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Accounting Student Teachers' Experiences of Mentoring during Teaching Practice

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Abstract. Mentoring during teaching practice can be a challenge for student teachers, with some student teachers reporting some difficulties with their mentor teachers during teaching practice. This qualitative study explored the experiences of accounting student teachers regarding mentoring during teaching practice, and it was located within an interpretive research paradigm. An exploratory case study was adopted as the research design while situated learning theory served as the theoretical lens of the study. Fourteen third-year accounting student teachers from one ODeL institution in South Africa were randomly sampled, and document analysis was employed to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The study revealed that student teachers have mixed experiences in terms of mentorship during teaching practice. The study further revealed that student teachers received professional and pedagogical mentorship from the mentor teachers. It also appeared that some student teachers experienced lack of mentorship from some mentor teachers. Based on the findings, this study recommends that the stakeholders involved in teaching practice should increase positive experiences that shape accounting student teachers' experiences and eliminate those that lead to student teachers experiencing teaching practice negatively.

Keywords: Accounting; experiences; mentoring; student teachers

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1.

2. Introduction

Accounting is among the gateway subjects in South Africa due to the role it plays in the economy of the country. Accounting as a subject produces key accounting professionals such as the accountants that play a major role in the economy of the country (Mkhize et al., 2022). However, the quality of teachers teaching accounting in secondary schools is under scrutiny (Mkhize et al., 2022; Mkhize et al., 2023; Ngwenya, 2019). Accounting teachers lack the conceptual understanding of accounting, especially those who were trained using the traditional procedural bookkeeping approach (Mkhize et al., 2022; Taylor, 2019; Venkat, 2019).

In some instances, they struggle with the pedagogical knowledge that is suitable for teaching accounting. Mkhize et al. (2022) observe that some teachers do not implement teaching methods that are suitable for teaching accounting to accommodate learners' different learning styles in their classrooms. In addition to the lack of content and pedagogical knowledge, some accounting teachers lack necessary attributes as Ogunyemi and Olagbaju (2020) reason that some teachers lack positive attitudes towards the subject. Thus, the preceding discussion shows that the teaching of accounting faces several challenges in South African schools.

Some of the challenges that were identified in the teaching of accounting can be traced back to teacher training programmes (De Clercq & Shalem, 2014; Mkhize et al., 2022). Notwithstanding the unique challenges faced by student teachers who receive their tuition mainly through contact sessions, these challenges are acute among those who are registered with Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) institutions, which subsequently places more strain on the quality of their training. This point finds credence in Lumadi (2021) who found that student teachers learning through ODeL model complained about the outdated study materials that they perpetually received from their course presenters and delayed responses to their email queries. Consequently, there is a need for the training and teaching of accounting to be given a serious attention as early as the teacher training level.

One of the avenues ODeL institutions attempt to achieve this is by exposing accounting student teachers to the real school context through teaching practice; where they apply different teaching methods in a real classroom and are exposed to different learners with different capabilities (Ezeafulukwe & Ezeobi, 2018). The authentic environment that is created during teaching practice for accounting student teachers to apply different teaching methods should help them to fine-tune their content and pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, Antonova and Kruglikova (2020) note that during teaching practice, student teachers gain experience, and they learn to apply theoretical knowledge they learnt from the university. In other words, teaching practice creates a platform for student teachers to showcase their content, pedagogical knowledge, and teacher attributes they acquired from the university.

Teaching practice is also acclaimed for creating a platform for accounting student teachers to observe experienced mentor teachers implementing various methods

of teaching and a variety of classroom management styles (Yusuf et al., 2022). Observing experienced mentor teachers teaching accounting can help them to calibrate their pedagogical knowledge. Student teachers also get a chance to teach under the supervision of their mentor teachers during teaching practice. When student teachers are engaged in teaching, mentor teachers evaluate their content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and classroom management skills (Bada & Jita, 2023). The evaluation by a mentor teacher can help student teachers to understand their strengths and weaknesses regarding pedagogical and content knowledge (Jita & Munje, 2022). After identifying their strengths and weaknesses, student teachers can work with their mentor teachers and teacher educators to improve the weaknesses and solidify their strengths before joining the teaching profession as professional accounting teachers.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that teaching practice plays an important role in giving accounting student teachers insights into how teachers cultivate their content and pedagogical knowledge (Hoben, 2021). In other words, teaching practice presents student teachers with opportunities to teach in a real school context, which shapes their pedagogical and content knowledge. As mentioned earlier, some teachers still fail to capitalise on the platform created through teaching practice to fine-tune their teaching skills before joining the teaching profession.

