

**Worry and the changing sense of
responsibility in first year primary
undergraduate student teachers**

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Louise Connolly
Bishop Grosseteste University

Abstract

This paper explores how the sense of responsibility changes for undergraduate student teachers in their first year of training. It is part of a larger case study that sought to identify what undergraduate student teachers reported to be the key sources of worry in their first year at a university in the East Midlands of England. An initial online questionnaire was used to find out the main aspects that the student teachers were worried about in their first year. These results then fed into a second questionnaire designed to explore the intensity of worry about these aspects, with a focus on responsibility. The final data collection method comprised of a focus group discussion including 4 student teachers in their first year of the course. Data collection points were at the start and end of their first year of teacher training. The results concluded that the students initially worried about wider aspects of the responsibility of being at university for the first time such as living away from home as well as having a growing sense of realisation of the requirements of the course and the associated responsibilities. However, by the end of the first year, this worry had manifested into more significant worry about the responsibility of being a teacher and the specific aspects of the role that hold considerable responsibilities. This study highlighted that an area for further research could be around the potential normalisation of worry about responsibility in education and student experiences in their training about safeguarding. It also identified recommendations for future practice including pre-course training, timetabling considerations, personalised support and staff training.

Keywords

Student teacher; responsibility; worry; university; undergraduate.

Introduction

Worry is a feeling that all people can experience from time to time and this is a normal, responsive part of human behaviour (Khawaja and Chapman, 2007). In fact, some clinicians will argue that in certain situations, anxiety or worry can be helpful (Barlow, 2002; Gould and Krane, 1992; Rosen, 2008; Dijkstra and Homan, 2016). It is well-documented that anxiety and stress have been commonly linked to the teaching profession (Aish, 2020; Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020). A survey by Kell (2018) that was distributed to teaching professionals through word of mouth and online platforms found that 82% of 3684 teachers stated that their anxiety was related to their job as a teacher (Kell, 2018). Other studies around teacher education have explored anxiety and worry in student teachers and have found that aspects such as behaviour management, mentor relationships and workload contributed towards their worry (Rushton, 2010; Ravhuhali et al., 2019). Leeds Beckett University conducted some research in 2018 with 106 student teachers from different settings around the country about their personal experiences and mental health. They found that 66.9% of students said the course had caused them anxiety (Leeds Beckett University, 2018). However, there has been found to be limited detailed consideration of the sense of responsibility causing worry in student teachers.

A current area of concern in education is teacher retention and recruitment. The number of entrants to undergraduate Initial Teacher Education courses fell 13% between 2022 and 2023 (Initial Teacher Training Census 2023/24). Over 20% of new teachers leave the profession within their first two years of teaching and 33% leave within their first five years which highlights the fact that teachers still early

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on in their career are choosing to leave (Foster, 2019). This highlights the importance of finding out what causes worry in student teachers during their course and to consider how this links with responsibility as this factor may be contributing to the lack of teacher recruitment and retention.

There are a number of different routes into teacher training in England which differ in length and design depending on if the trainee has already acquired a degree. The course which is the focus of this study is a Primary Education degree with QTS. Students who do not have a degree can apply to be a teacher on an undergraduate course. This course is full time for 3 years and students are taught through university-based lectures, workshops and seminars as well as a series of placements and teaching experiences spread across the 3 years (UCAS, 2020). This is different to other teaching courses such as a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) which is for students who already have a degree and the course usually lasts for 1 year.

All Initial Teacher Education courses and teacher induction in England are governed by statutory guidance including the Core Content Framework (CCF) and the Early Career Framework (ECF). These seek to establish the minimum entitlement for student teachers and teachers early in their career (CCF, 2018). The content is organised into 5 core areas - behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. The guidance documents do not stipulate an exact curriculum for the teacher educators to follow, but instead institutions should ensure that their curriculum design meets the minimum entitlements. There are also no guidelines in terms of the order of delivery of the content. However, there is an expectation that knowledge should be built up over time in a 'coherent sequence' (CCF, 2018, p.4). This suggests therefore that the amount responsibility should also be built up throughout their course. This is regardless of if the course is 3 years (Undergraduate) or 1 year (Postgraduate). I suggest that this is a particular challenge for teacher educators as the world of teaching is a very complex profession. Therefore, it might be the case that a gradual introduction is not always possible to ensure that the student teachers have been taught the necessary content and have had adequate experience of teaching by the end of the course. This also raises issues of responsibility and the necessity of student teachers being given responsibility in a timely manner to be able meet the requirements of the course. The variation in the length of teaching courses is not acknowledged in the CCF. There is also a lack of recognition that post graduate student teachers have already completed a degree and are therefore educated to a higher level. Postgraduates often have more life and university experience than undergraduates who are generally younger. This could have implications in terms of the responsibilities associated with becoming a teacher and a student teacher's readiness for these.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation of responsibility

