadership, and decision-making skills. These skills are not readily attainable through exclusive exposure to classroom learning during academic studies, highlighting the necessity for a more holistic approach. Recognizing the importance of cultivating relevant skills for the workforce, collaboration between universities and industry becomes imperative (Ceschin et al., 2017). This underscores the need for universities to adapt their curricula, facilitating students' familiarity with the practical aspects of the working world before graduation.

Teacher Education institutions allocate students to schools based on WIL protocols, enabling them to practice teaching under the supervision of experienced teachers. Within this framework, students are paired with mentors in schools who guide and assess their performance, assigning scores that are subsequently submitted to the university. Additionally, institution-based lecturers conduct visits to assess students, contributing further scores for evaluation. The cumulative assessment scores from both mentors and lecturers are utilized by teacher education institutions for grading students in the module. While numerous studies have explored the assessment of WIL for PSTs, the predominant focus has been on the scores assigned for grading purposes. This study seeks to shift the focus toward examining the active engagement of students in the assessment of the WIL program. The primary challenge addressed in this study is the passive role assigned to students in their own assessment, treating them more as objects than active contributors to their learning. Despite their extensive efforts in lesson preparation and application of theoretical knowledge gained from their studies, students are often expected to accept allocated marks without a platform for addressing potential concerns. This practice has resulted in student grievances without a clear avenue for resolution.

Participatory Action Research

Utilizing participatory action research (PAR) as an approach for data generation, this study aims to enact positive change and enhance the lives of individuals involved in the research. PAR is distinguished by its commitment to fostering equity and advocating for social justice, peace, freedom, and hope (Mahlomaholo, 2009; Moloi et al, 2023). In this collaborative endeavor, PSTs, mentor teachers, and the researcher function as active participants within the PAR framework. This transdisciplinary approach addresses the challenges of establishing meaningful and successful collaboration between the researcher and stakeholders (Dube et al., 2023; Home & Rump, 2015). By embracing PAR, the study departs from the conventional positivist science approach of social sciences research and acknowledges the complexity of issues related to human beings, particularly in the context of assessing WIL (Eruera, 2010). Therefore, the study employs PAR to explore WIL assessment issues through a lens of social justice within TEIs. This approach creates a space for the empowerment of students and teachers who often hail from marginalized communities, contributing to a more inclusive assessment of TEI activities. The foundational principles of PAR, including shared ownership of the research project, a community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action, inspire active participation from students throughout the study (Baas & Tsotetsi, 2023; Kemmis, 2010; Shea et al., 2013).

The study yielded collective participation, fostering the integration of indigenous knowledge systems in education through the active involvement of all participants. I intentionally facilitated the engagement of PSTs in the study, aiming to orient and emancipate them through the research process. PAR uniquely values the ‘‘voices’’ of community members and embraces insights from ‘‘outsiders,’’ enriching the collective understanding (Brear, 2016). PAR, as an approach, upholds principles of fairness and representation, offering opportunities for diverse student groups, including those traditionally marginalized or voiceless within society, to actively contribute to the research process (Kananura et al., 2017). In the context of this study, PAR created a platform for critical discussions on the assessment of WIL, allowing participants, including marginalized and oppressed students, to fearlessly express their opinions on matters directly affecting them. Importantly, the study dismantles power inequalities, as PSTs are integral participants with the agency to voice their concerns, eliminating the reliance on external assessors to determine their fate in the assessment process.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This qualitative research study diverges from a quantitative approach, where the emphasis is not on numbers and generalization (Clavert et al., 2024). In qualitative research, the number of participants is not a primary consideration; instead, the focus is on achieving a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon (Mahlomaholo & Netshandama, 2012). The chosen context for this study was a high-performing secondary school in the Thabo Mofutsanyana

Education district within the Free State Province of South Africa. The selection of this school was strategic, driven by its proximity to one of the University of the Free State's campuses. This proximity facilitated researcher visits to the school and allowed for in-person meetings with nine PSTs and five mentors who actively participated in the study. The nine PSTs were randomly selected from the pool of third-year education students who had engaged in teaching practice at the same school for two consecutive years, contributing valuable perspectives to the research. Additionally, the five teachers were purposefully selected due to their roles as mentors to the PSTs involved in the study.