Some scholars attributed poor teaching skills among the teachers to the quality of mentorship they received before joining the teaching profession (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020). Kihwele and Chuma (2020) further assert that mentoring during teaching practice informs the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. This is a valid observation because student teachers rely heavily on their mentor teachers during teaching practice and they spend more time with them throughout their teaching practice; hence, mentoring can immensely inform their teaching practice experiences.

Bada and Jita (2023) underscore that the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice determine how far they would go in the teaching profession. It is thus important to explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice, as this can help the stakeholders involved in teaching practice to create environments conducive for student teachers to have noble and positive experiences during teaching practice. Hence, this study explores the experiences of accounting student teachers regarding mentoring during teaching practice. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The research questions are: What are the accounting student teachers' experiences regarding mentoring during teaching practice? How do accounting student teachers perceive the roles of mentor teachers during teaching practice?

3. Literature Review

2.1. Experiences of student teachers during teaching practice

An experience is defined as a process an individual has undergone or is still undergoing, and provides knowledge and skills through action, emotions, communication, and cognition in life (Hohr, 2013). This study recognises

experiences as the events that student teachers encounter in the real school during teaching practice that shape their professional development. One major experience that student teachers undergo during teaching practice is mentoring that they receive from the mentor teachers. According to Garza et al. (2019), mentoring is seen as an integral part of professional development whereby a seasoned colleague shares professional knowledge with a junior counterpart. The existing studies reveal that student teachers experience teaching practice differently. Some studies have found that student teachers experience teaching practice positively (Jita & Munje, 2022; Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020). A Tanzanian study conducted by Kihwele and Mtandi (2020) revealed that student teachers perceive teaching practice as the crucial part of their education as the mentoring they receive helps to consolidate their pedagogical knowledge.

In South Africa, Jita and Munje (2022) found that mentor teachers' experiences and personal characteristics as well as their abilities created opportunities for them to grow professionally during teaching practice. However plausible the mentor teachers' gestures may appear, of great concern to us is what appears to be the perpetuation of what we deem to be mentor teacher reliance syndrome, that is, student teachers overly relying on their mentors instead of seeing themselves as assets capable of responding favourably to their professional challenges.

Hence, Kelchtermans (2019) has called for a more asset-based approach to mentoring which appreciates student and early career teachers' unique skills that they bring in their professional spaces. Nonetheless, this does not nullify the significance of mentor teachers in orientating and guiding student teachers during the important initial phases of professional identity formation. As such, Jita and Munje (2022) assert that positive mentoring experiences during teaching practice cannot be over-emphasised enough because of the potential they carry to shape student teacher's perception of the teaching profession and leading them to believe that they matter.

In contrast, several studies conducted in South Africa (Adebola, 2022; Moosa & Rembach, 2020) and internationally (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020), have found that student teachers have negative experiences during teaching practice. A study conducted by Kihwele and Chuma (2020) in Tanzania revealed that some student teachers had negative experiences during teaching practice due to lack of support and guidance from their mentor teachers. In South Africa, Moosa and Rembach (2020) revealed that some student teachers see teaching practice as a series of isolated and decontextualised lessons provided to them by the mentor teachers due to uninspiring experiences, they got from the teaching experience.

The preceding findings show how mentor teachers are not always emotionally available to their mentees which leaves them vulnerable to avoidable professional blunders. Rather, some of the mentor teachers mistakenly see student teachers as their replacements and abandon their teaching responsibilities to them (Sokhulu, 2018). It is clear from the finding by Sokhulu (2018) that student teachers who are given the full load of teaching responsibilities to teach will receive little to no

mentoring during teaching practice. It is, therefore, inevitable for such student teachers to have negative experiences during teaching practice. Other factors that contribute to student teachers' negative experiences during teaching practice are not directly linked to mentoring, but mentor teachers can play a role in alleviating them.

