Chapter #19

ANALYSING THE EXTENT TO WHICH STUDENT TEACHERS IMPLEMENT THEIR LESSON DESIGN DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Lesson designing focuses on the structure of a series of lessons. It incorporates the planning, organization, and sequencing of lessons to achieve learning outcomes. Student teachers are capacitated to master the skills of lesson planning so they can plan their teaching on a lesson plan template. However, what they do in the classroom is not a reflection of the lesson design itself. As a result, the researchers sought to investigate the reasons for this lack of synergy between the lesson design and the actual lesson presentations. This qualitative research was conducted through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. A sample of 20 B.Ed. degree student teachers who are in their third year of study were randomly and conveniently selected. The findings revealed that most student teachers do not have high regard for lesson designing. The assessment rubric used to evaluate student teachers' teaching competence does not outline aspects of the lesson design. Moreover, student teachers are unsure of how to implement some of the aspects of the lesson plan template. The study highlighted the need to put more emphasis on the importance of lesson designing. It was further recommended that lesson designing should allow for pedagogic flexibility.

Keywords: lesson design, synergy, lesson presentation, teaching practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Revised policy on the Minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), 2015 is a policy that lays out a minimum set of agreed-upon competencies for initial teacher education (ITE) programs in South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). This policy sets minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications aimed at ensuring that the higher education system produces teachers of high quality, in line with the needs of the country. It describes clear, specific requirements for the development of learning programs, as well as guidelines regarding practical and work-integrated learning (WIL) structure. In this paper, the researchers use the term teaching practice. Teaching practice constitutes an essential part of the BEd program as is school-based work-integrated learning that is supervised and assessed. It is an approach that harmonizes academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and their intended workplaces, in most cases the school environment (Mudzielwana, Joubert, & Phatudi, 2016). During this teaching practice period, student teachers are provided with opportunities to practice as a teacher, to develop desirable characteristics of a teacher and values in order to display appropriate professional behavior (Mudzielwana, et al, 2016).

2. BACKGROUND

Lesson design is a deliberate process that entails the methodical creation of instructional experiences. It concentrates on the overarching framework of a set of teachings. It involves the alignment of learning objectives, evaluation techniques, and instructional tactics over a long period of time (Cohen, Manion., & Morrison, 2018). Lesson design entails the development of a curricular framework that outlines the learning objectives, assessment techniques, and logical sequencing of lessons. Its purpose is to develop well-designed lessons that promote flexibility and adaptation during each lesson and aid aspiring teachers in developing coherent and impactful learning experiences.

Student teachers are also presented with a chance to learn different teaching skills and to effectively plan and present lessons that they were taught during lectures at the institutions of higher learning. This is an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover their strengths and weaknesses through reflection. They are mostly guided by mentor teachers and their lecturers who are tasked to evaluate them and give them reflective feedback on their performances in the classroom (Lombard, 2015).

The effectiveness of a teacher within a classroom environment is realized through the ability to plan lessons correctly. The lesson plan is a guide for the presentation of the lesson, without which the teacher may go astray (Drake & Jackson, 2016). Good lesson planning is an important aspect where teacher expertise exists (Li & Zou, 2017). According to Du Toit (2016:140), there are five basic questions that need to be considered and these are "what I teach; who my learners are; why I am teaching this; how I can teach this and how successfully do I teach.

When training student teachers on lesson planning and lesson presentation teacher education institution should ensure that they have the knowledge and understanding of lesson aims and objectives. When formulating aims and objectives, student teachers should know that these should strive to develop the learners holistically. This can be achieved if aims and objectives can include the integration, interrelation, and interconnection between the cognitive domain, psychomotor domain, and affective domain (Drake & Jackson, 2016; Du Toit, 2016).

