

Challenges experienced by Upper Primary Student Teachers in post-lesson reflections during School Based Studies

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Abstract

This study sought to uncover how student teachers reflect on their lessons and to suggest strategies for improving post-lesson reflections. Post lesson reflection allows students to identify their strengths and weaknesses which can improve teaching and learning processes. A qualitative approach with a single case of Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus was used. A sample of 10 student teachers from Social Studies and Mathematics Education was purposively selected. Document analysis and focus group discussions were used to collect data. Twenty post-lesson reflections were analysed to establish the extent to which students reflect on their own teaching. Data from document review and interview were thematically analysed. Findings revealed the following: students' post lesson reflection are mostly focusing on the description and action plans; students understand post-lesson reflection as a way of evaluating oneself to improve teaching; students are faced with numerous challenges such as forgetting what happened in the lesson, not taught how to reflect, overloaded schedule, and mentor teachers and lecturers are not fully supportive. The study suggested the integration of reflection into lesson planning components of other modules and the presence of mentor teachers during the lesson presentations. The study recommends student teachers' exposure to models of reflection and reduction of student teachers' work in line with the University guidelines.

Keywords

Post-lesson reflection, School Based Studies, Upper Primary, student teachers

Introduction

Reflection is a process of learning through everyday experiences and forms an integral part of undergraduate and post-graduate higher education programmes (Wain, 2017). It is a key factor of teacher training and one of the learning goals in teacher education. In teacher education, lesson reflections have been used as a way to develop reflective skills that help student teachers make connections between theory and teaching practices (Chitpin, 2006). It is a means for students to examine their beliefs and who they believe themselves to be (Ryan & Ryan, 2013), hence it serves the purpose of improving one's practice and learning behaviour. Reflection is a common challenge for students in tertiary education (Leijena et al., 2009). This study therefore explores how student teachers reflect on their post lessons, challenges they face and strategies for improving post-lesson reflections. According to Smith (2020) post-lesson reflection refers to the process of evaluating and thinking critically about a learning experience after it has taken place. Post-lesson reflection is a valuable tool for educators and learners alike as it fosters a culture of ongoing self-improvement and adaptability in the field of education. It helps ensure that lessons are effective, engaging, and conducive to meaningful learning experiences.

At the University of Namibia, HPC, it has also been observed that student teachers have difficulties in post lesson reflections. It is a requirement for student teachers to submit their School Based Studies files to their tutors for marking. Among the SBS portfolio components, student teachers are expected to reflect on the lessons that they teach. However, most of the reflections are repetitive, non-critical, and shallow. This study explored challenges faced by Upper Primary student teachers in post lesson reflections and suggested strategies for improving post-lesson reflections.

Theoretical framework

This study was based on Gibbs model of reflection. Reflection is the act of “reviewing, reconstructing, re-enacting and critically analysing one's own and the class' performance, and grounding explanations in evidence” (Shulman,1987, p. 15) with a view to changing them and a

view on the change itself (Nguyen, et al., 2014). Gibbs model is grounded on six stages of reflection. These include description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. The description mode of reflecting was used to look at how students describe their SBS experiences. The feelings mode of reflecting was used to look at how students reacted and felt about events that took place or happened during their teaching. The Evaluation mode of reflecting was used to look at whether students are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The analysis mode of reflecting was used to look at whether students are able to reflect on identified weaknesses and strengths. The conclusion mode of reflection was used to look at whether students are able to draw conclusions on their teaching in general. The action plan mode of reflection was used to look at whether students are able to act based on their experiences and knowledge gained to improve their teaching.

Method

This is a qualitative case study. A qualitative approach was used as the study seeks to gain a complex, detailed understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2014). A single case of HPC was used to explore the challenges experienced by student teachers when reflecting on the lessons taught. A sample of 10 student teachers (five from Social Studies and five from Mathematics Education) were purposively selected. This was done on the basis that they spent eleven weeks in schools doing their SBS and were expected to teach and reflect on the lessons taught. Focus group discussions were conducted with student teachers. Thereafter, twenty post-lesson reflections done by students were analysed to establish the extent to which students reflect on their own teaching. This attested to whether post-lesson reflection enabled students to improve their own teaching.

