

The Impact of Micro Teaching Lessons on Teacher Professional Skills: Some Reflections from South African Student Teachers

Mothofela Richard Msimanga¹

¹ University of the Free State, Faculty of Education, School of Social Sciences and Language Education, Private Bag X13, Phuthaditjhaba, 9866, South Africa

Correspondence: Mothofela Richard Msimanga, University of the Free State, Faculty of Education, School of Social Sciences and Language Education, Private Bag X13, Phuthaditjhaba, 9866, South Africa.

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Abstract

Micro lessons in teacher education are intended to empower student teachers by developing skills which are necessary in their teaching careers. The study used student teachers' reflections to explore how participation in micro lessons develops skills which are key in the teaching profession. Experiential learning theory was the theoretical framework for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select 14 fourth year Bachelor of Education student teachers. A focus group interview was used to collect data which was narratively analysed. The findings revealed that micro lesson presentations can develop student teachers' skills when there are different forms of progression in micro lesson presentations; micro lesson presentations should progress from friendship groupings, random groupings, and peer presentations. Participation in micro lessons develops teacher professional skills such as lesson planning, craft of teaching, how to use resources, reflection, decision making, time management, responsibility and professional conduct.

Keywords: experiential learning; friendship groupings, random groupings, reflection, teaching skills, teacher education

1. Introduction

Micro lesson presentation is a valuable component of teacher education used to develop teaching skills of student teachers. The process of preparing for micro lesson presentations up to the completion of micro lesson presentations involves several activities including the real lesson presentation. Many studies on micro lessons focus on pedagogical content knowledge and this study takes a different approach to other studies by focusing on other teacher professional skills. There are skills that student teachers gain in the process of preparing for micro lesson presentations up until the lessons are presented. The aim of this study is to explore how participation in micro lessons develop student teachers' skills which are key in the teaching profession. This study responds to a call by Ping (2013) that more reliable knowledge about conducting micro lessons should be availed by universities using the technique. The study also responds to the criticism of micro lessons by Şen (2010) that micro lesson experiences are not usually assessed; thus, this study is based on the reflections of the student teachers who participated in micro lessons during the four years of their studies, and their experiences of the different ways of conducting micro lessons and working with different micro lesson facilitators. The study is guided by the following research question: How participation in micro lessons develop student teachers' skills for the teaching profession?

2. Literature Review

To put the study into perspective, a literature review is conducted on micro lessons in teacher education and the role of micro lessons in development of teacher professional skills.

2.1 Micro Lessons in Teacher Education

Micro lessons are a teacher training technique used to help student teachers to acquire teaching skills by teaching scaled down lessons to practice how to teach (Banga, 2014). Student teachers participate in micro lessons as teachers, learners, and observers in the process (Ekşi, 2012) within a friendly and calm atmosphere (Banga, 2014). Micro lessons are a technique used by student teachers to practice how to teach (Anderson, Barr & Baij, 2012) and affords student teachers the opportunity to put the theories that they have learnt into practice (Punia, Miglani & Singh, 2016).

Moreover, Remesh (2013) highlighted the importance of conducting micro lessons frequently to gain the necessary skills.

According to Arsal (2015) and Banga (2014), micro lessons should be taught between five to ten minutes, in a reduced class size, with reduced tasks to be accomplished and skills to be employed, and student teachers should get feedback and re-teach after getting feedback. Congruently, Bilen (2015) stated that micro lessons limit the number of students, teaching skills, and duration of teaching. Micro lessons are a group teaching method used in teacher education to prepare student teachers in teaching practice for the teaching profession (Bilen, 2015). Face-to-face and small groups are approaches which have long been used in micro lessons and contribute to quality of teaching practices (Kusmawan, 2017). Suguna and Dongre (2017) indicated that facilitating micro lessons can be grouped into pre-planning, session planning, physical arrangements, session delivery, self-reflection, and constraints faced.

In summary, micro lessons help student teachers to practice how to teach and test teaching theories that they have learnt in a scaled down lesson. Micro lessons are a group teaching technique which involve a number of activities in which student teachers participate as learners (being taught during the lesson), as teachers (by teaching the lesson), and as observers (by observing the lesson and giving feedback about the lesson). Micro lessons are effective when they are conducted frequently.