This is followed by the step on the identification of the major components of teaching and learning which are teacher presentation and learner practice (Drake & Jackson, 2016). Student teachers should know that during this phase they should display their knowledge of the content, the different skills of presenting the content, strategies for interacting with learners, and the ability to interact with different types of learners (Drake & Jackson, 2016; Rusznyak, 2011). The student should meticulously plan learner activities that are in line with the teacher's actions in order to achieve the required objectives. A dissimilarity should be made between guided practice and independent practice activities (Drake & Jackson, 2016). Guided practice activities are those activities that allow learners to demonstrate the application of the new content under the guidance of the student teacher. While independent practice activities are those activities that encourage learner-centered behavior. It allows learners to use the new concepts or skills in a relevant but new context (Drake & Jackson, 2016; Rusznyak, 2011).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is framed by Lee Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) model (Shulman, 1987). PCK was used because it emphasizes the importance of the three knowledge domains that teachers and student teachers must possess to present successful lessons. The three domains as proposed by Lee Shulman are presented in the diagram below and these are Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1987). The knowledge domains that student teachers must possess are explained as follows.

Figure 1.
Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1987).
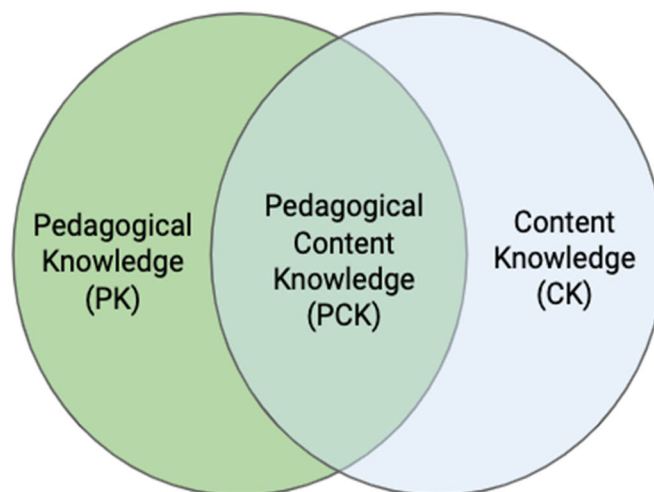
3.1. Content Knowledge (CK)

This domain refers to the outstanding knowledge of the subject matter that teachers must have to teach. A teacher must have a thorough understanding of the subject matter or content that they are going to teach (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Koehler, Mishra, & Cain, 2013). The teacher must have expertise in the subject level that he/she will be teaching; for instance, the subject knowledge of mathematics at primary school, high school, and university differs. According to Shulman (1987:6), the teacher's "content knowledge should embrace subject concepts, theories used in the subject, relevant philosophies, organizational frameworks, evidence, and proof, as well as reputable tactics and ways of developing such knowledge".

According to Thompson, Bell, Andreae, and Robins (2013:1), newly qualified teachers must have content knowledge to delivers subject topics effectively. Sound content knowledge is essential for teachers to teach the curriculum at schools because a more knowledgeable teacher in their specialized subject teaches the subject better (Poulson, 2001). Beginner teachers are required to have a sound content knowledge to be able to teach the curriculum in a simplified manner to enhance learner understanding.

3.2. Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)

Pedagogical knowledge refers to a deepened understanding of strategies, methods, and processes that teachers should employ in the teaching and learning of their respective subject specializations (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Koehler et al., 2013). It involves a thorough understanding of the aims and objectives of a subject, the educational purpose and values of the subject, and the ability to plan activities that will make the learning of the subject easy and making make the subject relevant and enjoyable to learners (Koehler et al., 2013).

Also, PK is about teachers' understanding of how learners learn, classroom management skills, lesson planning, development of classroom activities, and assessment of learners (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Koehler et al., 2013). PK requires teachers' understanding of the cognitive theories, and social and developmental theories of learning, and these can be applied to learners in the classroom (Koehler et al., 2013). The teacher should have the ability to determine how best to present ideas and concepts to be in line with the needs of the learners in their respective classrooms (Shulman, 1986, 1987).

3.3. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

PCK is about the knowledge and understanding of a subject matter taught, meaning the pedagogy of a specific subject. PCK relates to Shulman's (1986: 4) belief that "real teaching requires an understanding of both content and pedagogy". It does not require one to be just a content expert or just a pedagogy expert, but it requires teachers to have the expertise to match content with relevant pedagogy so that effective learning can take place (Koehler et al., 2013). According to Koehler et al. (2013, p. 14), this knowledge domain "revolves around the teacher's ability to properly teach, plan relevant activities for learning, understand the core and hidden curriculum, conduct assessment, and report results of a subject".