Responsibility can be defined as 'A sense of internal obligation and commitment to produce or prevent designated outcomes, or that these outcomes should have been produced or prevented' (Lauermann and Karabenick, 2011, p.127). Responsibility can either seek to achieve a certain outcome or potentially seek to avoid a negative outcome and can also be identified by the extent to which an individual feels personally accountable for the outcomes of something they do (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Lauermann and Karabenick, 2013). A connection between self-esteem and responsibility has been identified in terms of how confident an individual feels in their ability and this directly relates to their sense of responsibility (Jia, Yue and sheng, 2023). Other studies have suggested that teachers who have a high sense of responsibility tend to be more conscientious and optimistic in terms of their teaching and become more motivated to support positive outcomes in children's attainment (Lauermann and Karabenick, 2013; Çetin and Eren, 2022). Therefore, although a feeling of responsibility may cause some worry for student teachers, it could provide the intrinsic motivation to spur the student on to meet the requirements of the responsibility. This is consistent with multiple

research papers on links between worry and motivation (Tallis, Davey and Capuzzo, 1994; Szabó and Lovibond, 2002; Davey, Meeten and Field, 2022).

A connection has also been found between a student teachers' self-identify and their sense of responsibility. Therefore, if a student teacher was starting to identify themselves more strongly as a teacher, their personal sense of responsibility would be enhanced accordingly along with their goal orientation (Çetin and Eren, 2022; Lauermann and Karabenick, 2013). Responsibility can be distinguished between a felt responsibility and an assigned responsibility. Edling and Frelin (2013) attempted to explain felt responsibility in the way that a teacher might assume a responsibility as they feel compelled to act in a certain way and is a more psychological construct. This is different to an assigned responsibility where the responsibility has been delegated by a person or organisation (Edling and Frelin, 2013). For example, a student teacher might be told that they do not need to stay after school to support their mentor at a homework club during their placement, but the student teacher assumes a felt responsibility as they feel an obligation to stay and help.

Teachers' roles of responsibility

It is indisputable that being a teacher is a position of responsibility. You only have to read the Teachers' Standards (which are the professional standards required to be met to become a qualified teacher) to identify the different aspects of the role that include an element of responsibility including safeguarding duties and being accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes (Department for Education (DfE), 2021). The Teachers' Standards even includes the word 'responsibility' when making reference to 'Promoting high standards of literacy' (p.11), 'Promoting good and courteous behaviour' (p. 12) and 'Improving teaching' (DfE, 2021, p.13). Therefore, it could be anticipated that some student teachers would be worried about the responsibility of being a teacher. Forgeard, (2022) sought to establish why some people were worried about responsibility and found that having responsibility meant taking responsibility for your choices. Therefore, when these choices affect others or you become their responsible for others then the responsibility can become quite overwhelming. As a teacher you are responsible for children and therefore your choices and decisions could have a significant impact on their wellbeing and development. It is feasible to suggest that some first-year undergraduate student teachers may have not experienced a significant amount of responsibility prior to joining the university and therefore might exhibit feelings of worry. For example, they are likely to have never had to be responsible of children's outcomes and the behaviour of children (apart from if they have their own children).

Undergraduate, first year student teachers could become overwhelmed with the sudden increase in responsibility from living away from home for the first time. They are also entering a profession where they are becoming responsible for a class of children and the accountability and responsibility in terms of both academic and social outcomes. Research has indicated that some students do not feel competent enough to undertake these responsibilities (Fischer, 1970; Anspal, Eisenschmidt and Löffström, 2012; Ackerman, 2018). Puttick (2018) highlighted that student teachers often viewed themselves as "not knowers" (Puttick, 2018, p.39). This presents a potential disparity as the student teacher perceives themselves to be inferior in terms of knowledge and experience but are expected to undertake several important responsibilities when becoming a student teacher on placement.