2.2 The Role of Micro Lessons in Development of Teacher Professional Skills

According to Punia et al. (2016) inadequate awareness of the importance of micro lessons has led to its criticism, thus this study highlights the skills developed through participation in micro lessons. Sosibo (2012) posited that teachers should possess skills which will enable them to deal with different learning contexts and different learners. Micro lessons are an effective way of training student teachers in teaching skills (Ping, 2013) and developing effective teaching strategies (Ismail, 2011). It is important that teacher education should provide student teachers with the skills of managing the classroom, curriculum design, lesson planning, lesson presentation (Sosibo, 2012), and reflecting about their performance (Ismail, 2011). Critical thinking is enhanced when student teachers cooperate and share ideas about micro lesson presentations (Arsal, 2015). When student teachers serve as learners, they gain observation skills and skills of providing feedback, and these skills are demonstrated when they comment about the lessons they observed (Bilen, 2015). Micro lessons improve student teachers critical and self-reflective skills (Kusmawan, 2017), and help student teachers to speak in front of a group and manage time effectively (Saban & Çoklar, 2013).

Participation in micro lessons exposes student teachers to real teaching sessions and affords student teachers an opportunity to refine their teaching skills and build their self-confidence (Punia et al., 2016). Student teachers practice and gain different skills during different phases of micro lessons which leads to modification of their teaching behaviour (Kumar, 2016). Critical teacher education competences such as critical thinking, self-efficacy, apprehension, and personalities are positively impacted (Arsal, 2015). Micro lessons develop student teachers' professional competence and confidence (Ralph, 2014) and develop planning skills, teamwork, and subject content mastery (Herrera, Vielma, & Muñoz, 2017). Furthermore, self-training takes place when student teachers observe fellow student teachers presenting their lessons (Remesh, 2013). Student teachers develop skills of providing and receiving constructive feedback and this increases their self-confidence (Banga, 2014). Micro lessons improve time management skills, classroom management skills, and overcoming the difficulties experienced during the process (Kilic, 2010).

Based on preceding discussions, micro lessons promote the development of skills that student teachers will need in their teaching profession. They develop teaching skills, classroom management skills, critical thinking, observation skills, time management, and reflective skills. Students are able to speak in front of a group, cooperate with other students, take different roles (learner and teacher), share information about their presentations, and provide feedback to other students.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study is framed by the experiential learning theory because the study is about the experiences of student teachers when they participated in micro lessons. Experiential learning theory is an adult development learning model theory (Sternberg & Zhang, 2000). Experiential learning theory emphasises an adaptive and holistic process to learning (McCarthy, 2016) and is based on learning by experience through active participation in real-life activities (Odendaal, 2018). This theory focuses on bringing together behaviour, perception, cognition, and experience in the learning process (McCarthy, 2016) and learning takes place through emotions, cooperation, trust, sharing of experiences, and observing real working conditions (Giac, Gai, & Hoi, 2017). The theory involves concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation while emphasising the importance of experience and reflection for real learning to take place (Dhital, Subedi, Prasai, Shrestha, Malla, & Upadhyay, 2015). In addition,

Gorghiu and Santi (2016) highlighted the importance of reflection in the learning process. Experiential learning enhances students' learning (Austin & Rust, 2015) because it allows for learning by doing and deeper understanding in the adult learning environment (Odendaal, 2018). Transformation is encouraged as experiential learning theory directs how experiences are used to action developmental change (Strange & Gibson, 2017). Traditional ways of learning are transformed as students are taught the skills of how to apply knowledge in practice (Giac et al., 2017). Learning takes place through exploration and discovery, through experiences and by doing, to develop skills and improve self-confidence (Gorghiu & Santi, 2016).

Experiential learning theory is compatible with this study because it is an adult development learning theory based on active participation in real-life activities. The adults who are developed through learning are student teachers who actively participated in real-life teaching through micro lessons. Micro lessons involve the stages of experiential learning theory such as use of concrete experiences to contextualise teaching, reflective observation by reflecting on their peers teaching, and their own teaching and active experimentation by participating in micro lessons. Using student teachers' reflections, experiential learning theory will structure the exploration of how student teachers developed work related teacher professional skills by participating in micro lessons.

4. Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative research approach was used which is a research approach that tries to explore and understand feelings, perceptions, and experiences of people (Simion, 2016). The participants expressed their views and perceptions about how their participation in micro lessons developed their teaching profession skills. Data was generated from 14 Bachelor of Education student teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from a South African university. In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the participants based on what the study intends to achieve and to meet the specific needs of the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Fourth year student teachers were selected because they had already participated and completed micro lessons at different levels of their studies, were able to reflect on their experiences, and their availability during data collection was also considered.