It is believed that smaller groups are preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about a topic and lengthy experience related to the topic of discussion (Greeff, 2011). In this study, focus group discussions were done in four groups of five students based on their area of specialization. This was to explore challenges faced by fourth-year student teachers during post-lesson reflections. In the focus group discussion setting, the researcher facilitates a group discussion between participants (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, Mukherjee, 2018). Thus, for this study, focus group discussions were used to ask broad questions, elicit responses and generate discussion among participants. Data were thematically analysed. Thematic analysis involves interpretation in the processes of selecting codes and constructing themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Hence, issues emerging from data analysis in this study were coded and categorized. Categories were combined and developed into theme which were used to present the data.

Results

Study results are presented in accordance with data collection tools. Data from students' post-lesson reflections were first presented followed by data from focus group interviews. Findings from post-lesson reflection were presented according to the stages of Gibbs reflective cycle as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1: Analysis of student teachers’ reflections according to Gibbs’ stages of reflection

Description	Feelings	Evaluation	Analysis	Conclusion	Action plan
<i>(look at how students describe their SBS experiences)</i>	<i>(Look at how students reacted and felt about events that took place or happened during their teaching.)</i>	<i>(Look at whether students are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses in teaching.)</i>	<i>(Look at whether students are able to reflect on identified weaknesses and strengths.)</i>	<i>(Look at whether students are able to draw conclusions on their teaching in general.)</i>	<i>(Look at whether students are able to take action based on their experiences and knowledge gained to improve their teaching.)</i>
Learners (Positives): Learners were engaged, solving addition and subtraction problems. Showing confidence in asking and responding to the questions. Learners enjoyed lesson and performed well in activities. Learners were given a project that motivated them to create something with their own hands.	Teachers (feelings): I felt disrespected by the learners who left the class without a permission. Was happy because	Teachers (weaknesses): -It was not straight forward to find out how each learner was learning, identifying what their learning difficulties or gap were, and then to use that information to close their learning gaps with	Allowing learners to share ideas in group could be best way of learning to the slow learners Telling learners to improve on	Students did not draw conclusions in their reflections	-Teacher will make sure these learners sat in front to get their attention. -He will give more examples next time. -Appraise learners to take notes as soon as possible to save time. - The teacher will inform learners about the importance of doing homework on time.

Learners were always on time. Lesson went well as it was presented according to what I planned. Fast learners were able to complete the class activity within a short period of time. Learners (<i>Negatives</i>): Learners were making noise. Few learners were not following what the teachers was saying. Few learners were copying notes very slowly.	learner was asking challenging questions. Happy to see learners improved in terms of behaviour.	appropriate responses. The teacher did not allow learners to discuss and share their ideas in groups. The teachers failed to use effective teaching aids. Some learners found it difficult to relate the represented data to its graph.	their handwriting, by doing so, learners will have clear notes which they would like to study in. Learners are slow to process things.	-Encourage learner to always keep their school work neat. - The teacher will give learners more activities to improve understanding. -The teacher will gather enough teaching aids. -Give afternoon classes to learners who do not understand - Will use appropriate materials that correspond the lesson objectives.
Learners are struggling to understand English and have difficulties in pronouncing words. Learners were not paying attention and failed to answer teacher questions. Learners did not understand the lesson content. Lack of textbooks in the classroom. Learners were misbehaving. Learner too slow in	Learners feelings: Learners showed enthusiasm during the presentation.	-Learners copy other learners for the activity done in class. -Learners tend not to interpret keys in pie charts. -Sometimes I use to leave the class without official closure as the stipulated time got used	What made the lesson successful is that learners were willing to help one another during the activities made in class.	Will make sure that the introduction attracts learners to listen attentively. - I will follow my lesson plan whenever I am teaching. -I will seek advice to from support teacher on how to deal with learners who misbehave. -I will not give away some of my time anymore for the learners to copy notes from the previous lesson.