For example, a South African study by Arasomwan and Mashiya (2021) found that pedagogical incapacities during their teaching practice left some of the student teachers frustrated and anxious. Furthermore, another South African study found that schools do not adequately prepare to receive student teachers for teaching practice, and this negatively affects their experiences of teaching practice (Adebola, 2022). In Tanzania, Mpate et al. (2023) discovered that student teachers' negative experiences during teaching practice were due to limited skills in preparing lessons and managing classrooms. Finally, a Nigerian study by Ezeafulukwe & Ezeobi (2018) found that the scarcity of learning materials negatively affected student teacher's experiences because it hindered them from effectively engaging in the teaching process.

The literature reviewed above shows a plethora of factors that contribute to student teachers' negative experiences during teaching practice. Some are not directly linked to mentoring, but mentor teachers can help student teachers to mitigate them. For example, issues such as the lack of preparation by schools for the arrival of student teachers (Adebola, 2022) and the lack of learning materials (Ezeafulukwe & Ezeobi, 2018) can be addressed by the mentor teachers in collaboration with student teachers during teaching practice.

The literature also highlighted glaring shortcomings by mentor teachers resulting in student teachers' negative experiences during teaching practice. Issues such as lack of support and guidance during teaching practice (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020; Moosa & Rembach, 2020) featured strongly in the literature. To overcome this, Jita & Munje (2022) advise mentor teachers to put aside time to provide guidance such as feedback after each lesson presentation. This helps student teachers to grow professionally, and it can positively shape their experiences during teaching practice.

2.2. Roles of mentor teachers during teaching practice

Mentoring during teaching practice facilitates student teachers' professional development by enabling them to learn from experienced teachers (Gunawardena, 2023; Hoben, 2021). Bhebhe (2022) expands that mentor teachers are expected to be creative and active experts in their subjects and demonstrate outstanding performance in lesson preparation and delivery so that student teachers can copy the good practices and use them. This assertion implies that school-based mentor teachers should be exceptional in their craft to allow student teachers to learn from them during teaching practice.

This shows that mentor teachers are integral in the professional development of student teachers because they are expected to provide them with guidance, support, and constructive feedback in relation to their progress during teaching

practice (Moosa & Rembach, 2020). In other words, mentor teachers are the backbone of student teachers' learning during teaching practice. This is because mentor teachers are responsible for helping student teachers to prepare their lessons and demonstrate how the lesson is delivered in the actual classroom (Chou, 2019). Student teachers engaging in teaching practice after completing courses at their teacher training institutions still need guidance from their mentor teachers on how to put theory into practice. Some student teachers find the implementation of content and pedagogical knowledge challenging during teaching practice; hence, the need for mentor teachers to guide them (Mpate et al., 2023).

Furthermore, some student teachers find it challenging to communicate with learners at their level and to design learning activities that are appropriate to the learners' age and level of understanding (Deng et al., 2018). This might be because accounting student teachers are taught the content at a higher level in the teacher training institutions; hence, a need for mentor teachers to guide them to adjust their lessons and content to the level of secondary school learners.

Mentor teachers are also responsible for modelling lesson presentation to accounting student teachers. Kihwele and Mtandi (2020) assert that student teachers should observe mentor teachers teaching so they can gain knowledge on how the lesson is delivered. This suggests that mentor teachers should allow accounting student teachers to observe how accounting is taught. This will not only help student teachers gain pedagogical knowledge, but also it will equip them with classroom management skills. Some student teachers are afraid of facing learners during teaching practice, especially at the beginning of teaching practice (Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020). Observing mentor teachers engaged in teaching would help them to learn some strategies used by the mentor teacher to manage the class.

Overall, one may conclude that several studies that explore the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice have been conducted both locally and internationally. It emerged from the literature that student teachers experience teaching practice both positively (Jita & Munje, 2022; Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020) and negatively (Adebola, 2022; Moosa & Rembach, 2020). The reviewed literature also revealed that mentor teachers are at the heart of determining the experiences of student teachers during teaching practice (Moosa & Rembach, 2020).

