

TEACHER TRAINERS' BELIEFS IN MICROTEACHING AND LESSON PLANNING IN A TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Recent development in teacher education emphasizes the need to create teachers who are not only knowledgeable but have the ability to transfer their pedagogical skills into practice. This leads to the use of various approaches in teacher education courses, among which is the microteaching session. Researchers have viewed microteaching as beneficial in establishing a good experience amongst the student teachers in the teacher training institutions. However, their focus is mainly on establishing good lesson planning and carrying out what is planned in a mock classroom. There is a need to create awareness on what aspects of theories and approaches are applied during microteaching. This study aims to look into how educators from one teacher training institution view microteaching and lesson planning. A set of open-ended questionnaire was administered to the respondents to examine the ways they carried out microteaching and their perception on lesson planning. The findings of this study indicated that the respondents viewed learning objectives, stages of the lesson and types of activities for the lesson as three important elements in lesson planning. Student centered and teacher centered approaches were used to teach microteaching. Specific ways to teach microteaching were also presented by the respondents. Based on the findings of this study, a proposed template for microteaching is presented.

Keywords: microteaching, lesson planning, student teachers, approaches

Introduction

The hope and aspiration of a nation is to generate productive citizens to build a successful economy. With this in mind, the emphasis on good education is a key element in the national agenda. As such, the teaching profession is seen as the backbone that will lay the foundation for the future generation. Therefore, it is not surprising for the Ministry of Education (MOE) to focus on upgrading the

quality of teaching and training in the teacher training institutions. Hence various ways and means are adopted in upgrading the quality of teaching and training especially among student teachers. Among the strategies employed are providing pedagogical knowledge and skills besides providing practical experiences through School-Based Experience (SBE) and practicum sessions.

With regards to the training of student teachers, various methods and approaches are adopted by the educators in either upskilling or providing new experiences. One of the ways to gauge student teachers' understanding of the pedagogical knowledge and theories taught is through microteaching. Microteaching is considered as one of the most effective tools in bridging the gap between theory and practice. The art of teaching is highlighted in microteaching by constant practice in producing quality lesson plans which serve as a guide for student teachers to plan and execute their lessons. Furthermore, the feedback provided by lecturers and peers further enhances student teachers' understanding and knowledge of pedagogical skills. However, there is concern over the impact lecturers have on student teachers regarding ways of teaching (Francis, 1997). This occurs due to the different schools of thought and belief systems educators have on teaching and learning processes. Since teachers have a strong influence on what students learn there is a need to look at ways microteaching is approached by educators (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). This study attempts to focus on the perceptions of educators on microteaching and lesson planning to provide insights into how these two important elements in teacher education are best implemented.

Impact of Microteaching on Student Teachers

Most researchers agree that microteaching is an effective method to be applied in the pre-service and in-service stages in the professional development of teachers (Allen & Ryan, 1969). It is considered as a training concept, scaled down into selected teaching skills under a carefully controlled condition (Cruickhank et al., 1996; Sadker & Sadker, 1972; Meier, 1968). It is also viewed as a pre-induction, booster or reinforcement involving hands-on and minds-on experiences. Others perceive microteaching as a valuable instructional tool that mediates between theory and practice (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Wahba, 1999).

There are various views on the purpose of conducting microteaching. Some researchers believe it enables student teachers to improve pedagogical skills in presentation and participation or to increase the range of behaviors (Mayhew, 1982). Others claim microteaching can create awareness among student teachers of the values, assumptions and attitudes that inform their practice. Sadiq (2011) highlights the fact that microteaching is more beneficial for pre-service teachers

because they are more receptive to feedback and that microteaching encourages self-evaluation. All in all, microteaching focuses on the act of teaching which enables student teachers to test their pedagogical skills in assimilated teaching context.