The extent to which a student teacher worries about the responsibility could be different depending on the individual. Studies on teacher agency (which is the capacity to act) could help to decipher how these differences could be determined (Priestley, 2015; Kneen et al., 2023). For example, one of the dimensions of agency is around past experiences. Therefore, those who have previously had a significant of experience in primary schools may not have as much worry and achieve teacher agency quicker than those without. Another dimension is the ability to see themselves in that role in the future. As a result, those student teachers with higher aspirations who see themselves holding that responsibility in the future, are likely to reach it more readily. Finally, a practical element also comes

into play in terms of agency that focuses on the judgement and responses of the trainee in the context and over a period of time (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Priestley, 2015). All these could play a part in the determination of the amount of worry a trainee has about the responsibility of becoming and being a teacher.

Certain aspects of the teaching role could cause some students to worry about responsibility. For example, the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education, Part 1' (KCSiE) document explicitly states that staff should ".....consider how to build trusted relationships with children" (DfE, 2024, p.7). This is so they are more approachable to children if they have a safeguarding concern they wish to share. KCSiE (DfE, 2023) also highlights that teachers are often best placed to be the first to identify a safeguarding concern. Therefore, this is also the case regarding student teachers, particularly as the course progresses, they will be better placed to pick up possible concerns on their placements as their teaching responsibility increases. However, this could trigger worry about the scale and importance of the responsibility put on their shoulders in terms of safeguarding. A study on 75 students in the third year of their teacher training course found that they were anxious about having to make safeguarding judgements and decisions as well as the prospect of having to work with families who could potentially be abusers (Bishop, Lunn and Johnson, 2002). This study also found that the students tended to respond very emotionally to safeguarding concerns and these feelings remained even when they had finished their teaching course. Therefore, this could prompt feelings of worry and anxiety about the children in their placement class or they could worry about potentially not identifying key signs of harm in children. However, they did recognise the need to detach themselves and behave professionally, but some occasionally displayed a judgemental attitude and made some negative comments about the parents which showed a lack of experience and awareness of some of the external factors that could be present e.g. pressure on parents (Bishop, Lunn and Johnson, 2002). This could suggest that emotionally and in terms of their experience, the undergraduate student teachers may not yet be ready for such a crucial responsibility. On the other hand, it could just suggest a lack of experience.

Additional responsibilities

A student teacher could have additional responsibilities at home that contribute to further worry. For example, some students could have dependent children at home. Alkandari (2020) recognised that this could hinder adequate preparation for assignments as they have family members at home demanding their time. Having children could also result in absences from lectures or placement when their children are ill (Alkandari, 2020). This anxiety could also be driven by external family factors such as having to care for a close relative who is unwell (Ozen et al., 2009). Several studies around mothers trying to balance university and meeting family needs have found common challenges of these circumstances (Edwards, 2017; Lyonette et al., 2015; Quickfall, 2020; Webber and Dismore, 2020). Time has been identified as an issue in terms of mothers not feeling they are able to give enough time to their studies as well as care for their children and the fact that being a parent is a 24/7 job and they are never *not* responsible for their own children. This can then leave to feelings of guilt that not enough time is spent on either factor (Webber and Dismore, 2020; Jayadeva, Brooks and Abrahams, 2022) which then could potentially lead onto anxiety. However, scholars such as Swain and Hammond, (2011) argue that these feelings of responsibility could actually be a motivator to drive hard work and a commitment towards their studies.

The responsibility of undergraduates being at university for the first time

Birham highlights that transitional periods make students more vulnerable to worry or anxiety (Biram, 2019). There are lots of new experiences at university and these run alongside a lack of control, organisation and greater academic demands in comparison to their previous school, college or home environment as well as pressure to succeed (Credé and Niehorster, 2012; Zeidner, 2014).

This could result in undergraduate student teachers feeling the strain of the responsibility of having unfamiliar academic demands and the pressure to succeed in their chosen profession.