Despite the existing studies, there is a dearth of studies exploring the experiences of student teachers from a distance education institution in South Africa regarding mentoring during teaching practice. Furthermore, there is scarcity of studies that focus on the experiences of accounting student teachers during teaching practice, despite accounting being a gateway subject in South Africa. Therefore, this study makes a unique contribution in the field of accounting education and distance education by exploring the experiences of accounting student teachers in relation to mentoring during teaching practice.

2.3 Theoretical framework

When accounting student teachers embark on their teaching practice, they are expected to observe an experienced teacher teaching and performing responsibilities associated with teaching in a way that will enhance their professional competencies once they become fully qualified. Against this backdrop – and anchored in the understanding that learning is social in nature, this study is premised on Lave and Wenger’s situated learning theory (SLT) as a theoretical approach. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning cannot be detached from the social environments within which agents (accounting student teachers) originate. To clarify its meaning, Lave and Wenger (1991) draw from what they call *legitimate peripheral participation*, meaning a lens to talk about the relations between seasoned colleagues (mentors) and mentees (accounting student teachers) and how “newcomers become part of a community of practice”.

Thus, when accounting student teachers are placed in their respective schools for teaching practice, they decide to join a community of practice through which their teaching competencies are harnessed while also fulfilling specific expectations. By joining these communities of practice, they learn, formally and informally, from experienced teachers so that they gain a better understanding of nuances of teaching accounting (Hamman-Fisher & McGhie, 2023). As such, at the centre of SLT is the idea that accounting student teachers carry with them valuable historical knowledge, i.e., knowledge acquired throughout their different life stages, that they merge with other acquired forms of knowledge as they interact with the outside world. The preceding idea is extended by Handley et al. (2006) when they argue that agents do not nurture and uncover new identities only in a specific community of practice but from multiple arenas of communities of practice.

However, their integration into these communities of practice is not always smooth because at times they are viewed as *hollow beings* upon which ideas are imposed instead of being regarded as “peripheral participants in a community engaged in its own reproduction” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 76). The *reproduction* to which Lave and Wenger (1991) refer is indicative of the evolving nature of communities of practice as opposed to being seen as fixed properties. On this basis, it is prudent to say, while accounting student teachers begin their professional lives on the peripheries by often being regarded as recipients instead of collaborators in the knowledge exchange process, the evolving nature of communities of practice illuminates the idea that, eventually, they will grow to become expert teachers.

4. Methodology

Due to the nature of the phenomenon that was explored in this study, qualitative research approach was adopted. Teherani et al. (2015) postulate that the qualitative research approach is ideal for studies that intend to explore participants’ experiences, views, and behaviours. This study explored accounting student teachers’ experiences of mentoring during teaching practice using the interpretive research paradigm. An exploratory research design was employed as

a research design for this study. A third-year teaching practice module that is done by student teachers enrolled for Bachelor of Education Senior and Further Education and Training (FET) Phase in the selected ODeL institution was identified purposefully for this study. This module was selected on the basis that it requires all third-year students to complete their teaching practice in the FET phase. At the end of their teaching practice, all third-year students are required to submit the portfolios of evidence which includes reflections on their teaching practice.

For data collection, document analysis was employed where a sample of fourteen portfolios of evidence was selected. From, 3 455 total portfolios submitted on Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) by third-year student teachers, fourteen portfolios were sampled. Moodle is the learning management system (LMS) used by students to submit their portfolios after undergoing teaching practice. From 3 455 total portfolio submissions, the list of all portfolios belonging to third-year accounting student teachers was developed by the researchers. At the end, a total of one-hundred and thirty portfolios were enlisted. The researchers then engaged in systematic random sampling where every ninth portfolio was selected.

A total of fourteen portfolios were therefore sampled for the study. After obtaining this sample of fourteen portfolios, the researchers engaged in document analysis where student teachers' reflections as chronicled in each portfolio were then analysed. As part of their reflective reports, student teachers were expected to reflect on their mentoring experiences during teaching practice. The researchers recorded all student teachers' responses on the spreadsheet, and they then engaged in data analysis. Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse data. The researchers organised data to prepare for analysis and started to allocate codes to the data. Some codes were revised and merged to develop themes and subthemes that were used to present the findings.

3.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution where this study was conducted. The researchers also ensured that they abode by all the ethical standards throughout the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld to protect the portfolios that were sampled for this study. Pseudonyms Stud #1 to Stud #14 were used when reporting the findings of the study.