Hence, the concept of PCK is the transformation, by the teacher, of the content (Shulman, 1986; Koehler et al., 2013). A teacher who has a deep PCK can interpret the subject matter well, can present the subject matter in a way suitable to their learners, and can develop suitable teaching and learning materials to meet the needs of individual learners in their classrooms (Shulman, 1986; Koehler et al., 2013).

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To determine whether student teachers understand all aspects of the lesson design and can complete lesson plans correctly.
- To determine whether student teachers can formulate lesson objectives, develop assessment strategies, logically sequence lessons, and develop strategies for differentiation.
- To determine the challenges that students are confronted with when they present lessons, that derail them from their lesson design.
- To suggest ways in which student teachers may as far as possible, synergize their lesson design with their lesson presentations.

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5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study sought to investigate the reasons why student teachers at a university of technology do not synergize their lesson plans with their lessons during teaching practice. A qualitative enquiry which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) involves the study of anything in its consistent environment to attempt to make sense of it regarding the meanings people assign to it, using among others, observations, interviews, and personal experiences, was used to carry out this investigation.

5.1. Data Collection

Qualitative data collection techniques that were used in this study are document analysis, semi-structured focus group interviews, and observations. Document analysis was in the form of the analysis of student teachers' completed university lesson plan templates.

Kutsyuruba (2017) defines document analysis methodology as a systematic process through which documents are reviewed and analyzed with the purpose of searching for meaningful data within them, as well as to gain understanding for knowledge development. The researchers collected student teachers' completed lesson plan templates with the aim of determining if student teachers gain an understanding of essential aspects of a lesson, and if they present their lessons according to what they have planned, as outlined on their lesson plans. Document analysis is a type of qualitative research method that entails the interpretation of documents where contents is coded into themes and sub themes. The data collected from the analysis of lesson plans in this study was coded into themes.

Secondly, the study employed observations as a research method. Observations is one of the primary research techniques utilized in many disciplines, including the natural sciences, social sciences, psychology, and more. It entails conducting systematic research by carefully and methodically examining a topic or event (Cohen et al., 2018). It is the process of gathering information by directly observing and documenting behaviors, occurrences, or phenomena without interfering with them. Because it seeks to accurately portray what is occurring without introducing prejudices or prior beliefs, it is seen as objective (Cohen et al, 2018).

A focus group interview is a type of group interview where data emerges from the interaction among participants (Cohen et al., 2018). Focus group interviews were conducted with student-teachers in their final year of study. According to Edwards and Hollands (2013), one of the core features of semi-structured interviews is the interactional exchange of dialogue between two or more participants. Dialogues were held with the student teachers to investigate the challenges they encounter during teaching practice, when they plan their lessons as well as present them as planned.

5.2. Sample

Random sampling was used in this study because according to Mulisa (2022), the results of random sampling can be extrapolated to the rest of the population in question. A sample of 20 third year student teachers was randomly and conveniently selected in this study. Maree (2016) asserts that the sample should be feasible in terms of resources, time, and accessibility. The proposed participants in this study are easily accessible as they are student teachers at our university.

The two researchers developed a schedule to visit the 20 student teachers at their respective schools where they were placed for teaching practice. Each one of the two researchers had to observe 10 student teachers in class teaching. This gave the researchers an

opportunity to observe the student teacher's presentation skills in front of the learners at schools. The researchers also had to collect two lesson plans from each of the 20 student teachers for analysis. In total 40 lesson plans were analyzed to determine whether there is synergy between the lesson plans and the presentations of the lessons.

5.3. Data Analysis

The explanatory nature of qualitative research is relatively lengthy and more descriptive and leads to the discovery and construction of new meanings, understandings, ideas, and deductions (Delport & Fouché, 2005). Deductions were made and new meanings of the ideas and opinions of the participants when analysing the collected data, were established regarding their challenges pertaining to presenting their lessons in accordance with their lesson plans during teaching practice.