<p>writing. Learners could not understand the instructions to the activity. Learners did not work on their own but were rather helped by family members.</p> <p>Some learners did not hand in their homework.</p> <p>Absenteeism was a challenge. Learners came late to class.</p> <p>Student struggled to subtract a bigger number from a small number. -Learner found it difficult to divide a number using long division. Presentation was good, however there were some learners who were too passive during the lesson.</p> <p>Teachers (Positives):</p> <p>The teacher was showing good gestures.</p> <p>The teacher became competent in lesson planning and this helped</p>	<p>up and the next teacher wants to move in.</p> <p>Teachers (strengths):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher used inquiry-based learning strategies, and demonstration strategies that has honestly helped the learners to analyse and interpret the tables and bar charts etc. <p>Learners (weaknesses):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners are not really exposed to so many words used in mathematics. E.g. Words like sum, product, twice. - Learners were unable to 	<p>Since it was an easier topic, learners misbehaved, and ended up saying it is an easy thing to learn. I ended up leaving some minutes, since learners wanted a class work rather than being given more examples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During the lesson, some learners struggled with long division method. This 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Next time I will improve my timing by dividing time to be spent on each phase. -I will make sure the letters are big enough for the learners to see. -I will make sure that I provide clear instructions to all learners. I will also give one example for them to see how the exercise should be done. -Next time, I will use learner centered approach. -I will improve on time management. I will advise learners to come to class on time and not to make noise. -Project will be done at school only. -I will allow learners to listen to the video more than once. - If I am to present this again, I will make sure that I have taught the
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<p>him to deliver lessons easier. Teacher used appropriate teaching aids. Teacher managed to assess learners' performance. Used cooperative learning strategy. Teacher included both open and higher order questions. Different teaching methods were used.</p> <p><i>Teachers (Negatives):</i></p> <p>Teacher's voice tone was not appropriately used. Spend more time writing notes. Forgot to pay attention to slow learners. Teaching aids did not help the learners to understand the content. Not prepared enough in most of the lesson. Failed to follow the lesson plan. Letters on poster were too small/not visible. I did not give clear instruction to</p>	<p>use the tally marks accurately. Some learners failed to understand the definition of food web and food chain.</p> <p>Learners (strengths):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They participated well and this made learning fun. Learners know most of the weather elements and could easily connect previous knowledge to new knowledge. Learners understood and can represent data on vertical and horizontal single or double graph. -All learners know that zero means nothing. 	<p>made learners not to finish writing on time, and the correction was not made because the learners used up time for completing the task.</p>	<p>learners about all the terms one can use for all four basic operations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show them how to borrow a ten from the next number. -Teach them to master long division. Learners confuse between those properties. Next I will separate them and take only two in a day, and the other two in the following day. - I have to give them extra classes in the afternoon. - In future, I am going to explain the same topic, I will come along with the laptop, to show learners how energy is transferred through a video. - In future I will teach zero as an identity element so that I will manage time effectively. - In future the division topic will be taught on its own, so that if I have to
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the learners during class activities.

In some lesson, teacher only use teacher centered approach. The teachers is not familiar with the content taught. Prepared a lot that could not be presented in one lesson. No homework was given as the time won't allow it to complete the class activity. I did not really manage the time very well, and I ended up not making a conclusion. Learners confuse the words greater than and smaller than. I failed to interpret the meaning of the above words in their local language.

They passed the class work very well, and majority of them scored 5/5.

give a classwork, it will be given its feedback during the lesson.

- In future I will have to explain the meanings of greater than and less than in their local languages so that no learner will be confused.

-Next time, I will prepare extra activities for the fast learner to avoid noise.

- I will teach them to master place values, because if they do not know, there is no way they will get things right.

As evident in Table 1, the analysis of all 10 student teachers post lesson reflections (document analysis) were focused on description and action plans. They were able to give both the positive and the negative descriptions of the lesson taught. For example: *“Learners enjoyed the lesson and performed well in activities”*; *“Teaching aids did not help the learners to understand the content”*.

The reflection focused less on the other stages of reflection such as feelings, evaluation and analysis. For example, *“I felt disrespected by the learners who left the class without a permission”* (feelings); *“Teacher used inquiry-based learning strategies, and demonstration strategies that has honestly helped the learners to analyse and interpret the tables and bar charts etc.”* (evaluation); *“What made the lesson successful is that learners were willing to help one another during the activities made in class”* (analysis). None of the students’ reflection included conclusion stage.

