

STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT OF VIDEO-RECORDED LESSONS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract

Lecturers have not been able to go to schools where student teachers were placed for teaching practice, to physically sit in classrooms to observe and assess their lessons. This is due to Covid-19 lockdown regulations in South Africa. For this reason, students were instructed to video-record their lessons, and submit them to lecturers for observation and assessment of their teaching competence. As a result of this unprecedented venture, the researchers sought to determine student teachers' perceptions of the video-recorded lessons, and the assessment thereof. A qualitative research approach was employed to carry out this study because the researchers intended to understand in-depth, the student teachers' views and perceptions regarding their video-assessed lessons. Individual interviews were conducted among a sample of 40 third-year students, which were purposefully selected. Collected data were analyzed by means of identification of patterns and themes. Findings revealed that most student teachers preferred video-recording their lessons and sending them to lecturers for assessment. They felt less nervous and anxious, and thus made fewer mistakes when it was just them and the learners in the classroom, as opposed to when the lecturer or mentor teacher sits in and observes them as they conduct lessons. However, they preferred mentor teacher/lecturer feedback over feedback from their peers. The study highlighted the need for a shift, from lecturers being physically present in the classroom to observe and assess student teachers' teaching competence, to assessing video-recorded lessons and providing students with feedback.

Keywords: *Assessment, teaching practice, video-recorded lesson.*

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in many sectors including education. Several systems were affected at schools and universities alike. Prior to this pandemic student teachers, we placed in schools to undergo teaching practice as part of their Work-integrated learning (WIL). The teaching practice is in most cases over a period of two to four weeks depending on the year level of the student-teacher.

At the Central University of Technology (CUT), first and second-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) student teachers predominantly do school and classroom observations for a period of between two and three weeks. While third and fourth-year students do their teaching practice in the form of co-teaching together with their respective mentor teachers, allocated to them by their school management where they have been placed. The co-teaching process involves the capacitation of student teachers with skills in lesson preparation, lesson presentation, planning and execution of assessment of classroom tasks, classroom management, and other critical skills in the practice of teaching. During this period, university lecturers are dispatched to different schools to evaluate these third and fourth-year student teachers on the practice of teaching.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this teaching practice system was disrupted as lecturers were unable to conduct these student-teacher evaluations. This prompted the CUT to come up with an alternative strategy for these school visit evaluations. The lecturers proposed the implementation of remote evaluation of student teachers during teaching practice. With this system student teachers were expected to video record themselves presenting lessons and these video-recorded lessons are sent to lecturers for assessment of their teaching competencies.

1.1. Video-recorded lessons

Apart from it being a forced strategy to implement during the COVID-19 pandemic video-recorded lessons have many advantages. First, video-recorded lessons have the potential to encourage collaborative teaching among student teachers and their mentor teachers (Vedder-Weiss, Segal & Lefstein, 2016). This is because opportunities to learn are constructed through actions and interactions interpreted by peers within a learning environment and in this case among student teachers (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2018, Coddington, 2017).

Second, with its ability to make classroom practices public video-recorded lessons enable interaction and free feedback among student teachers, their mentor teachers, and their lecturers. This is because it prompts discussions of pedagogy and practice examines student thinking and fosters reflection on the practice of teaching (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2018). Third, it enables student teachers to explore the theory of teaching as presented in practice and therefore sharpen their understanding of the teaching environment (Vedder-Weiss, Segal & Lefstein, 2016).

Fourth, through its ability to encourage rehearsals student teachers are at liberty to fine-tune different skills like the skill of set establishment, the skill of probing questions, the skill of stimulus variation, the skill of explanation, etc. Viewing one's own video is more motivating and stimulating for learning (Coddington, 2017). The video recordings were regarded as more appropriate in line with the disruptions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic to the teaching practice period.

2. Methodology

This study sought to determine the perceptions of a university of technology's student teachers on the assessment of their video-recorded lessons presented during teaching practice. For this reason, a qualitative research approach was used to collect data from the research participants. Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003:5-13), is concerned with the studied use and collection of empirical materials, for example, a case study, personal experience, introspection, interview, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured. The qualitative approach was best suited for this study because there was no interest in carrying out any experiments or measuring any quantities. This study was rather focused on understanding student teachers' feelings and perceptions of the assessment of their video assessed lessons that they presented during teaching practice.

Hammarberg, et.al (2016:499) assert that qualitative research methods are suitable and fitting when truthful and authentic information is required to answer the research question. These methods are also used to answer questions about perspective, meaning, and encounter, from the participant's point of view. In this study, the researchers relied heavily on factual data collected from the views, experiences, and opinions of all the research participants. The researchers also sought truthful and authentic information directly from the student teachers regarding how they perceived the assessment of their video-recorded lessons.