3.2. Ensuring trustworthiness

In addition to observing ethical research standards in this study, the researchers abode by all the trustworthiness strategies in qualitative research. These included credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Primarily, *co-researcher member checking* was used to ensure study credibility and confirmability, whereby both researchers cross-checked each other's themes and subthemes until consensus was reached (Stahl & King, 2020; Sikicikoglu, Koc, Olcay & Vuran, 2024). We also fully detailed data collection and analysis processes, including the use of direct quotations when reporting the results, as well as random sampling to ensure transferability.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Two main themes that emerged during data analysis were used to report the findings. The themes are: Experiences associated with mentoring during teaching practice and Guidance provided to student teachers during teaching practice.

3.3.1 Experiences associated with mentoring during teaching practice

This main theme reports on the accounting student teachers' experiences in relation to mentoring during teaching practice. It emerged from student teachers' reflections that they had a mixture of both positive and negative experiences of mentoring during teaching practice. Accounting student teachers' reflections and experiences are captured in the subthemes below.

3.3.1.1 Positive experiences of mentoring during teaching practice

Some accounting student teachers experienced mentoring during teaching practice positively. This is evidenced in their commentaries that are reported below.

"My mentor suggested that we do co-teaching. The experience was marvellous as I got an opportunity to present the lesson with my mentor side-by-side." -Stud #4

Stud #3 also had a positive experience with mentoring during teaching practice, and he stated,

"I used to have meetings with my mentor to check my readiness for every class and she always accompanied me to Grade 10 Accounting class".

From the assertions above, it can be deduced that both Stud #4 and Stud #3 worked closely with their accounting mentor teachers during teaching practice. Stud 4# engaged in co-teaching with her mentor, while Stud #3 was accompanied by his mentor to the class. It appeared from these accounting student teachers that working closely with their mentors boosted their experiences of mentoring during teaching practice.

Furthermore, it transpired from student teachers' reflections that accounting mentor teachers assisted them in consolidating corrections. Stud #12 said:

"My mentor helped me to compile the corrections. We used the previous question papers, textbooks, and the teacher's guide."

From this, it can be interpreted that the mentor did not leave Stud #12 to compile accounting corrections on his own after teaching and assessing learners. Having the mentor intervening in the compilation of corrections will not only enhance the confidence of Stud #12, but it will also help him to understand the role of corrections in reinforcing accounting content to learners.

Stud #8 further revealed that she did not receive mentoring from her designated mentor only, but also from other teachers within the school. She stated:

"Teachers in commerce department helped me a lot. They make student teachers to feel welcome and comfortable. They are working together to ensure that you as a student teacher you gain a lot of experience and

acquire a lot of knowledge. They were assisting, guiding, and providing a full support."

The commentary from Stud #8 suggests that mentoring was not confined to her designated mentor, and this contributed to a positive experience of teaching practice. This is because she learnt from a variety of experienced teachers who mentored and orientated her to the teaching profession.

3.3.1.2 Negative experiences of mentoring during teaching practice

In contrast with the positive experiences that were recounted by accounting student teachers in the preceding section, it also emerged from their reflections that some had negative experiences of mentoring during teaching practice. For example, Stud #13 insinuated that she was not properly orientated to teaching practice by the school and by her mentor. She said:

"There was no proper orientation for me. The school and my mentor should have first allowed me to go through orientation process where I will be familiarised with the school and learners before starting teaching."

From Stud #13's sentiments, it can be concluded that the lack of proper orientation to teaching practice caused her to experience teaching practice negatively. Stud #6 had a similar experience by not being introduced to staff members of the school by the principal and her mentor. She said:

"I was not introduced to other teachers, and I was being asked by individual teachers".

It appears from Stud #6's reflection that she was not introduced to other teachers. Instead, individual teachers asked her who she was. The lack of proper introduction and orientation to the school environment during teaching practice may have implications for individual accounting student teachers and this may affect their stay and performance in the school. Accounting Student teachers who were not properly welcomed in the school at the beginning of teaching practice may find it difficult to interact with fellow teachers and seek assistance on critical aspects of teaching accounting.