Studies about worry in student teachers and university students in general found that many of them were worried about finances and a number had to have a part time job to enable them to access their studies. This adds an additional personal responsibility onto the students. A national money survey in 2024 involving 297,564 students from a range of UK universities found that 4 in 5 students were worried about making ends meet and 48% had considered withdrawing due to money worries. Although a job might alleviate some financial pressure, this could be a source of further anxiety as they have to cope with the demands and expectations of full-time study as well as trying to juggle the responsibility of having a job. This could also impact on the progress and attainment of these students as they may not be able to focus their sole attention on their course and the associated assignments.

Other self-sufficiency responsibilities associated with being a student living away from home for the first time include aspects noted by Smith (2022) such as cooking, cleaning and washing. Another study found that they were also adjusting to the responsibility of having to get themselves to lectures on time without the support of parents or carers to remind them (Money et al., 2017). These student teachers are also having to navigate the social aspects of transitioning to university and making new friends both in their accommodation (if living away from home) and within their course and this is often their main concern on arrival to university (Arjanggi and Kusumaningsih, 2016; Money et al., 2017; Smithikrai, Longthong and Peijssel, 2015). Unfortunately, some studies have found that although their preconceived positive expectations of meeting new people and making friends are initially high, the reality does not always meet their expectations and many are disappointed that this proves to be difficult and university is not quite a fun as they were expecting (Katanis, 2000; Lipson and Eisenberg, 2017). This could add a further strain on their transition and also have a potential impact of student teacher retention.

Undertaking these responsibilities could have an influence on student teacher resilience levels. This is an aspect that has been explored in depth by researchers such as Gu (2014) and has been considered in detail in relation to teacher retention (Neenan, 2012; Gu, 2014). A student teachers' resilience is known to fluctuate and a factor determining the level of resilience could depend on the perception of the student regarding the quantity and importance of responsibilities they have and their ability to cope with them. Therefore, this underlines the importance of considering responsibility in teacher training and the fact that it could determine resilience and retention rates of student teachers as well as qualified teachers in education.

Methodology

Setting

The setting of the study was a university-based ITE provider in the East Midlands. The setting was established as a teacher training college in 1862 and was later awarded university status in 2012 and now offers a broad range of other degree programmes. It has approximately 360 students undertaking a BA Honours Degree in Primary Education. The participants that were invited to take part in this research were the 2022/23 first year cohort of BA Honours Degree in Primary Education which included 117 students. The first data collection period was in October 2022 when the trainees had recently moved into their university accommodation (if they were not living at home). Freshers' week had been the week before and they had accessed some introductory sessions to their first modules. They were only a few weeks away from handing in their first assignment and had not yet been on a placement in school. The second data collection period was in late May 2023 when the student teachers had attended their last taught session of the academic year and had finished their first

extended placement in school and all assignments had been handed in. Most of them were about to go home for the summer.

Method 1 - Questionnaire 1 and 2

Questionnaire 1

In order to obtain an overview of the key factors causing worry in Y1 student teachers, the student teachers were asked an open question about what has caused them worry.

Inductive coding was used to obtain the key themes of worry from the open question in questionnaire 1 as explored by Chandra & Shang, (2019). This was completed by reading the responses and colour coding them into similar sources of worry. The number of times each theme was mentioned was recorded in a tally chart to enable easy identification of the most and least commonly mentioned triggers.

Questionnaire 2

The key purpose of questionnaire 2 was to find out the extent the students worried about the aspects identified both from questionnaire 1 and from the literature. This was because although questionnaire 1 was useful in identifying triggers of worry, it did not signify how much each aspect was worried about in comparison to other aspects. The students were asked the question below:

'To what extent do you worry about the responsibility of being a teacher?' The participants were asked to rank their response using a Likert scale format (1 for 'never', 2 for 'infrequently', 3 for 'occasionally', 4 for 'frequently', 5 for 'always').

Unlike questionnaire 1, questionnaire 2 followed a more quantitative design by using a Likert scale. However, it was qualitative in nature as it was measuring the level of an emotion as supported Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) and Nemoto and Beglar (2014) who agree that nature of questionnaires can be qualitative or quantitative depending on how they are administered and analysed.

The worry triggers that had been collated through questionnaire 1 (including responsibility) were added to questionnaire 2 and the participants were asked to what extent they agreed. This was completed by transferring the numerical data from the Likert scale into an excel spreadsheet to compare the worry extent scores. This was then used to construct graphs to enable more visual representations of the data to make comparisons.