Devetak, et al (2010:77) further reports that the aim of a qualitative study is to collect data in the form of rich content-based descriptions of people, events, programs, processes, and situations. Qualitative research was chosen for this study by virtue of its nature of engaging in an in-depth study rather than focusing on numbers, measurements, and statistics.

3. Data collection

Open-ended interview questions were used to determine the student teachers' perceptions of the assessment of their video-recorded lessons during teaching practice. According to Weller et al. (2018: 2), open-ended questions are used for the in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon. A sample of 40 third-year students was purposefully selected to participate in this study due to their position as senior students who had to video-record the lessons they presented during teaching practice. These lessons were submitted to lecturers electronically for assessment. Because of the regulations of the covid-19 lockdown in South Africa at the time, these interviews were sent to students and administered in WhatsApp groups that were created for this purpose.

4. Results

While student teachers were doing their teaching practice amid lockdown due to the covid-19 pandemic, the lessons they presented to learners were assessed in two ways. Firstly, their school mentor teachers attended their classes to observe them as they conducted the lessons. These mentor teachers used an assessment rubric to award marks according to their performance and competence.

Secondly, students video-recorded their lessons and shared these videos amongst themselves according to their groupings and gave each other feedback on their performance. Students in a particular group had to choose one video and submit it to their lecturer for evaluation. This they do after consultations and peer reviews within their respective groups. The results of the open-ended interview questions are presented in two parts as detailed below.

4.1. Results when assessed by the mentor teacher

All 40 students were asked if their mentor teachers assessed any of their lessons besides the video-recorded lessons, and they all were assessed by their mentor teachers for some lessons.

28 students reported that they were anxious and extremely nervous having to present lessons in the presence of the mentor teacher, and thus fumbled through the lesson, resulting in low marks awarded.

Here are some of their responses when asked how the presence of the mentor teacher affected their performance:

- *“I felt very intimidated by the presence of the mentor teacher, and I could not be myself”*
- *“I was always worried that I was making mistakes, and I actually ended up forgetting simple things such as outlining lesson outcomes”*
- *“He was looking right at me, and I could not even speak loud and clear. My voice was literally trembling”*

12 students reported that they were reasonably calm and at ease when presenting the lesson, and thus did not fumble.

4.2. Results when the video-recorded lesson was assessed by peers and sent to the lecturer for assessment

All 40 students reported that they were neither anxious nor nervous about having to present video-recorded lessons in the absence of the mentor teacher.

Here are some of their direct responses when asked how their performance was affected while recording their lessons in the absence of the mentor teacher, and sharing them amongst each other as peers:

- *“I was quite comfortable when he was not there, and I was feeling myself”*
- *“I felt very relaxed and as a result I executed my lesson according to plan”*
- *“The lesson was smooth-flowing because I could be myself all alone with the learners”*
- *“I was not worried about making mistakes and this put me at ease”*
- *“I was so relaxed I could even crack some jokes related to the lesson, which made the lesson more interesting and interactive”*

4.3. Results regarding feedback by mentor teacher vs peers

Asked if they preferred to get feedback on their lessons from their peers or mentor teachers, 33 students mentioned various reasons why they prefer feedback from the mentor teacher. 7 students reported that they preferred feedback from their fellow students. Here are some of their direct responses:

- *“I prefer that the mentor provides feedback on my lesson because she has much more experience than my peers”*
- *“I trust the mentor’s feedback more because she observed me teaching live and was able to correct my mistakes immediately”*
- *“I trust my mentor’s feedback because he is such an expert in Mathematics”*
- *“My fellow students and I are at the same level. I do not fully trust their feedback”*
- *“As students, we relate more to each other than we do with teachers or lecturers. I can definitely rely on feedback from my peers”*

5. Discussion of results

This study found that student teachers' performance as they present lessons in the presence of either a mentor teacher or lecturer, may take a decline. This is due to anxiety or nervousness about having to teach learners in the presence of a more knowledgeable figure, and the fear of making mistakes resulting in the loss of marks.

Students tend to perform much better when the environment in which they operate is neither tense nor intimidating.

Even though they prefer video-recording their lessons in the absence of the teacher or lecturer, they still trust and prefer teacher/lecturer feedback on their lesson over feedback from their peers!

The study highlighted the need for a shift from lecturers being physically present in the classroom to observe and assess student teachers' teaching competence, to assessing video-recorded lessons and still providing students with swift feedback on their performance.

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