Analysis and description of student teachers' responses and researcher observations were reported by means of rich and thick descriptive explanations which, according to Ponterotto (2006), have to do with lengthy elaborations and interpreting of meanings. The constant comparative method of analysis and interpretation of data was used. Themes were also developed from the analysis of the student teachers, lesson plans.

The data collected from the analysis of lesson plans in this study was coded into themes. Observations of student teachers conducting lessons were documented and their behavioral patterns coded and recorded according to similarities. According to Rädiker and Kuckartz (2020), when interviews are analyzed, data is categorized, and interviews are coded through basic coding. Data from the focus group interviews were categorized and coded.

6. FINDINGS

After the student teachers' lessons that they presented during teaching practice were observed and compared with their lesson plans, at the realization that there were aspects of the lesson plans that did not come out as outlined on the lesson plans, we decided to investigate the reasons why this was the case.

6.1. Document Analysis

The following themes were used when analyzing student teachers' lesson plans as part of document analysis:

No	Theme	Findings
1.	**Curriculum coherence**: Lesson plans created by student teachers were in line with the overall curriculum or academic requirements.	It was found that all 20 student teachers planned lessons around topics well within the scope of work as prescribed by the curriculum. Students presented content that was within the prescriptions of the university and school curricula.
2	**Learning outcomes**: What students are expected to accomplish at the end of the lesson is guided by specific and quantifiable learning outcomes.	22 of the lesson plans that were analyzed revealed that some student teachers could not formulate lesson outcomes correctly. Common mistakes that were made included student teachers failing to use appropriate action verbs to

		formulate lesson outcomes. Students started their lesson outcomes by writing: • At the end of this lesson, learners must "know" how to…… • At the end of this lesson learners should "understand…" "Know" and "Understand" are not appropriate action verbs used in the formulation of lesson outcomes.
3	**Pedagogical knowledge**: Sound pedagogical knowledge that guide the teaching and learning process	All 20 student teachers selected various teaching methods as listed on the lesson plan template. Scaffolding method was selected on 15 of the lesson plans, however, researcher observations revealed that student teachers did not have full understanding of this method as most of them rather used purely the "Question and Answer" method.
4	**Assessment**: Considering how learning outcomes will be evaluated and measured. Formative and/ or summative assessment outlined.	All students outlined their assessment strategies on their lesson plan templates, including questioning learners throughout the lesson and giving them classwork, but some of them run out of time before putting all their assessment plans to action. Only 8 of the lesson plans were implemented successfully in terms of assessment.
5	**Learner-centeredness**: Putting student needs and interests first to provide interesting and productive learning experiences	Of the 40 analyzed lesson plans, it was found that only 10 student teachers plan to actively involve their learners in the teaching and learning process, but that is only through asking as many questions as possible. Students are not able to facilitate learning by probing and leading learners to discover information.

6.2. Interviews

Students were further asked two questions that were coined to bring about an understanding of the reasons for the lack of synergy between their lesson plans and the actual lessons they presented.

6.2.1. Question 1

Students were first asked about the extent to which they understand the aspects of the lesson plan, and if they could confidently complete the lesson plan template?

Ten (10) students claimed they understood all the concepts that are outlined in the lesson plan, however, some of their responses indicated that they had some misconceptions about some of the aspects of the lesson plan. Five of the students acknowledged that there were some aspects that they were not sure of.

Here are some of the responses by those who claimed to understand the lesson plan in its entirety:

➢ *"The lesson plan template is easy to fill in and it is understandable." (P1)*
➢ *"The lesson plan template helps me a lot because it makes me aware of all the activities that are expected of me as a teacher" (P4)*
➢ *"I believe I do understand all sections of the template because I never leave out anything when I complete the lesson plan" (P3)*

Even though these students claim to understand all the lesson plan aspects, one of them, attempting to explain what "expanded opportunities" is, which is one of the aspects on the lesson plan, referred to it as a summary of the lesson where the teacher provides final explanations and remarks to the learners. We deduced from this explanation that students still have misconceptions about certain elements of the lesson plan because "expanded opportunities" refers to opportunities that the teacher creates for learners to learn what was discussed in class, outside of the classroom or even away from the school by sending them to a grocery store in their communities to investigate food prices, for example!