The need for microteaching in preparing student teachers before they embark into the real classroom situations can be argued for based on a few studies conducted. Sadker and Cooper (1972) believe in the importance of microteaching in creating greater awareness on teachers' behavior. Among them are specific personal habits and mannerism, teaching acts and techniques, activities and interrelationships of children in the classroom, problems of structuring and pacing in the classroom and effective acquisition of alternative teaching patterns. The authors also advocate the need for supervisors to allow student teachers the freedom to find their own teaching styles. This is necessary since each student teacher comes with his/her own beliefs on what constitutes teaching.

Copeland (2001) conducted a study looking into the relationship between microteaching and student teachers' classroom performance. Using a five week microteaching training program as the treatment, the author carried out a quasi-experimental study. The findings indicated the experimental group exhibited a significantly higher mean rate of occurrence of the target skills than the control group. Similarly, a study by Benton-Kupper (2001) indicated microteaching as beneficial for peers to provide constructive tips and suggestions, gain new ideas and strategies and be able to discern strengths and weaknesses in the teaching.

There are also studies that look into how student teachers perceive microteaching. Among them is a study by Akalin (2005) who did a comparison between traditional language teaching and microteaching using 52 fourth-year students placed into control and experimental groups. A questionnaire was distributed to seek student teachers' comments on microteaching. The study found student teachers' positive attitude towards microteaching to be more effective compared to traditional teaching. Chang (1972) conducted a similar study looking at student teachers' reaction to microteaching. The findings indicated interesting relationships between the number of hours of teaching, preparation for microteaching and anxiety. It was found that the more student teachers taught, the less time they spent preparing for microteaching and the more student teachers practiced, the less they felt anxious. The findings also showed that as practice time increased, anxiety decreased.

On the other hand, Liderman and Gess-Newsome (1989) investigated the effect of a microteaching course on pre-service student teachers. Seventeen pre-service

student teachers presented four lessons on science to identify their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about teaching. Three forms of feedback were received, namely, informal verbal feedback from peers, formal written feedback and videotape. The study found a transition state of focus among the subjects from concern for self to concern for students.

A study on microteaching was also conducted in an authentic classroom. Newlove (1969) focused on 23 junior-level education students enrolled in their first professional course where the trainees taught for 15 minutes in an 8th and 9th grade English class. Based on the questionnaire distributed, the findings of the study indicated greater respect by the trainees for the teaching profession. It also addressed concerns by student teachers on student achievement and their ability to teach.

Other studies looked into the problems faced by student teachers in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Capel (1997), for example, conducted a study that looked into student teachers' anxiety during observation. Among the concerns addressed by the author are: feeling under pressure most of the time, meeting the needs of different kinds of students, too many instructional duties, feeling more adequate as a teacher, being accepted and respected by professionals, working with too many students each day, getting a favorable evaluation of teaching and maintaining the appropriate degree of class control.

All in all, microteaching functions as a technique that gives student teachers the opportunity to analyze and assimilate different teaching approaches and styles (Hamed, 1979). Since microteaching deals with fewer variables, it also provides immediate feedback that allows discussion and critique of the lessons.

The Need for Lesson Planning

One important element that is deemed crucial in microteaching is the preparation and execution of lesson planning. Lesson planning has been identified as a problematic area especially for student teachers to master (Thornbury, 1999; Bhargava, 2009). One concern is that written plans do not match the proceedings in the classroom. Taylor (1970) comments that teachers tend to deviate from the theoretical aspects learnt when preparing lesson plans. This calls for an investigation of teaching and learning situations. Too much emphasis on meeting the demands of the school and students has led teachers to neglect the theoretical aspects of teaching and learning.

Other researchers have looked into the problems faced by teachers in lesson planning. For example, Abdul Gafoor and Umer Farooque (2010) indicated four problematic areas faced by 74 pre service student teachers in lesson planning.

These areas are: choosing learning experiences appropriate to the learners, deciding and allocating the time suitable for every lesson, executing the planned lesson in the classroom and specifying the education objectives. Some suggestions given by the student teachers to overcome their problems include acquiring knowledge through seminars, providing better opportunities for direct experience in schools and flexibility in attempting a few lessons off-hand without lesson plans and making some comparisons between lessons conducted with and without lesson plans.