Method 2 – Focus group

In order to understand and explore the complexity of social phenomena (worry and responsibility), the views of the participants were also explored through a focus group because it was felt that this may have an influence on the understanding of the worry about responsibility in student teachers. Focus groups are a form of qualitative research. This is because participants are asked about their opinions, perceptions and views on anxiety in student teachers (Morgan, 1997). A focus group comprises of a group discussion which has a particular focus on a certain topic and is a valuable and widely used, qualitative research method commonly used in social research projects (Gibbs, 1997; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). They are successful in exploring specific topics, views and experiences (Litosseliti, 2003) and in this case, worry about responsibility in student teachers. The intention was to obtain further clarification and identify if there were variations in views of worry about responsibility and what could impact on that. This was achieved by asking them a specific question about responsibility. The interaction between the researcher and the students not only explored students' views of the responsibility of being a student teacher but it also offered an understanding of the underlying factors that may have influenced the student teachers to worry about certain

aspects of the course. For example, why specifically they were worried about being responsible for safeguarding children.

Analysis of the focus group was conducted using the Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) strategy. This is a primarily psychological approach to analysis which is commonly used to analyse the data from qualitative research methods (Willig and Rogers, 2017). Phenomenological analysis techniques typically concentrate on how the participants perceive and talk about the aspect (in this case – the concept of responsibility) and Alsase, (2017) refers to this as the interpretation of the ‘lived experience’ (p. 17). Specific guidelines are provided detailing the IPA ideographic aspect which can be adapted by the researcher as deemed appropriate, and this is encouraged to promote flexibility and creativity. Therefore, this is the process that was undertaken regarding the data derived from the two semi-structured focus groups:

1. Read the transcript over and over again and make notes of repetitive themes. This will help the researcher to immerse themselves in the collected data.
2. Transform the notes into themes that are emerging.
3. Seek relationships and cluster themes and name each cluster.
4. Write a narrative of the themes, including examples and quotes from the focus group.
5. (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014 p.12)

Participants

All the participants were all Year 1 student teachers in their first year of three years of undergraduate teacher training. This was considered to be appropriate as the study was specifically focusing on this cohort of year 1 undergraduate student teachers as part of the case study. This therefore meant that they would have accessed the same curriculum and programme design. Figure 1. shows the number of students who participated in the different stages of the research.

| Stage | Number of participants |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| October questionnaire 1 | 46 |
| October questionnaire 2 | 49 |
| October focus group | 4 |
| May questionnaire 1 | 22 |
| May questionnaire 2 | 21 |
| May focus group | 4 |

Figure 1. Number of participants for each method of data collection.

Data collection

Questionnaires 1 and 2 were distributed to the cohort of Y1 students in October 2022 after they had completed their first week of the course but before they had undertaken any school placements. They were distributed again in May 2023 towards the end of the first year when then had completed all assignments and had also had their 5 weeks introductory placement. The focus group took place following the distribution of the questionnaires in October 2022 and May 2023 with the same participant group. These were students who were selected due to offering to participate in the focus group through a question in the second questionnaire.

Figure 2. provides an overview of the data collection process:

CONNOLLY: WORRY AND THE CHANGING SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN FIRST YEAR PRIMARY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT TEACHERS

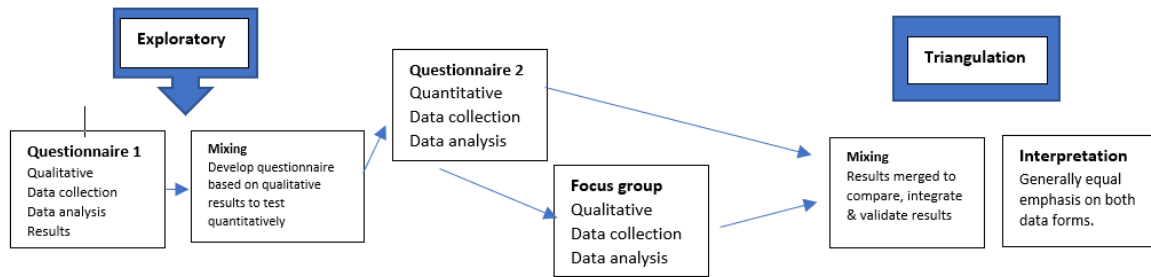


Figure 2. Diagram of the data collection process.