Findings from focus group discussions were thematically analysed. The data analysis emerged into four themes. These include: students understanding of post-lesson reflection, students post lesson reflection during SBS, challenges face by student teachers during post lesson reflection and suggestions for improvement.

Students understanding of post-lesson reflection

Students understand post-lesson reflection as a way of evaluating oneself on what happened during the lesson in order to improve the teaching.

“It is giving students opportunity to assess what they have learned from the lesson.” (Respondent D)

“It is a way whereby a student evaluates herself on what he or she taught in the lesson. To find out whether she or he obtained what was expected from the objective, and to find out where to improve.” (Respondent E)

Students post lesson reflection during SBS

Most students reported that they reflect on strengths and weaknesses of the lessons as well as on ways to improve the lessons. They also reflect on themselves, not only on their learners’ behaviours. They look at how they manage their time, how they presented the whole lesson and whether they have achieved their lesson objectives. Some of their responses are given below:

“I personally would say I reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. So when I am reflecting, I look at what went well in the lesson and what did not go well. And what I am supposed to do in future to improve my lesson taught.” (Respondent B)

“I also reflected on myself as well, not just on my learners, where I look at how I manage my time, how I presented the whole lesson plan, if it was according to the lesson plan... and whether I have achieved the basic competencies and lesson objectives, I look at that as well”. (Respondent E)

Challenges face by student teachers during post lesson reflection

Findings revealed that student teachers are faced with numerous challenges when doing post reflections during SBS.

1. Forgetting what happened in the lesson

Some students reported that they forget what went well and what did not go well in the lesson. As a result, they end up repeating what they have said in other lessons’ reflections. Some of their responses are given below:

“Sometimes I might forget on what happened in the first lesson especially if I have a double lesson. I might just end up reflecting on the other lessons. So, I might end up forgetting what I was supposed to reflect on.” (Respondent A).

“The challenges I experienced were that sometimes I forgot what went well and what did not go well” (Respondent C)

2. Not taught how to reflect

One student indicated that they were not taught how to reflect, she reflected based on her own understanding, although there were some guidelines on how to reflect that she has learned after the SBS was completed.

“We were not taught on how to reflect, so in my opinion, we were just reflecting based on our personal understanding. However, there are some guidance on how to reflect that I have learned this year” (Respondent C)

“We were not taught anything on how to reflect”. (Respondent F)

“There is nothing in place that train students on how to teach and reflect on their lessons.”
(Respondent J)

3. Overloaded schedule

Some of the respondents indicated that they had overloaded schedule. They were overloaded with a lot of work to the extent they were not able to reflect immediately after teaching. They indicated that they had many lessons and are expected to mark and plan after school for the next day. As a result, they tend to reflect for the sake of reflecting after they completed their SBS. *“Yeah, also, to be honest, there are some lessons that I can reflect after, let me say, not many of them but few of them I came to reflect them after SBS. That was due to overloaded schedule. For example, I use to have many lessons and then after school, I have to plan and make activities for the next day, so I did not manage to reflect on all my lessons.”* (Respondent C)

“Another reason is that when we are at SBS, the support teacher will overload you with all the lessons that we were supposed to share, him and myself. So, it becomes a challenge for me not to focus on my SBS file, reflect on my lessons immediately after I teach because you need to plan, you need to mark, yeah.” (Respondent C)

” But if I reflect after sometime, I do it for the sake of reflecting, and that is not what it supposed to be like.” (Respondent E)

4. Mentor teachers and lecturers are not fully supportive

Students reported that mentor teachers do not fully support them as expected. Sometimes mentor teachers are not present during lesson presentations. They are either at their offices or on leave. At times mentor teachers are not cooperative when student teachers are asking them for assistance in terms of lesson planning and teaching. Students further reported that lecturers were not always willing to give necessary assistance. When students asked lecturers how and when to reflect on lessons, their responses were not always helpful.

“Mentors are not helpful enough. Some seem not to be cooperative with the students. Once you come there, then they act as if you are the one who supposed to know everything. Sometimes a mentor can be there, but instead of identifying where you have gone wrong and guiding you so that he /she tells you what you should be able to in the neat lesson, they

keep quiet. Then if you ask them, how the lesson was, they just respond at least you did it”.
(Respondent F)

“Sometimes the mentors are just not present at all. You are going for class she is not following you. When you need assistance, she is not there. Some they even put leaves.”
(Respondent G).