Data Generation

The data collection for this study employed the Free Attitude Interview (FAI) technique in conjunction with observation forms. The FAI technique involves initiating conversations among participants using a single question to stimulate discussion (Tshelane, 2013). As articulated by Buskens (2011), FAI encourages participants to engage in a more natural and conversational manner during the study, as opposed to responding to a predetermined set of questionnaires. This approach offers the advantage of allowing participants the opportunity to express themselves more freely compared to a situation where they are constrained to respond to closed-ended questions. To ensure accurate capturing of the information discussed during the interviews, voice and/or video recordings were utilized. This method was chosen to enhance the fidelity of data collection, enabling a thorough analysis of the qualitative information gathered through the FAI technique and observation forms.

In the initial phase of the study, preliminary visits were conducted to mobilize mentor teachers and PSTs for their active involvement. The study adopted a PAR design to facilitate and encourage participation (Mahlomaholo, 2009). PAR mandates the mobilization of participants to collaboratively identify and address problems (Moloi, 2013). Participants were integral to the decision-making process throughout the study, contributing to aspects such as problem identification and solution development (Anderson et al., 2015). This participatory approach holds the advantage of mitigating unequal power dynamics between principal researchers and participants (Mahlomaholo, 2010). Moreover, the solutions derived through PAR are not only locally relevant but also context specific (Ozannie & Saatcioglu, 2008). By involving participants in the decision-making and problem-solving processes, the study ensures that solutions are informed by the firsthand experiences of those directly affected (Dupuis et al., 2016). This collaborative effort builds a meaningful partnership between researchers and participants, fostering a more inclusive and contextually sensitive study outcome.

The utilization of participant observation in this study involved engaging the senses, including sight, touch, and the physical presence of both researchers and participants throughout the entire research process. Participants were required to be present in the classroom to observe a preservice teacher delivering a lesson. This direct involvement allowed them to witness teaching and learning dynamics and gain a comprehensive understanding of the classroom environment (Aagaard & Matthiesen, 2016). Following the classroom

observations, a structured discussion ensued, during which a designated mentor teacher assumed the responsibility of note-taking. This discussion primarily focused on the development of an observation form tailored for assessing PSTs. In the subsequent six paragraphs, the following sections outline the phases of PAR, adapted from Kemmis (2007).

The initial phase of the PAR cycle involved the systematic organization of experiences, where a collaborative team of 15 participants worked collectively to generate data. The inaugural meeting facilitated the sharing of collective knowledge on assessing WIL based on participants' prior experiences (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). During this data generation phase, the objective was to elucidate issues related to the assessment of WIL for university PSTs. Furthermore, ground rules were established among both participants and researchers to ensure the smooth implementation of the study. These rules included mutual respect, acknowledgement of diverse opinions, attentive listening, and the commitment to weekly meetings. A designated team was formed to enhance coordination of activities.

In the second phase of PAR cycle, the focus shifted to collective analysis and problematizing. This stage commenced during the second research meeting, which was strategically organized to delve into the assessment of WIL. The discussions encompassed patterns, identified problems, causal factors, and potential solutions. The team dedicated this phase to addressing the primary objective of the study – the disengagement of PSTs in the assessment of WIL. During this stage, PSTs were afforded the opportunity to express their concerns regarding the assessment processes for the module they were undertaking. Among the challenges articulated were conflicting interests between assessors and students, PSTs' confidence levels in the classroom, the rigorous demands of higher education on assessments, and students' financial considerations for WIL. A prominent challenge identified was the perceived judgmental and biased nature of the assessment system toward students. Consequently, the team decided to scrutinize the contents of the observation form and to observe a mentor teacher. This approach proved instrumental in uncovering gaps in the observation form and addressing assessors' misconceptions.