Ethical considerations

This study gained ethical approval through the university ethical approval process following the University Ethics Policy (2022) and guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (British Educational Research Association, 2018). A potential risk of this study was that it could trigger an emotional reaction as participants are being asked to comment on an emotional response (worry). Students were therefore provided with an information sheet before participating in the study. This was so they were fully aware of the details of the research and the nature of their involvement before providing their consent to participate. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form for the focus group included the agreement to keep any information derived from the focus group confidential due to the personal nature of the content. Participants were provided with de-brief information containing sources of support from the university following the conclusion of the data collection process.

Findings

In questionnaire 1 (distributed at the start of the course in October) when the students were asked to identify any triggers of worry, no students mentioned specifically ‘responsibility’ as a cause of worry. They were mainly concerned with aspects such as assignments, workload and finances. However, they may not have used this broad term ‘responsibility’ specifically and rather used other examples of responsibility, but term and notion of responsibility did not explicitly feature as a dominant aspect. This meant that in October, responsibility did not feature in questionnaire 2 as an independent question that measured the intensity of the worry identified in questionnaire 1. However, in October, questionnaire 2 showed that the teaching students frequently or always worried about aspects that involved an element of responsibility such as finances and this increased to from 51% in October to 57% of participants frequently or always worrying about this in May. In the focus group in October that followed the distribution of the questionnaires, the student teachers were asked specifically about their sense of responsibility. One participant explained how the responsibility of a part time job on top of their studies created additional pressure.

I'm lucky to have a job that is flexible. But if I didn't find that job I would be worrying about finances, I'd be under. I've got a car to pay for. I've got all these other bills.....
(Student teacher D).

This student teacher also drew attention to the fact that having a job made their free time limited to be able to take part in extracurricular activities or to work towards assignments.

Responsibility was discussed in relation to some of the students living away from home for the first time and this sudden sense of responsibility caused some feelings of worry:

For student teachers my age (21) it is that we're just not used to being responsible
(Student teacher B).

CONNOLLY: WORRY AND THE CHANGING SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN FIRST YEAR PRIMARY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT TEACHERS

I just don't feel adult enough to be taking responsibility of it all. Just when I think I'm getting on top of everything and I feel like I'm swimming in a pool and my heads above water and then someone will say, oh, what about this? And that's it. I've sunk

(Student teacher C).

It appears that there was a sense of realisation of the requirements of the course in terms of assignments, time keeping and attendance as well as getting used to the online systems that the university used.

In the May data collection period, responsibility did come up as a source of worry for 4/20 participants in questionnaire 1. Aspects relating to this were concerns like the responsibility of being on placement, having to complete the online record keeping tasks associated with placement as well as preparing for the next assignment. Responsibility was added as a factor into questionnaire 2 and Figure 3 shows the results:

26 To what extent do you worry about the responsibility of being a teacher?

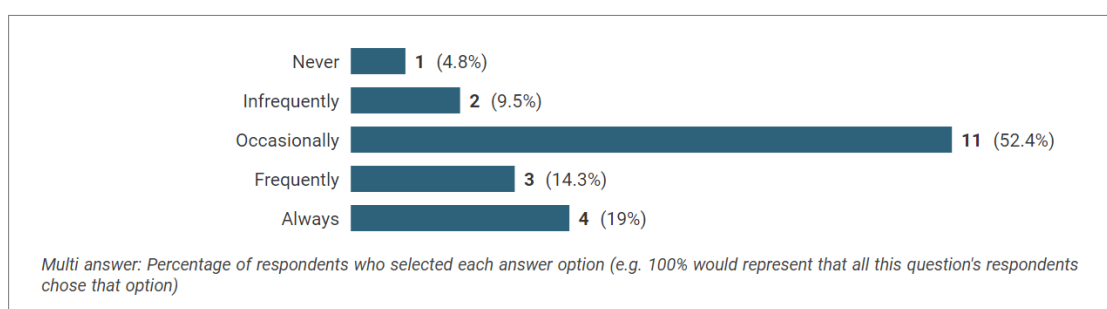


Figure 3. Graph showing the percentage of respondents who selected the extent to which they worry about the responsibility of being a teacher.