Data was generated through a single focus group interview which lasted for one hour and fifty-five minutes. Focus group interviews are a structured and focused way of gaining insight about a particular issue in a short period of time (Cohen et al., 2018). The structure of the focus group interview allowed the participants to listen and understand the inputs of other participants and that afforded them an opportunity to expand on the points already raised. Participants reflected on their experiences based on their participation in micro lessons. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions from the recordings presented the narratives which were used to make the findings. A narrative data analysis approach was adopted whereby the participants related their stories and experiences in relation to the research question. According to Mohajan (2018), narrative analysis is the collection of individual or groups' stories; in this study, a group of 14 student teachers used storytelling to share their experiences with regard to micro lessons. Narrative analysis focuses on what people say about themselves regarding a set of events (Mohajan, 2018). The perspectives of student teachers in relation to micro lessons was the focus for making the findings. According to Arifin (2018), protection of participants' rights is very important, thus, ethical protocols should be observed in a study that involves human beings. Ethical clearance was granted by the university where the study was conducted. Participants participated voluntarily, were assured of confidentiality and anonymity (although they knew each other because they participated in focus group interviews) and were able to freely withdraw from the study at any time. The findings were based on the statements made by the participants during the focus group interview.

5. Research Findings

Micro lesson presentations can develop student teachers' skills when there is progression on student groupings. The number of students can be high in each group in the first year and reduced in succeeding presentations up until they are presented in pairs. Another way of achieving progression is when micro lesson groupings start from friendship groupings and move towards random groupings. Progression can take place when student teachers choose their own topics and at a later stage, they are given random topics. The roles of students should be changed in each presentation.

I also think progression in terms of like groups, we were grouped like we were eight in a group then to five, then fourth year to pairs and if it was possible maybe this semester we would have done it individually. It shows progression and also in terms of friendship, you choose your own group then random, you choose your own topic then you are given a topic; it shows progression, it somehow forces you to develop.

We should be grouped into five and then we always do our micro lessons in that group, in that way you can see that people are changing roles; this time a person is doing introduction the next time they engage with the content.

Presenting micro lessons in groups helps to boost student teachers' confidence and cooperation, especially in their first years of study. Some students who are shy do not develop when they present micro lessons in groups because they end up not doing anything but get the marks. A high number of students in a group makes it difficult for other students to contribute during micro lesson presentations. On the other hand, students have an opportunity to learn from a diverse group of people, present the lessons in different ways from what they are used to, and see how other groups present them.

I never thought people can teach in groups so working in groups also helped my confidence. In my first year it helped me very much.

Lessons were conducted in groups so I can't say I did not learn anything because I was a shy person. I'm shy, because we were in groups, I didn't do anything. Others taught and I just got the marks.

I think that's because of the number of participants in the group was quite large as compared to if we were just three – you can just have a phase each rather, than when you are about four or five.

If you have few people you learn less than you would have if like ... in terms of diversity you will have more people who would understand different characters and that's what you will be exposed to at schools because most of us, the reality is we are going to townships.

And also, we learned how to teach topics in a different way compared to when we were only ... just one group we would think of particular ways and we wouldn't think of other ways whereas when we came to micro lessons, we could see that group taught it in this way and this can also work for me one day.

Friendship groupings help students to develop because they collaborate with people who know their strengths and weaknesses. This helps students develop their areas of strength and get support where they have weaknesses; this in turn improves students' confidence. Friendship groupings increase the pace of preparing for micro lessons and students freely talk and give their ideas. The working environment is friendly, relaxed, and comfortable as students know each other's characters and know how to deal with each other.

I think being in the friendship group helps because you know the other persons' strength; you know the weaknesses, so you are able to dominate in that way. Like you know who can be responsible in typing because they can do it faster, who can be responsible in collecting information because they can. So, you get to work at a faster pace when working with your friends rather than with people you don't know.

I think the good thing is that you know your friends and you understand them, so you are able to be confident with them. So, you are able to come up with ideas and to talk so I think that's a good part.

It was just friendly, more relaxed, and comfortable environment.

Even with my own group of friends, there's five of us and we know this one is this type of a character and this one and we all know how to gel well together.

There is a problem in friendship groupings because some students take advantage of their friends by expecting more from them. In this grouping, friends end up not focusing on the task and end up doing the work at the last minute because friends normally accept their friends' excuses. Students who do not attend classes regularly encounter difficulties in finding groups because people do not want to work with someone who is unreliable.