The third phase centered on reflection and the formulation of an action plan to instigate changes addressing the challenges associated with WIL for PSTs. During this phase, the team directed its attention toward the assessors to disseminate key findings. Notably, the entire team collectively observed a lesson conducted by an experienced teacher. This approach aligns with the assertion made by Lune and Berg (2017) that observation serves as a means of measuring behavior by closely examining individuals, events, situations, or phenomena in their natural settings. Defined by Creswell and Creswell (2017) as the process of collecting open-ended, firsthand information through the systematic observation of people and places at research sites, classroom observations were instrumental in characterizing teachers' practices during lessons. This allowed the team to assess how these practices aligned with the objectives of the study.

The fourth cycle entailed the implementation and evaluation of actions. During this phase, PSTs delivered lessons, now under the observation of mentor teachers. Subsequent to

these presentations, discussions took place after school, creating a forum to examine conditions that could effectively address challenges encountered by PSTs in the context of WIL. A prominent condition identified was the necessity for PSTs to meticulously plan their lessons. This became a focal point as PSTs initially held the misconception that possessing content knowledge was sufficient for effective teaching, without the need for thorough preparation. The discussions delved into the various components of lesson plans, underscoring the importance of each component in the teaching process.

The fifth phase involved the systematic organization of learning, where the team replicated the process across various class activities. To reinforce this phase, the team organized a workshop specifically designed to identify potential challenges associated with the implemented solutions. The underlying notion was that, irrespective of the apparent nobility of an idea, it is essential to recognize and address potential challenges that may impede its successful implementation.

In the final phase, PSTs and mentors engaged in reflective exercises to assess the successes achieved through the implementation of the steps. PSTs undertook a self-reflection exercise, evaluating their individual experiences and growth throughout the process. Similarly, mentors engaged in reflective practices to evaluate their roles and contributions to the overall success of the initiative. This reflective process served as a valuable component in gauging the impact of the undertaken actions and fostering continuous improvement.

Data Analysis

In this study, critical discourse analysis (CDA) served as the analytical framework for examining the generated data. CDA, as elucidated by Fairclough (2013), directs attention toward both written and spoken words. In the context of spoken discourse, our analysis focused on transcribed data derived from meetings, while written text scrutiny centred on comments made by PSTs concerning the observation forms. Furthermore, CDA was applied to scrutinize both verbal and nonverbal communication with participants, aiming to explore the assessment of university PSTs in the context of WIL. The objective was to critically question the existing assessment practices and propose improvements. The utilization of CDA was particularly pertinent in addressing the perceived injustice of excluding PSTs from their own assessment in WIL, aligning with the call for transformative change in PST assessment methodologies (Tsotetsi, 2013). Our analysis delved into three distinct levels—textual, discursive, and social practice—providing a comprehensive examination of the assessment of university PSTs during WIL. This approach was instrumental in revealing the judgmental nature of the current assessment practices, highlighting the disengagement of PSTs in the evaluation of their own learning experiences.

CDA operates by leveraging language as a communication tool to empower individuals to think critically, unveiling insights present in both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects to address underlying issues (Mustofa & Yuwana, 2016). In the context of this study, CDA was employed to investigate the impact on participants within the given situation and to discern

whether these effects prompted changes in the assessment of WIL (Alford, 2015). The application of CDA allowed for a nuanced examination of language use, enabling a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play, and facilitating insights into potential shifts in the assessment practices related to WIL.