It also appeared from accounting student teachers that some schools excluded them from professional development programmes that were meant for accounting teachers. Stud #14 said:

"I was not included in professional development sessions for accounting teachers. I feel like the inclusion of student teachers in professional development sessions underscores their integration into the educational community, facilitating exposure to modern educational trends and practice".

Judging from the assertions of Stud #14, it can be concluded that she was willing to be included in the professional development programmes that were meant for accounting teachers. This willingness could be driven by her belief that forming part of such elevates her professional acumen as she would be exposed to the developments in the teaching of accounting. For student teachers who come from distance education, being included in the professional development would mean

a lot since they are rarely exposed to the community of practice compared to their counterparts in contact higher learning institutions. Conversely, exposing student teachers to professional development programmes may be costly for the school, especially if the programme involves travelling to a particular venue.

3.3.2 *Guidance provided to student teachers during teaching practice*

This theme reports on the findings related to the guidance provided by mentor teachers to accounting student teachers during teaching practice. Student teachers' commentaries are presented in the subthemes below.

3.3.2.1 Professional guidance provided to student teachers

It emerged from student teachers' reflections that they received guidance on professional guidance from their mentor teachers. For example, Stud #5 had a mentor who inculcated:

"..... the skills necessary to become an educator, including how to set rigorous standards for my learners."

For some mentors, part of setting high academic standards meant that their mentees had to perfect lesson planning. About this, Stud #2 and 8 responded respectively:

"We first started by preparing lesson plan together with the mentor teacher. He told me that I don't have to panic – everything is easy and simple. All I have to do is stick to my lesson plan."

"I have a meeting with the mentor whereby she helped me to do a lesson plan before starting with actual teaching, for me to be well prepared."

In other instances, it seemed important to mentor teachers that student teachers adapt to different settings and embrace the fluid and dynamic nature of the teaching profession. For example, Stud #2 articulated this as follows:

"The mentor really helped me guiding me in the teaching philosophy. She always made sure that I feel comfortable and inspired to be better teacher. She emphasised that it is important to adapt around situations in the field."

For other student teachers, their mentors sought to develop holistic teachers who can fulfil multiple professional standards. According to Stud #3, their mentor fulfilled this in the following manner:

"He showed me different files that a teacher must have. A teacher must have an SBA file, resource file. I learnt so many skills to introduce my lesson, I learnt how to identify what learners already know of the topic that you are about to teach. He was always there for me to guide me during my preparations for the lesson presentation. He was always helping me to deal with challenges such as noise and walking of the students. He helped me to prepare valid lesson plan".

For Stud #8, their mentors

"...provided invaluable guidance, sharing their expertise in pedagogy, classroom management, and curriculum. Their feedback and constructive

critiques enriched my teaching skills, boosting my confidence as a teacher. Their contributions have truly empowered my growth and development as a teacher."

Other mentors capacitated the student teachers on administrative work as part of getting them ready for one of their core duties when they eventually qualify as full-time teachers. For example, Stud #3 said:

"He contributed a lot in my teaching practice. Taught me how to compile a teacher's file. I even learnt how to mark accounting."

Teaching student teachers to mark accounting is valuable because marking accounting can be intricate and cumbersome for student teachers. This is because marking accounting assessments requires teachers to pay attention not only to the answers provided by the learner, but also the steps followed including calculations that resulted to a final answer, thus teaching student teachers to mark accounting assessments during teaching practice is important.

3.3.2.2 Professional guidance on pedagogical practices

This sub-theme reports on the pedagogical guidance that student teachers received during their teaching practice. Other student teachers had mentors who accentuated the importance of stimulating learners' interest in accounting by drawing lesson examples from their lived experiences as they deliver the subject matter. A case in point is Stud #6 who stated that:

"The mentor made [me] realise [that] as a teacher you must make practical examples that are relevant or related to the lesson and make sure that you accommodate diverse needs of learners when teaching."

The other support student teachers received included being equipped on how to choose appropriate teaching strategies for specific topics with the understanding from the mentor teacher that the uniqueness of a topic warrants a tailor-made pedagogical approach. Stud #2 commented that their mentor guided them:

"Through all necessary documents, and the curriculum or syllabus that is done for term through the FET. The mentor asked [sic] me to choose sub-topics that I will be comfortable teaching and told me the best methods to teach them."