I think with friendships, most people take advantage. If I know that my friend is good with engaging with the content, all the time I want to do introductions because I know that its short and I want to give most of the work to my friend because she or he has a strength in that area. Okay that's a good thing, but we also have to be considerate of other people. And with friends the environment is more relaxed, but I think there is too much playing around when working with friends; like we do things, we do last minute things and stuff like that.

With friends you know that they will understand that 'I was busy, I did not have access to Wi-Fi' and things like that.

The issue of people not having groups, I met all of my group members in class so through being in class and saying 'hello' and sitting down and I now familiarise with my peers, I see them – but in most cases the people who do not have groups are the people that some of us are seeing for the first time; so we are like you know, so we can't have strangers just come into our groups; we don't even know how do you participate in class.

Random groupings give student teachers a sense of responsibility because they do not want to appear badly to people they are not used to, or disadvantage the group. Students get different perspectives from people they do not know and

learn from the interactions. They learn how to deal with people of different characters. Tasks are completed on time because every member does not want to disappoint.

With random groups you don't really know the people who you are working with and you don't want to be the black sheep of the group; if you are delegated a certain responsibility you want to do it so that you don't disadvantage the other people.

There's more sense of responsibility when it comes to random groups rather than friendship groups.

I think you also learn a lot from people you don't know so you get different perspectives from them, in that way you can grow and as she has already mentioned that you get a sense of responsibility because you cannot really make excuse with people you don't know – you'll do what you need to do at a certain time.

On the random groups you are grouped with people you don't know and you learn characters of other people, and now after, you are able to identify that this one is good in something and you are able to learn that thing, instead of just working with the same people all the time. It will be better sometimes, it's random, and sometimes it's in [friendship] groups because you are able to grow as time goes by in that way.

The problem with random grouping is that students do not have an option of avoiding students who are not cooperative who will affect the group's performance. There might be friends in a group who will work on their own before they come to the group and support each other to overturn the group decisions. Micro lesson presentations in these groupings end up being unplanned because there was no time for planning meetings. Power relations are rife in these groupings and students end up not working together and the lesson presentation becomes disjointed. The group's progress is affected because there might be more than one domineering person in a group and that affects decision making. Some members do not contribute to the group's effort because they are "lazy", and come up with all sorts of excuses.

Some people you can't just work with them; when they say I need to choose groups you know this one and this one I can't go with them because of the level of communication and how they choose to do things.

We were grouped in five and then two of these people were friends and then we communicated, we discussed the topic we were going to present and then we finalised everything; and then the two of them aside decided that it is not the good topic, so they prepared their own topic and then last minute when we met in the library there are two different topics. There is an introduction, there is different engaging with content, the lesson was like too apart because they did the functions of the management and then we did top managers and the level of the management.

Some people are too bossy, they don't want to listen to other people's opinion, they think as if they are smarter than everyone else in a group. While with your friends you know who is bossy, you are used to it.

With random people there's too many bossy people; in a random group we now have two bossy people, and those two people cannot work together whereas with your friends you know, this one is like this.

Some are just lazy, they always have excuses, they stay far; so, you know when you choose people, maybe you all stay nearby, and you can contact each other you know. So, I think that's the advantage of working with people you know.

Presenting micro lessons in pairs ensures each student is responsible and learns more from their partner. Roles are clearly defined for each partner. Students develop because they are unable to hide behind other people. Decisions are quickly taken, and arrangements are more convenient.

It was great to work in pairs, you don't get to hide behind quite a number of people. If we are two, you know you are going to do this part and this part, so you learn more than working in a group of people, like five people.

I think working in pairs give you a chance to develop as a teacher, for example looking at myself, I know I have to teach the content, I have to do so many things – so it gave a chance to develop as a teacher.

Decision making is quicker than when you are five or six.

You don't have to come to school early and prepare your lesson and you can just do it at home, so it was more convenient.

Micro lesson presentations prepare students to present lessons in the classroom context. Reflections on their own lessons and feedback from other students and the lecturer support students' pedagogical content knowledge development. Micro lesson presentations help students with lesson planning, the craft of teaching, and time management. Micro lessons help students with professional conduct and how to use the resources found in the classrooms. Students become empowered with knowledge as the lessons broaden their ideas about teaching.

I feel like the part that prepares you for the school context, it's when you sit down, and you reflect on how the lesson was and the strategies that you used. So, I feel like feedback is the one that is important. I feel the micro lesson part that prepares you for reality of the classroom context, it's when you done presenting and you sit down for the feedback.

I feel like feedback is the one that prepares you.