Based on the reviews on microteaching and lesson planning, there is a need to find out the views of lecturers on how they perceived these two components. As such the research questions for this study are as follows:

- i. How do educators carry out microteaching?
 - a. What are the strategies employed in microteaching?
 - b. What are the forms of feedback provided during microteaching?
- ii. How do educators view lesson planning?
 - a. What is their perception of lesson planning?
 - b. What are the strategies they employ in teaching lesson planning?
 - c. What are the crucial components in lesson planning?

Methodology

The respondents of the study consisted of 13 lecturers from a teacher training institution in Malaysia. These respondents were selected based on their experiences in teaching methodology courses. All respondents have five to ten years of teaching experience. They were involved in teaching Linking Theory to Practice (LTP) which is a core component in the B. Ed TESL link-programme. Microteaching is one of the strategies used in this component. Student teachers are required to plan and conduct lessons for microteaching sessions. This is followed by peer (verbal) and lecturer (verbal and written) feedback.

The main instrument for the study is an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two parts; part A focuses on the respondents' teaching background and part B highlights respondents' beliefs about microteaching and lesson planning. The data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed and organized by identifying the emerging themes based on the research questions.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented based on the research questions. The findings highlight two areas, namely, the respondents' views of lesson planning and how they teach lesson planning and microteaching.

Definition of Lesson Planning

A lesson plan is described as a *plan* or *design* or *self-contained mapping* to help teachers to conduct lessons. They also view lesson planning as a *blueprint* that serves as guidelines in 'writing' which could either be brief or a detailed 'step-by-step recipe' of a lesson. Most respondents agree that lesson planning provides a sense of direction for teachers in the classroom. The lesson plan is also viewed as a written and structured outline consisting of learning objectives and content stages of lesson development.

A lesson plan is generally regarded as a plan of action to administer or carry out the stipulated objectives of the lesson and use of teaching-learning materials. One respondent also mentioned that the lesson plan functions as a collection of activities for teachers to conduct the lesson in a smooth manner. The respondents seem to place emphasis on the components of the lesson plan, for example, the learning objectives and teaching-learning activities and background of the students or learners. The respondents state the importance of attainable learning objectives that should match the curriculum, syllabus and the teaching-learning activities. They stress the interrelated aspects of the teaching learning activities to facilitate smooth delivery of the content. One respondent mentioned that the lesson plan is subject to change; however the changes should be minor not involving content or language skills.

The data indicate that the respondents share similar views of lesson planning as a guided and written document to facilitate teaching in the real classroom in the future. The components in the lesson plan in terms of learning objectives and teaching learning activities are given equal emphasis.

Teaching of Lesson Planning

The data indicate that the respondents teach lesson planning using two different approaches; one using the student-centered approach and the other using the teacher-centered approach. For the student-centered approach, the respondents started the session by getting the students or learners to draw on their learning experiences. The students were also required to draw from the personal experiences when they were in school. In this approach, students were involved in numerous discussions among peers as well with the lecturer. Students were required to think about the lesson components and discuss the use of the

components in the various stages of the lessons. Lecturers posed questions to the students in order to help the students gain a better understanding of the lesson plan design and implementation. The lecturer's role is more of a facilitator in creating a conducive learning environment.

Another respondent used the method that she described as the 'loop approach' in which she provided a demonstration of the lesson and got students to discuss and analyze the stages of the lesson. This respondent showed a video as a set induction and got the students to discuss the set induction and relate it to the stages of the lesson plan. Students were also given sample lesson plans in which the lecturer provided students with the opportunity to scrutinize and sample the variety of activities and learning objectives.

The next approach is more teacher-centered. There seem to be variations on how the lecturers conduct the teaching session on lesson planning. In this approach the lecturer first provided the necessary input. For example, one respondent emphasized the '3 P approach – pre-instructional, instructional and consolidation stages'. Another respondent highlighted the need to 'give input on the principles and practice of lesson planning'. Another respondent focused on 'a holistic presentation' of the curriculum and the requirements of a lesson plan. This includes selection of syllabus content, teaching-learning materials, activities for each stage of a lesson and learning objectives.

