STUDENT-TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES OF OPEN ACCESS ONLINE RESOURCES FOR LESSON PLANNING

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Abstract

Quality education for learners across the various spheres of life remains a global priority. Many Sub-Saharan African countries in particular, face challenges such as limited resources at schools; shortages of trained teachers; and school children being effected by poverty, disease, hunger and associated risk, to mention a few. As a result, support initiatives and school/community interventions are continuously introduced in an attempt to offer quality education to as many children as possible. Online resources for teachers to plan and facilitate lessons is one form of support that has gained field over recent years.

Ongoing research and experience with student-teachers at a higher education institution however indicates that these resources are often not utilised optimally and that students would rather develop new lessons than accessing existing examples. Against this background, this paper reports on a study exploring student-teachers’ experiences of online support resources for lesson planning, as part of a broader research project on teacher identity development of student-teachers. For our investigation, we implemented participatory reflection and action (PRA) workshops with 318 undergraduate student-teachers who were at the time involved in teaching practice at schools in South Africa. For the PRA activities, participants worked in small groups of six to seven students each. Following the first round of data collection, each group of student-participants explored three online support resources for lesson planning; reflected on these options; and developed one model lesson plan. A prescribed template was used, with the broader aim of subsequently uploading these lessons to an existing open education resource (OER) website that supports effective classroom practice. For the second phase of data collection, students submitted their responses, with all lesson plans in electronic format.

Findings indicate that student-teachers became aware of and valued the range of lesson plans available online, more specifically in terms of the variety of topics, grades, lesson ideas and supportive resources they observed. On the contrary however, they viewed available online lesson plans as not representative of the national school curriculum and grades across different contexts. Participants concluded that current online lesson plans and examples are not necessarily applicable and relevant to all contexts. Student-teachers furthermore identified certain subjects as being neglected and indicated the need for accompanying printable and audio-visual resources when downloading a lesson, such as literature on selected topics; assessment measures; and other resources that may support effective teaching. The costs associated with Internet access and resources not offered free of charge were experienced as other challenges. Some lessons were also perceived as vague, with no indication of aspects such as required prior knowledge; suitable time allocation for activities; and assessment guidelines. Participants suggested that resources could be improved by attending to webpage outline and the friendliness of websites as well as feedback by users, by regularly updating information, and by allowing teachers to submit additional lesson plans. The next phase of the project entails a screening of the submitted model lessons in order to identify high quality examples and upload these to the existing OER website.

Keywords: Online resources, teacher lesson plans, open education resource (OER), teacher training.