At the textual level, our analysis focused on both spoken and written expressions of participants. Rashidi and Souzardel (2010) emphasize the clarity of CDA when examining the relationship between ways of talking and ways of thinking within written and spoken language. Given that participants in our study actively engaged in verbal communication, the analysis of spoken and written words, derived from comments made during lesson observations, was straightforward. Moving to the discursive analysis level, our attention shifted toward exploring power dynamics and their influences among participants. In this context, we sought to uncover how power issues manifested and impacted the discourse. At the social level, we delved into examining the rights and obligations of participants in the conversation, specifically in the context of fostering social change. As noted by Mosia (2016), social analysis involves examining broader societal structures, encompassing social behaviors and arrangements. Our focus here was on observing the participants' interactions and behavior during discussions of change. This level of analysis was integral to the study, aligning with the PAR methodology and CDA, both of which prioritize issues of power and social change (Alford, 2015). CDA, in particular, was instrumental in identifying instances of positive developments, hope, and change within the discourse.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of the data we have generated, we used the four criteria credibility, dependability, transferability authenticity (Alonzo & Teng, 2023). To adhere to the credibility requirement, we described the methods we used to generate data. We used meetings initiated through FAI to start conversations. As for transferability, we gave the context where the study took place. The readership can further contextualize the findings in their spaces. In terms of dependability, we provided verbal utterances from participants. Furthermore, participants had an opportunity of member checking to confirm our interpretation of what they said. In terms of authenticity, our findings can be applied in real life contexts as we obtained it through PSTs and their mentor teachers.

FINDINGS

We used did not use real names to represent participants in this study. Preservice Teachers (PTs) as Student#1, Student#2, … Student#9, and experienced teachers as Teacher#1, Teacher#2, … Teacher#5, and Teaching Practice officer as TP Officer. This paper recorded only data responding to the question of why PSTs are not engaged in the assessment of WIL. Three reasons were identified after data were saturated why PSTs were not actively involved in their assessment of WIL.

Lack of training for assessment of WIL

Participants were asked why PSTs were not actively involved in their assessment of WIL. The absence of adequate training for WIL assessment surfaced as a significant factor hindering the involvement of PSTs in the assessment process. This observation gains support from the remarks of a participating teacher during the discussions, questioning the rationale behind their responsibility to evaluate third-year students.

Teacher #1 raised a pertinent question during the discussion:

"Why are we tasked with assessing third-year students pursuing a teaching degree, especially when they are specialists in their respective subjects? If they have reached the third year, shouldn't they already possess the necessary teaching skills? I believe their time in schools is meant for applying the knowledge acquired at the university."

It is evident from the above that teachers do not know that they need to assess preservice teachers during WIL. Teacher#1 understand that a student at third year level knows how to teach, and only visit the schools for WIL to practice the skills. In response to the inquiry from the teacher, TP officer clarified that the mandatory requirement stems from the policy outlined by MRTEQ. This policy underscores the need for WIL to be both supervised and formally assessed.

"The MRTEQ policy underscores the importance of both supervision and formal assessment in the WIL program. This rationale guides the assessment of pre-service teachers within the program." (TP officer)

The TP Officer's response further justified the absence of training for assessors of WIL. The TP Officer indicated that, had there been any training conducted, it would have been referenced as part of the justification for the assessment process. Furthermore, this is supported by literature that during WIL framework, students are paired with mentors in schools who guide and assess their performance by assigning scores that are subsequently submitted to the university. Additionally, institution-based lecturers conduct visits to assess students, contributing further scores for evaluation.

Unclear purpose of assessment for WIL

Participants further responded to the question of why PSTs were not actively involved in their assessment of WIL by referring to the purpose of assessment that is not clear to assessors themselves. The lack of a clear purpose among assessors was found to be one of the key factors contributing to the disengagement of PSTs in the assessment of WIL. Assessors found themselves evaluating university students without a well-defined understanding of the underlying objectives. This lack of clarity in the assessment purpose stands in contradiction to the expectations outlined in MRTEQ policy, which advocates for the supervision and formal assessment of PSTs in the program (DHET, 2015). Comments from PSTs, the mentor teacher, and the TP officer further underscored the prevailing uncertainty regarding the rationale behind assessing WIL. These voices collectively emphasize that the purpose of WIL assessment was not universally clear to all stakeholders involved. Two students shared their observations following the TP Officer's explanation.