Other student teachers had mentors who ensured they had adequate instructional materials to seamlessly deliver the accounting content. This is how Stud #6 captured this:

"The mentor provides[d] all the necessary documents that the student [needs] and give[sic] them learning and teaching resources that the student teacher require[s] to prepare for a lesson."

For other student teachers, their mentors ensured that they not only supported them pedagogically but ensured they were emotionally and physically present. In the case of Stud #5, this is how this support manifested itself:

"My mentor was always available when I needed help, and he did assist me whenever I needed clarity on aspects of the subject. He was always there in the classroom when I was presenting the lesson. He helped me

finish the portfolio and he did play a role in developing my teaching skills."

Another student teacher reported having a teacher mentor who helped them to find their own professional identity. This was the case for Stud #7 who said:

"My [mentor] guided me when I need[ed] guidance. She gave me confidence to develop my own teaching style."

Furthermore, the mentors of some student teachers encouraged them to develop critical thinking skills by promoting collaborative learning environments in which learners become active participants. This was the case for Stud #8 who had this to say:

"The mentor teacher advised me not to tell learners everything. He told me that I should allow them to share their ideas."

In addition, Stud #8 enthusiastically shared how their mentor encouraged them while also counselling her on how to improve their classroom practice:

"The teacher was so impressed about my lesson. He then advises[d] me to try to ensure that while I am presenting, I should also use the chalk board as some learners learn better from what they see."

From Stud #8's excerpt, it is evident that the mentor encouraged her to make use of multiple teaching aid resources to enhance learners' understanding of the content taught.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of accounting student teachers at an ODeL institution in South Africa on mentoring during teaching practice. Our findings indicate that the kind of mentoring experiences that accounting student teachers had during teaching practice were a two-edged sword. For instance, they derived satisfaction from experiences such as receiving mentor support, being allowed to co-teach with the mentor and having feedback meetings with mentors.

The excerpt by Stud #6 *"The mentor made [me] realise [that] as a teacher you must make practical examples that are relevant or related to the lesson..."* reveals the power of what Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 92) call "sponsorship", which translates to senior partitioners (mentor teachers) offering their professional support to newcomers (accounting student teachers) in the organisation. Although the form and shape of this sponsorship is not homogenous, in our study, the participants appreciated mentoring support shown by their mentor teachers.

This point is also confirmed by Jita and Munje (2022) whose study showed that quality mentoring positively influences student teachers' experiences during teaching practice. In addition, we found that accounting student teachers received mentoring that had the potential of allowing them to grow. Essentially, this suggests that the quality of mentoring can significantly shape student teachers' professional identity. This is even more important, considering the shortcomings such as vague instructions in the study materials that student teachers learning through ODeL model experience (Lumadi, 2021). Therefore, it could be argued

that accounting student teachers need more exposure to enriching teaching practice to minimise the effects of such negative instructional experiences. In line with the central argument of Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory, it also transpired from this study that accounting student teachers participated in co-teaching with their mentor teachers. This theory advocates for seasoned parties (mentors) within the community of practice to guide learners (accounting student teachers) on learning activities that would enable them to become competent members of the community of practice.

On the other hand, some experienced teaching practice negatively. It emerged from this study that some of the student teachers were not properly orientated to teaching practice by their mentors, and some were excluded from the professional development programmes that were meant for accounting teachers. For example, the experience of Stud #13 "*There was no proper orientation for me. The school and my mentor should have first allowed me to go through orientation process*" is indicative of someone who longed for proper orientation at school to feel that they belong, however, this need was unmet.

Spouse (2001) notes that accounting student teachers as apprentices operate at the peripheries of their communities of practice until they are gradually afforded benefits of a full-time member. However, Handley et al. (2006) cautions that this full-time membership is only reserved for apprentices who adopt "the practices of other practitioners" (p. 4). In case of Stud #13, it could be that their distasteful mentoring experiences were because of not fully embracing the local *modus operandi*. Existing studies conducted both locally (Adebola, 2022; Moosa & Rembach, 2020;) and internationally (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020) concluded that some student teachers had negative experiences during teaching practice which may have an everlasting impact on student teachers. For accounting student teachers learning through ODeL institution, this is unhelpful as we contend it stifles their professional growth as future education practitioners who could make meaningful contributions to the teaching profession.