This demonstrates that in May (near the end of the first year of the course) 7 out of the 21 students were 'frequently' or 'always' worried about the responsibility of being a teacher. It was more commonly 'occasionally' worried about (11/21). It signifies that this was a factor causing some amount of worry to most students as only 1 of the participants never worried about the sense of responsibility. It appeared that this theme of responsibility was still a worry for some students in May as well as in October which could be identified through the results. One trainee was moving out of halls into a student house, and this had prompted some fears of the sudden additional responsibility:

Fears like turning the water off if there is a flood, overpaying the electricity and a very unrealistic fear of mine is what if my house gets broken into?

(Student teacher B).

However, after placement, this worry had moved onto different, more teaching related aspects of responsibility such as safeguarding. For all the students in the focus group, the realisation of the importance of the safeguarding role a teacher had become very real to them:

You can read the safeguarding policy and stuff like that and try and prepare yourself, but there's nothing like doing it and it actually being straight in front of you

(Student teacher D).

Holy crap, this is real and someone is coming to me for help!

(Student teacher B).

I have to look after someone who isn't me!

(Student teacher B).

Linking to this further, there was the worry that they might miss something or not respond to a safeguarding incident in the correct way and this responsibility became a heavy weight on their shoulders:

No one wants to be the reason why something's happened to a child

(Student teacher D).

This then led to worry for when they qualify, that they will have to undertake the safeguarding responsibility on their own; they will not have a mentor in their class that they could pass it on to and they will have to be the teacher who may have to speak to the parents about uncomfortable topics.

This great sense of responsibility can translate into worry about if they are good enough to undertake the role and links to concerns about their lack of knowledge and experience (Puttick, 2018). This was reiterated by the focus group participants:

What if I'm not a good teacher? What if I can't control the class? What if this is the wrong career for me?

(Student teacher C).

The course is so specific so what if the next three years go terribly wrong for me? There's nothing I can do.....What if I can't actually teach as well as I imagine I can?

(Student teacher B).

The focus group at the end of the year also highlighted that some students had a notion that they were not good enough to undertake the responsibility of being a teacher. For one trainee, their feedback in the focus group indicated that this feeling had remained between the two data collection points in October and May, despite having had a successful placement and strong scores in assignments.

We feel just like a newbie again

(Student teacher C).

The fact that going into Y2 also made them feel like the end of the course was getting closer and this caused worry about leaving university. They spoke of a few people they knew who had stayed on at university to do masters. They even used the word '*Institutionalised*' (Student teacher A). That illustrates the extent of this potential fear and the fact some students felt they were not ready to leave university and go into the big wide world and get a job as a teacher and they wanted to stay within the safe and familiar support mechanisms of the university.

Discussion

The results highlighted that at the start of the year, the students were more concerned with responsibilities around living away from home for the first time and attending a university rather than specific aspects of the course and the responsibility of being a teacher. This concurs with research conducted by Smith (2022) and Smithikrai, Longthong and Peijsel, (2015) about the sudden increase in responsibilities such as cooking, budgeting and making friends which are associated with being a new undergraduate student. They shared that they were also feeling quite overwhelmed about the quantity of information being given and having to be responsible for getting themselves to lectures and organising their time to meet upcoming assignment deadlines.

By the end of the year once the student had been on placement, this worry had transferred to more specific aspects associated with training to become a teacher. Some aspects of responsibility were highlighted as causing more significant concern such as the responsibility of safeguarding children. This is coherent with the recognition in the literature review that the Teachers' Standards (2021) include many elements of responsibility that the students must demonstrate they are competent in - one being safeguarding. Also, Forgeard (2022) highlighted the fact that being responsible for others can result in the responsibility becoming quite overwhelming to the individual. Features of Biram's (2019) research on the link between transition and anxiety could be identified in the end of year focus group where it quickly became evident that going into Year 2 was playing on their minds and causing some worry (Biram, 2019). Maher, (2022) also drew attention to individuals being particularly vulnerable to responsibility fatigue where the students could become very overwhelmed by their position of responsibility.

Their fear of failing the course links to the significant amount of literature about self-identity and the fact the students are trying to establish and understand themselves as teachers and this can lead to feelings of worry or self-doubt (Fischer, 1970; Anspal, Eisenschmidt and Löfström, 2012; Ackerman, 2018). Anspal, Eisenschmidt & Löfström (2012) believe that the first year of a teaching course is particularly focused on the students trying to find their self-identity which corresponds to what the students were sharing in the focus groups.