Student #1 highlighted:

"Many teachers simply fill out the forms without actively observing our teaching in the classroom during assessments."

The above statement was emphasized by Student #2:

"Some even go to the extent of asking us how to allocate marks when completing the assessment forms."

Research findings from the above revealed that mentor teachers assess preservice teachers without purpose. It was only at this meeting when the TP officer was responding to these comments clarifying the purpose of assessment in WIL to teachers. The TP officer responded by indicating the primary objective of WIL as to assess whether students can effectively apply teaching methods in their respective subjects, with the aim to address any deficiencies in their teaching skills. The TP officer further emphasized that it goes beyond assessing mere subject knowledge. Additionally, the assessment serves the teaching practice module, ensuring that students meet the stipulated requirements outlined in the policy of minimum qualifications for teacher education.

Poor communication between PSTs, mentor teachers and lecturers

Another obstacle preventing the active involvement of PSTs in the assessment of WIL was identified as inadequate communication among assessors, PSTs, mentor teachers, and lecturers. This challenge was substantiated by comments made during the discussions.

Student #3 made a comment that they had never discussed assessment with any of the assessors until the assessor visit for assessment:

"I have never discussed assessment expectations with my lecturer or mentor teacher; they only visited our class on the assessment day, assigned marks, and then left."

The TP officer responded to the comment made:

"The purpose of this discussion is to explore ways to enhance communication during the assessment of WIL. Let's hope this platform will facilitate improvements."

The concern for lack of communication between stakeholders involved in the assessment of WIL was not only concerning the preservice teaches, but teachers were also not happy. Teacher #2 also supported the lack of communication that was prevailing between them and the university.

Teacher #2:

"This is the first instance of university lecturers coming to the school to discuss assessment matters related to WIL. Usually, you [lecturers] just place student teachers here and depart."

Teacher #3 responded to the student's communication concerns, stating that:

"We always provide notice when we plan to assess your class. It's not that we arrive unexpectedly for assessments. The lack of communication with you students might be because you are consistently present with us, and we assume you are adequately informed."

Student #5 expressed a broader perspective, by asserting that:

> *"All assessors, lecturers, and mentor teachers don't communicate with us beforehand about what to expect in class. They simply come, observe the lesson, assign marks, and leave. There's no opportunity to discuss how they arrived at the final mark."*

Teacher #4 showed remorse by shifting the blame to limited time:

> *"As teachers, we struggle with limited time to engage in thorough communication with students. Our free periods are occupied with other school commitments such as grading, recording marks, and preparing exam papers. This is why we may encounter difficulties in maintaining extensive communication."*

All the above discussions show the need for communication in any platform where there is collaboration. The study by Zapata-Rivera, et. al., (2021) on communicating assessment reports that communication include actionable feedback to guide learning. Through communication students learn their strengths, weaknesses, and get recommendations for improvement. PAR methodology as transdisciplinary approach in this study, established meaningful and successful collaboration between the researcher and stakeholders (Home & Rump, 2015). Participants in this study were able to communicate freely in discussing their concern as people affected by the situation.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings uncovered a deficiency in the training of assessors, mentor teachers, and students themselves regarding the assessment of WIL. Mentor teachers, functioning as assessors for WIL, were assigning marks to students without a clear understanding of the purpose behind their assessment role. Some assessors were observed to be providing marks without actively observing students in the classroom, while others went to the extent of seeking input from students on the appropriate mark allocation. This approach, driven by the belief that students prefer a passing grade, resulted in conflicts between students and assessors who adhered to a more just assessment system. A key recommendation emerging from this study is the adoption of a considerate approach to WIL assessment, aimed at averting confusion. This approach involves continuous assessment to monitor learning improvement, with the final score determined through conscientious collaboration between assessors and PSTs. The study advocates for sustained student engagement throughout the WIL assessment process until the final results are determined.