Furthermore, we found that student teachers received varying degrees of professional guidance that enhanced their professional competencies. Thus, it seemed that the mentors believed it was important that they be guided in other teaching profession imperatives besides the usual teaching and learning routines to develop holistic professionals. Such guidance involved being taught how to complete lesson plans, and how to mark learner assessments and compile teacher portfolio of evidence. Affirming these findings are Ndebele and Legg-Jack (2022), who found that student teachers appreciated their mentor guidance in terms of some of the administrative duties.

Accounting student teachers need to understand that administrative duties are some of their core duties as teachers. It was encouraging to note that they embrace this as it shows that they were prepared to be enculturated into their new communities of practice, especially considering that enculturation serves as a hallmark of being fully accepted into these communities of practice (Brown et al., 1989). On the contrary, a study by Chan (2020) found that her participant student

teacher felt these add-on duties were unnecessarily burdensome as they took away valuable time to plan effective lessons. In addition, it became clear from some of the excerpts that student teachers' mentors seemed to take on the role of experts in imparting knowledge to less experienced protégés rather than the mentoring relationship taking on a more collaborative form. According to Chan (2020), one of the cornerstones of a good mentoring relationship hinges on balanced power relations, which is preferable to those where the mentor assumes intellectual superiority. This is also one of the points advocated by Handley et al. (2006) who have earlier reported that student teachers as agents need to be seen and heard as equal partners who carry with them valuable experiences to be shared in the community of practice.

Literature recognises the importance of investing a considerable amount of time learning how to teach learners across all socioeconomic backgrounds (Entz, 2007). In addition, Hudson et al. (2013) have found that affording student teachers pedagogical guidance enhances their level of confidence about their teaching abilities. Encouragingly, this study revealed that accounting student teachers were also guided pedagogically by their mentors. This ranged from simplifying the content to making it relevant to the learners. They were also supplied with the relevant learning materials. Also, although they did not explicitly state it, student teachers in this study seemed to have mentors who were readily willing to share their pedagogical experiences, contrary to what Li et al. (2021) found in Malaysia where mentors did not voluntarily share any pedagogical expertise unless they were approached by student teachers.

In that instance, the student teachers had to be proactive to benefit from their teaching practicum. A South African study by Hyde (2019) has found that some of the student teachers in her study enjoyed the pedagogical support they received from their mentors, and some were given the autonomy to figure things out on their own. This is consistent with the situated learning theory, which advances the idea that novices need to move from the margins and be fully integrated into communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

5. Conclusion

This study concluded that accounting student teachers had both positive and negative experiences during teaching practice. This might be due to the varying degrees of mentorship and professional guidance they received during teaching practice. It emerged from this study that accounting student teachers were exposed to several experiences, including co-teaching with their mentor teachers, which boosted their experiences during teaching practice. The study further revealed that student teachers received professional and pedagogical mentorship during teaching practice which boosted their experiences during teaching practice.

Finally, it transpired from the study that some student teachers were not properly introduced by their mentors to the school community, and this negatively influenced their experience of teaching practice. Based on these key findings, this study recommends that teacher training institutions and teacher educators develop a close relationship with mentor teachers to strengthen the experiences

of accounting student teachers during teaching practice. This can be achieved by capacity building workshops to mentor teachers for them to acquire more mentorship skills and create conducive environments for all accounting students, resulting in positive experiences during teaching practice.

This study was not without limitations. For example, we used one data collection method to gather data on the phenomenon under investigation. Future studies can employ two or more data collection methods, and this will assist with triangulation. Furthermore, this study only reports the views and the experiences of accounting student teachers. Accounting mentor teachers can be valuable, thus future research should include mentor teachers as participants in order to capture their views on the quality of mentorship they provide to accounting student teachers.

Finally, this study included only participants who are enrolled with ODEL university in South Africa, hence the need to conduct a comparative study that will investigate the experiences of mentoring of accounting student teachers from both an ODEL context and contact universities. This will help to ascertain whether the nature of a teacher training institution has any influence on student teachers' experiences during teaching practice.

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

7. Acknowledgements

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