Feedback sessions are also another crucial area in lesson planning. Feedback is often provided with the notion of getting the students to be better equipped with the concepts and implementation of lesson planning. As one respondent mentioned, feedback is provided via the lecturer as well as peers to ensure that the students are able to design lesson plans in accordance to the requirements of the syllabus and curriculum.

Crucial Components in Lesson Planning

Learning objectives, stages of the lessons and types of activities as well as assessment tasks are the crucial components identified in the designing and implementation of lesson planning. 80% of the respondents were highly focused on learning objectives in lesson planning. The respondents believed that this would provide the 'rationale for activities' and 'the scope of the aspect to be taught'. This was followed by the 'systematic development of the focused language skills/language content' to be taught. The third aspect was suitability of activities to match the learning objectives and the assessment tasks to gauge students' understanding. One respondent commented on the importance of types of activities or techniques that will enhance active engagement. By using

meaningful and challenging activities teachers will be able to make lessons meaningful and fun. They also highlighted the need for assessment to gauge students' understanding during and after instruction. Hence, most respondents focused on the need to set assessment tasks within the lesson planning to measure learning.

Ways of Implementing Microteaching Sessions

The respondents have presented varying views in terms of how they would carry out micro teaching in class. A few approaches have been identified. The first take off point would be using the documents such as the teaching guidelines, handouts of effective critiquing, logistics and schedule and appraisal guide to help the student teachers plan and design the microteaching sessions. Here the lecturer plays the role as the provider of information in terms of the necessary documents to facilitate the planning of the microteaching sessions. This class is input-driven as trainees are exposed to aspects related to planning, designing and evaluating the sessions. One respondent used the following technique in which trainees were given a disorganized lesson plan and asked to sequence the teaching stages appropriately. After the sequencing activity, the respondent would help the trainees to draw out the principles of lesson planning. Then the trainees were required to write the aims of lesson plans to teach a lesson of their choice. The form of scaffolding provided by the respondent indicates the emphasis on accuracy of format and structure of the lesson plan. The focus too seems to be on generating appropriate lesson objectives as learning objectives are instrumental in ensuring the relevance of the lesson plan.

Another respondent, apart from providing input on relevant microteaching documents, proceeded to demonstrate a lesson complete with materials and integration of skills. In the next stage the practical session sets off with planning the lesson together, showing teaching clips from other resources and finally providing feedback with a check list. What is interesting here is the checklist is used against the respondent's lesson as well as other viewed lessons. The respondent functioned as a facilitator and students worked in pairs. The trainees planned the lesson under the supervision of the lecturer and generated a checklist. The check list was used to evaluate the lesson observed. During the planning stage, the trainees discussed with the lecturer on how to carry out microteaching and peer observation. During the post microteaching session, there was a focused discussion on ways to improve the lesson. The role of the lecturer was once again a facilitator as well as a participant of the learning community. She used her lesson plan to guide the trainees and got them to critique the lesson. This takes on another form of providing input and guidance as the lecturer does not merely impart knowledge but encourages and empowers the trainees to analyse lessons in a critical manner.

The following illustrates the general microteaching session as described by the respondents in the study.

Microteaching: Input Session

The focus of this session is to equip the students with the relevant knowledge pertaining to microteaching. Two different perspectives on ways of providing input are identified. The first is focused on input provided by the lecturer. For example, one respondent emphasized the need to provide a demonstration of a complete lesson plan with materials, integration of skills, moral values and CCTS (creative and critical thinking skills). The respondent claimed that this would enable students ‘to see the flow and strategies’ of a complete lesson. Another respondent highlighted the need to provide advice on the selection of activities, materials and other related elements. The lecturer also demonstrated a lesson and provided video clips of teaching sessions to help trainees visualize an actual teaching session.

The second perspective focuses on student input as a crucial stage in which the trainees and lecturers provide input on the use of relevant documents related to microteaching planning, designing and assessment strategies. A few respondents also emphasized the need to have discussions with students on what constitutes a good lesson. One respondent agreed with the need for the students to prepare and conduct microteaching by stating the content and students’ background knowledge or levels of abilities, followed by a feedback session.