The study identified an additional concern regarding the lack of a clear purpose for the assessment of WIL. Assessors exhibited uncertainty about the purpose of WIL assessment, often asserting that there was no necessity to assess students. Some assessors communicated to students that, having successfully passed their subjects, and learned the teaching methods at the university, assessment was superfluous, and their role was merely to practice teaching. Notably, discussions revealed that some assessors were unaware of the assessment policy, MRTEQ. They engaged in assessment because students presented them with assessment forms,

indicating it was mandatory for teachers to assign marks and return the forms to the university following the WIL period. This study contributes clarity on the rationale behind and the optimal methods for assessing WIL. The elucidation of WIL assessment to mentor teachers proved instrumental in establishing effective strategies to achieve the instructional objectives of WIL. Moreover, the study unveiled the potential benefits of distributing responsibilities between PSTs and mentor teachers, offering a viable solution to simplify the assessment of WIL. This collaborative approach not only facilitated mentor teachers in acquiring new teaching methods from PSTs but also enhanced their capacity to support students more effectively in the future.

Another notable finding from the discussions highlighted the issue of poor communication among PSTs, mentor teachers, and lecturers during the assessment of WIL. Teachers tended to rely on written comments on assessment forms, assuming that this was sufficient communication for PSTs. This reliance on written communication, as opposed to direct verbal communication, was identified as a potential obstacle to PSTs' success (Khan et al., 2017). The study underscored the importance of providing PSTs with clear expectations before formal assessment and emphasized the need for constructive feedback. Additionally, the discussions revealed teacher concerns about the involvement of lecturers in discussing student progress with them as mentors. One mentor teacher highlighted the university's practice of dropping off PSTs at schools as an example of inadequate communication between lecturers and teachers regarding placement and expectations during WIL assessment. As a result, the study recommends prioritizing effective communication among stakeholders involved in WIL assessment. This includes fostering clearer communication channels between lecturers, mentor teachers, and PSTs to enhance understanding, set expectations, and ensure a more supportive and successful assessment process.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the imperative of actively engaging PSTs in the assessment of WIL through dedicated workshops. The justification for this need was established by involving preservice teachers (PSTs) in their WIL assessment, aiming to enhance their understanding of the assessment's purpose and promote self-engagement. To address the research questions concerning the training and comprehension of assessors for WIL, it is recommended that mentors, lecturers, and PSTs undergo training in assessment techniques. Moreover, fostering collaboration among these stakeholders is crucial for providing comprehensive support throughout the WIL program. A key recommendation stemming from this study advocates for the collaboration between university lecturers and mentor teachers, extending beyond mere assessment discussions with PSTs. It emphasizes that these collaborations should involve regular meetings to discuss student progress. Such meetings should not solely focus on assessment but should encompass broader discussions related to WIL experiences and expectations. Implementing these recommendations is anticipated to empower preservice teachers (PSTs) with a clear understanding of WIL expectations, fostering satisfaction with their

module results. This approach not only recognizes the voices of PSTs in the assessment process but also cultivates a culture of self-assessment as they transit into qualified teachers Results of this study are based on the perceptions of experience teachers, lecturer and preservice teachers from one university in South Africa.

Ethical consideration

This study is grounded in the research conducted as part of the researcher's PhD thesis, which received ethical clearance with the reference number UFS-HSD2018/1107. The findings and recommendations presented herein represent the perspectives of the PSTs, mentor teachers, and the researcher, and should not be construed as reflective of the school's opinions. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Education's ethical clearance committee at the University, and participants were made aware of and adhered to ethical considerations such as confidentiality and non-identification in the study. Participants who actively engaged and evolved into co-researchers throughout the study were assured of their anonymity, and it was communicated that data generated would be securely stored until the conclusion of the research. Clear explanations about their rights in the study, including the right to participate and withdraw at any point, were provided to participants. Consent forms were thoroughly explained, and each participant received detailed information about the study during the preliminary meeting before signing the consent forms, ensuring their informed and voluntary participation in the research.

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