The following are some of the responses from students who acknowledged that there are some elements of the lesson plan that they do not quite understand.

➢ *"I always struggle with the section that requires me to mention the skills, knowledge and attitudes." (P7)*
➢ *"There are many teaching methods listed on the lesson plan template to choose from, but I always select question and answer because I am not even sure what scaffolding method is". (P2)*

6.2.2. Question 2

What challenges are you confronted with during your lessons, that derail or cause you to deviate from what you have planned on the lesson plan template?

This question was coined to elicit responses regarding the actual reasons student teachers do not present lessons as they planned them. These are some of their responses:

➢ *"Learner discipline and classroom management are the challenges that I mostly face in the classroom during lesson presentation. As learners are the ones rotating, they come late to class and disrupt the ongoing lesson. When learners misbehave in the classroom, they delay the lesson and I end up skipping some points in the lesson due to time wasted". (P10)*
➢ *"Time, class time is very short, and learners are unpredictable. Sometimes you must spend more time explaining one concept than you had planned, leading to not achieving some of the objectives you stated". (P13)*
➢ *"Having to discover that the teaching strategies that you are using are not helping the learners to acquire the intended knowledge, now you have to use other strategies within the same period, which puts you under pressure because you won't get extra time for these new adjustments. Also, sometimes gadgets are used to conduct a lesson and it happens that technical errors arise in the middle of the lesson, now you need to rearrange your lesson in such a way that you can still lead the learners to the objectives they need to acquire". (P15)*

> ➤ *"The reason I struggle to present the lesson exactly how I planned it is because of the disruptions caused by the learners in the class, as well as others who are roaming around outside making lots of noise to a point where the ones inside the classroom are not able to pay attention. Learners also do not participate or ask questions, and they always pretend to understand what we are doing." (P1)*

> ➤ *"Underestimating time: planning to teach a certain amount of content not being aware that the content is too much for the duration of the period. Learner corporation: sometimes learners take time to get to class and this reduces the duration of the class because time is wasted, then it becomes difficult to complete the lesson on time. Learner discipline: most of the time learners respect their teacher more than they do student teachers. Having to constantly discipline learners during the lesson wastes time and again, it becomes difficult to complete the lesson". (P12)*

6.3. Discussions
6.3.1. Question 1

Most student teachers view the lesson plan template as an understandable and uncomplicated document, and they do not struggle to complete it fully before their lessons. However, findings reveal that some of them have misconceptions about certain aspects of the template and thus do not complete it correctly. This provides evidence that student teachers lacking pedagogical knowledge (PK), as they have limited comprehension of a variety of teaching methods.

6.3.2. Question 2

Overall, student teachers indicate that they deviate from their plan as outlined on the lesson plan template because of issues related to learner discipline and time constraints. Student teachers in their final year of study are expected to demonstrate high levels of time management as well as competence in classroom and discipline management, but this is not the case.

One of the students indicates that learners are uncooperative and do not participate in class, as well as pretend to understand what is being taught. This is a clear indication of the lack of pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) on the part of the student teachers. Final year student teachers as facilitators and mediators of learning are expected to possess the skills to get learners engaged or involved in the teaching and learning activities, but again, this does not seem to be the case.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Subject didactics lecturers must be sensitized about the misconceptions that students have about the lesson plan so that they spend time reinforcing a deeper understanding of the lesson plan. Lecturers are also encouraged to spend more time facilitating and demonstrating various teaching methods that student teachers are expected to demonstrate competence in.

More intensive pedagogical training is requested to prepare students for both expected and unexpected situations that arise in the teaching and learning arena, such as the management of ill-discipline and the optimal use of time. Student teachers must be intensively trained to become facilitators and mediators of learning equipped with skills to be able to get learners involved in their classroom activities. Student teachers must be trained on pedagogic flexibility so that they are able to adapt and adopt their lessons as the unexpected happens during their lessons.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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