Throughout the data collection process, it quickly became evident that the amount of worry towards responsibility could differ between trainees. For example, their financial responsibilities and circumstances were individual but significantly affected over half of the participants, particularly those who were also juggling the responsibility of having a part time job. Studies such as Brown (2022) highlighted the responsibility of financial difficulty and the impact it could have on a student. Other individual circumstances became apparent such as concern about the responsibility of having young children at home as well as being responsible for a class of children on placement that had similar content to findings by other researchers about mothers balancing university and family needs (Edwards, 2017; Lyonette et al., 2015; Quickfall, 2020; Webber and Dismore, 2020).

Limitations of the study

A potential limitation of this study is that fact that it is a case study and therefore the findings are specific to a particular university and cohort of student teachers. Studies on teacher agency recognise that different individuals might have alternative experience, aspirations and contexts (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Priestley, 2015; Kneen et al., 2023). In addition, the perception of the importance of the responsibilities can also differ as recognised by Neenan (2012) and Gu (2014). Therefore, this could limit the generalisability of the results of this study to other settings. However, the findings could still be useful to enhance understanding and be interesting to other institutions.

Another potential limitation is that this was part of a larger study about worry in general in student teachers. This therefore might have resulted in the participants not sharing in as much detail their views specifically in relation to responsibility as they were also being questioned about other aspects causing worry.

Areas for further research

This study highlighted that there appeared to be limited, more recent research around the perception and experience of student teachers in relation to the responsibility of safeguarding. Therefore, this could be an area for future research. It would also be interesting to continue this study as the undergraduate student teachers progress throughout the rest of their training as this study only focused on their first year.

Conclusion

This research found that the students initially worried about wider aspects of the responsibility of being at university for the first time such as living away from home as well as having a growing sense of realisation of the requirements of the course and the associated responsibilities. However, by the end of the first year, this worry had manifested into more significant worry about the responsibility of being a teacher and the specific aspects of the role that hold considerable responsibilities. Individual circumstances that created additional responsibilities such as financial challenges, having a part time job or children at home could also add further worry.

The results of this study have generated some potential implications for future practice for Initial Teacher Education. Undergraduate Initial Teacher Education institutions should seek to better prepare the student teachers to cope with the worries and responsibilities associated with becoming a qualified teacher. This could start even before they start the course with summer schools or pre-recorded online sessions to explore the key knowledge and skills required for being at university for the first time such as organisation, budgeting, key academic writing skills, interpersonal skills and general advice about living away from university for the first time.

The changing sources of worry and responsibilities during the course demonstrate there should also be consideration and control regarding the amount of content and exposure the student teachers have in relation the different elements of the responsibility of being a teacher at any one time. Therefore, ensuring that their knowledge and undertaking of these responsibilities is gradually built up over time so students do not become too overwhelmed. For example, introducing them to the potentially worrisome responsibilities of being a teacher (safeguarding/progress accountability) might not be ideal at the start of the year when they are just getting used to living away from home and being at university for the first time. This could be supported by revisions to the CCF and ECF that include recognising the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate student teachers as well as the varying length of courses and the difference this should make to the content and delivery. I believe that many undergraduate teacher educators would agree that a separate CCF document for undergraduate student teachers would be welcomed and is long overdue.

It was recognised that the student teacher perception of the importance of the responsibility, their resilience levels and their self-identity could also differ, but all still play a part in determining the level of worry towards responsibility. This highlights the need for student teachers to have a source of more personalised and responsive support they can turn to and also be aware of the other avenues of support available. This could be a personal tutor or a peer (maybe in another year group) who can be supportive to the student's individual needs and circumstances. This leads onto the teacher educators themselves needing to understand the worry of responsibility in student teachers and how it could fluctuate throughout the course, so they are better prepared to pre-empt concerns and provide support.

It was also highlighted that it is important to communicate to first year students that some amount of worry about the responsibilities associated with being at university and being a teacher for the first time is to be expected and common and they are likely to gradually become accustomed to it. Although this raises a wider question about whether high levels of worry and responsibility has become normalised in education and this could be an additional area for future research.

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