Practical session

Trainees in groups selected one stage in the lesson and presented that part of the lesson to lecturers and peers. At this point, the check list was used to assess the student’s performance in the microteaching session. Among the aspects assessed were: clarity of instructions, organizational abilities, questioning techniques, pacing of activities and quality of learning.

Post microteaching

Feedback is the crucial aspect in this session. Two major forms of feedback takes place at this point; lecturer feedback and peer feedback. The lecturer ‘recorded aspects relative to the skills agreed’ while selected students became observers to record aspects of the content taught during microteaching. Once again the area of focus was on the lesson structure and content. In terms of the lesson structure, the emphasis was on the sequence and appropriateness of the stages in the lesson. In terms of content, learning objectives and relevancy of teaching-learning activities in accordance to the syllabus were given priority.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study on the views and emphases of a group of teacher trainers regarding microteaching and lesson planning, we have two recommendations. One relates to the preparation for microteaching while the other is on the role of lecturers as trainers of students preparing to become teachers in the future.

Proposed Template for Microteaching

The Linking Theory to Practice course component sees an urgent need to link explicitly the aspects of theory and practice to enable the trainees to 'bridge the gap between theory to practice'. Learners need to be able to identify and operationalize these theories in their teaching. In order to achieve this we suggest the following microteaching template.

The proposed template should consist of elements that help establish the link between theory and practice. Hence the following template could be employed during the planning and administration stages of the microteaching sessions.

The proposed microteaching template is divided into two parts:

- a) **Theory construction** – identification of the theory or theories to be used in the lesson. Here the students are required to explicitly name the theories being used in the lesson. Apart from identifying the theories the students are required to elaborate on the application of the theories in the specific lessons. This is to ensure that the students are able to reflect critically on the use of appropriate theories or models of teaching and learning. This is a crucial section as the application of theoretical knowledge would help the learners establish a well rationalized teaching framework. The theories are often not given due consideration due to the assumption that the theories are not 'practice friendly' in classroom scenarios. By including the theoretical foundation, student teachers will be made aware of the purpose and significance of the theories.
- b) **Practice stage** involves the class profile and stages related to the lesson plan. Here the students are required to align the theories and models to the teaching-learning activities. Based on the data in this study, the trainees merely planned or designed the lesson with little deliberation on the teaching and learning theories used. The bridge between theory and practice needs to be established here when the student teachers use their knowledge acquired in the course and implement the knowledge gained in classroom situations. However, application cannot be used per se as the student teacher would need to adapt and modify their lesson plans to suit the practicalities in the classroom. At this point, the

students take on the role of the reflective practitioner in which the individual reflects on the selection of theory/theories and analyses their suitability in the lesson implementation.

The need for including theories in the planning and designing of lesson plans for the purpose of microteaching sessions provides a good foundation for beginner teachers to become effective reflective thinkers. Being a reflective thinker allows the practitioner to create a meaningful and effective learning environment. The inclusion of theories and how these theories are employed in the microteaching sessions help bridge the gap between theory and practice in teaching.

Role of lecturers

Lecturers, being the content matter experts, need to highlight the relevant pedagogical theories in the mentioned course. There should be a paradigm shift from *knowing what* to *knowing how* of the theories and content. Lecturers need to be able to provide practical content knowledge to the trainees by demonstrating and showcasing practical teaching-learning sessions to their trainees. Hence lecturers need to be not only theorists but also practitioners. Through the practical implementation of the theories via the teaching-learning activities, trainees will gain an insight on the link between theory and practice resulting in meaningful and effective learning. Trainees would then be better able to apply the knowledge gained in a practical situation when they embark on their teaching stint.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes the importance of practical knowledge to support theoretical knowledge in teacher training. The complexity of today's classroom and the trepidations of beginner teachers are crucial concerns that impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Therefore by highlighting the significance of practical knowledge through the use of microteaching and the link to content knowledge these young inexperienced beginner teachers will be better prepared to face teaching challenges confidently.

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