Chapter 2

The Contribution of Part-Time Work Experience to Pre-Service Teachers’ Development of Graduate Employability

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ABSTRACT

Work-integrated learning (WIL) has been found to be effective in developing graduate employability. Working part-time while undertaking undergraduate studies may produce similar effects; however, its contribution to the development of students’ employability has not yet been examined adequately. Therefore, this chapter will report a study investigating 22 Vietnamese pre-service teachers’ experiences of how working as teaching assistants in commercial English language centers has contributed to their employability. Content analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that part-time work experience elevated the pre-service teachers’ specialized knowledge and skills, equipped them with soft skills, expanded their social networks, enhanced their adaptability to different work cultures, and modified their teacher identity. The chapter calls for universities to award credits for part-time work experience as a type of WIL, develop a mechanism for integrating it into curricula, and help graduates evidence their work experience to their future employers.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, employers have complained about graduates’ ability to conduct professional duties and have called for universities to improve their pedagogical approaches to better prepare graduates for work and life (Abel, Deitz & Su, 2014). In response, universities worldwide have been employing various approaches to develop graduate employability. One of the most effective approaches is work-integrated learning (WIL), which has been found to substantially contribute to the development of students’ professional knowledge and skills, expanding their networks with relevant professionals, and shaping their professional identity (Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010; Jackson, 2013; Rothman & Sisman, 2016; Silva et al., 2018; Tran & Nguyen, 2018).

In the case of teacher education, WIL is most obviously used in teaching internships. Within the authentic work environment provided by such internships, pre-service teachers gain opportunities to participate in observational, situated, participatory and reflective learning (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through these learning activities, they can develop their employability by gaining a better understanding of their work roles and the profession, as well as further developing their professional knowledge and the skills and attributes required of them (Roth-Sitko, Everett, Marnella & D’Angelo, 2015; Salazar Noguera & McCluskey, 2017; Tran & Huynh, 2018; Walton & Rusznyak, 2013). Unfortunately, most teacher education programs postpone teaching internships until the final semesters. This delay may hinder the development of pre-service teachers’ employability, which requires substantial time.

Such a scenario can be found in teacher education programs offered by Vietnamese universities. Such programs appear to be only slowly catching up with the demands of the contemporary labor market. They mostly focus on training teachers to work in the formal education sector, although private non-formal education services are blooming in the country (Tran, 2016). Taking English teacher education programs as an example, several pre-service teachers do not work in the formal education sector but enter commercial English language centers (CELCs) instead (Tran & Huynh, 2018). English teacher education programs, unfortunately, have not yet taken this context into account. In the face of the slow rate of change in their universities, many pre-service English teachers have proactively sought positions as part-time teaching assistants (TAs) in CELCs, either paid or unpaid, to prepare for their employment in the sector. However, virtually no research has been done to explore how working in this business-focused environment influences the development of pre-service teachers’ employability.
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