I wanted to speak on the aspect of time because as a teacher time management is very important, so teaching for ten minutes it helps you to plan.

It teaches you time management. So, feedback gives you areas where you need to improve, gives you possible strategies that you can use for the type of content that you chose.

What I liked about micro lessons is that since we have been doing micro lessons from the first year up to fourth year is the progress; you see progress you accumulate the knowledge all the way, by the time you get to fourth year you have a bigger idea. You also get to fine tune your craft of teaching, so that is a benefit of having micro lessons from first year up to fourth year.

This thing of conduct; the way in which we conduct ourselves as teachers during micro lessons. It sorts of like prepares us on how to present ourselves when we are in a real classroom situation.

The preceding sections presented the findings on how micro lessons develop student teachers' professional skills. The necessary conditions for presenting micro lessons in a manner that will develop student teachers' professional skills were also presented. The next section discusses the findings.

6. Discussion

The study confirms that micro lesson presentations can develop student teachers' professional skills. Banga (2014) found that micro lessons develop teaching skills when the lesson is scaled down, but this study found that progression is important in developing student teachers' professional skills. Progression can take place by starting presentations with a high number of students in a group and reducing the numbers until the students present in pairs (from this study) or individually. The types of groupings should be changed from friendship groupings to random groupings. Choice of topics should move from students choosing their own topics for presentation, to facilitators allocating the topics to students. The content presented should be based on general topics, to topics of lower grades and finally the topics of higher grades. Students' roles during group presentations should change by presenting different stages of a lesson. These forms of progression can be applied if micro lessons are presented frequently, as Remesh (2013) highlighted that students can gain necessary skills if micro lessons are conducted frequently.

Group presentations boost the confidence and cooperation amongst student teachers especially in their first year of study. Bilen (2015) indicated that micro lessons are a group teaching method used to prepare student teachers for their teaching profession as confidence and cooperation are key in the teaching profession. Working in groups helps student teachers to refine their teaching skills and observe other groups present lessons. Student teachers develop better in friendship groupings because they work with people who can accommodate them, as Banga (2014) indicated, that there is friendliness and a calm atmosphere during micro lesson presentations. Power relations in groups help the students to know how to deal with difficult situations that they will come across in their teaching career. Presenting micro lessons in groups prepares student teachers on how to deal with people of different characters and acquire soft skills needed at the workplace. Working in pairs ensures that student teachers take responsibility for their work without hiding behind other student teachers and this is expected in the teaching profession.

The study found that without reflections and feedback, micro lessons might not achieve their purpose, as the participants indicated that those are the main activities from the whole process. Participants regarded these activities as developmental. Reflecting on their lessons helps student teachers understand their strengths and weaknesses. When student teachers receive feedback from other students, they develop the skill of accepting constructive criticism. Self-reflection and feedback help student teachers to improve their lesson planning, the craft of teaching, how to use available resources, and time management. This is supported by Ping (2013) and Ismail (2011) that micro lessons are an effective way of training teaching skills and developing effective teaching strategies. The aforementioned discussions demonstrate the importance of micro lessons in developing student teachers' professional skills.

7. Conclusion

The study managed to respond to the criticism of micro lessons, that micro lesson experiences are not assessed. The study addressed this criticism by asking student teachers who participated in micro lessons to reflect on how their participation developed their professional skills. Secondly, the study responded to the call that universities using micro

lessons should provide more reliable knowledge about conducting micro lessons. This study concludes that micro lessons should still form an integral part of teacher education because they develop student teachers in different ways, including development of teacher professional skills. The study also concludes that student teachers' professional skills can be developed when there is progression in conducting micro lessons. Progression can take place when the number of students presenting are reduced from high to low, the types of groupings, students choosing their own topics to students being given topics, presenting the content from lower grades to higher grades, and changing the roles of students during presentation. When students present micro lessons in groups, they are able to learn from a diverse group of people, their confidence is boosted, and cooperation skills improve. Students learn human relations skills and have a sense of responsibility because they do not want to disappoint other group members. Micro lesson presentations develop student teachers in lesson planning, the craft of teaching, how to use the resources, time management, reflection, and professional conduct. When students present micro lessons in friendship groupings, they encounter the challenges of friends who do not focus and taking advantage of their friends to do more in the group. When random groupings are used, students are unable to avoid students who are not cooperative and power relations can disrupt group performance. This study can help institutions conducting micro lessons to focus on other areas of student development and conduct micro lessons in a manner that can empower student teachers with teacher professional skills.

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