“I think some of the challenges are from the lecturers. Usually you are assigned to a certain lecturer, and sometimes you want to ask him/her on how to reflect. He responds to you that you are a fourth year and you are there asking me such questions. They are the one who supposed to teach us. In the lesson, this is how we expect you to do in the lesson, this is how you are going to do after the lesson plan, you have to reflect immediately after the lesson, and this is the focus when you are reflecting.” (Respondent I).

“Some of the lecturers do not even give commends on the reflections to say this was right and this was wrong.” (Respondent J).

One student teacher felt that some mentors do not maintain confidentiality about what happened during student lesson presentations. Instead of discussing comments with students, they do it with other staff members. Lack of confidentiality eventually results in students not being honest in their post-lesson reflections.

“I am not honest sometimes. For example, if I am reflecting, like someone said an incident happened in class or may be like she said she has been spoken about by the teacher on what has happened in class, I will not include that in my reflection because I am scared. I may just put other things that happened and exclude that one. So, I am not being fully honest.” (Respondent D).

“Sometimes they do discuss what we have taught in class with other staff members, instead of calling you and discuss it with you, and that makes me feel bad and uncomfortable.” (Respondent G).

Suggestions for improvements

1. Integration of reflection into lesson planning components of other modules

Participants suggested that there is a need for reflection component to be integrated in other modules or specific module design, specifically on reflection. They also indicated that it is better

for lesson reflection component to be taught in their first academic year, before they commenced with their SBS. They felt that this could allow them to reflect better since they are given tips on how to do post- lesson reflection.

“Maybe we can have a specific module designed specifically on that or it can be integrated in other modules. May be there is a certain ELO about lesson planning and reflection where students are taught how to plan and given tips on how to reflect on lessons.” (Respondent A)

“I would suggest if there can be a lesson specific for lesson planning and lesson reflection mostly on the first year because second year, straight from holiday, we go to schools if I am not mistaken.” (Respondent B)

“I think the SBS should give a brief on how to reflect more especially when it comes to SBS and lesson plan.” (Respondent H)

2. Presence of mentor teachers during lesson presentations

Some of the participants suggested that there is a need for mentor teachers to be present during their lesson presentations. They further indicated that they needed their mentor teachers’ opinions to guide them on how to do post lesson reflections correctly.

“The mentor teachers need to be present. We at least need the opinion of the mentor teachers. Our mentors need to be encouraged to be present when we are teaching to guide us better when reflecting.” (Respondent D)

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore challenges experienced by student teachers when doing post lesson reflections. Findings reveal that students understand what post-lesson reflection is. They were able to define post-lesson reflection in their own ways. They defined post-lesson reflection as a way of assessing and evaluating oneself. This resonates with Ryan and Ryan (2013); Wilson (2002) who defined reflection as a mean for students to examine their own views with respect to what they believe and who they believe themselves to be.

Students mostly reflected on their strength and weaknesses, time management, learners’ behaviours, whether they achieved their lesson objectives, and on how to improve on their lessons.

These aspects help students to evaluate their teaching experiences and propose ways to improve the teaching and learning processes.

Findings further revealed that students' reflection are mostly focusing on the description and action plans, and are less on the feelings, evaluation, analysis and conclusion. This implies that students have minimal understanding of the process of reflection, hence the quality of post-lesson reflection are compromised. This supports Leijena et al. (2009), who found that reflection is a challenging activity for students in tertiary education. Although students were able to do post-lesson reflection, they lack understanding of some of the stages of the reflective cycle.

Findings revealed that student teachers are faced with numerous challenges with post lesson reflections. These include students forgetting about what happened in the lesson, students not taught how to reflect, overloaded schedule, and mentor teachers and lecturers being not fully supportive. When students are overloaded, they find it difficult to focus their attention on post-lesson reflection. Lack of support from mentor teachers and lecturers, and the fact that students were not taught how to reflect defies the purpose of sending students to schools for SBS.

Furthermore, results of this study suggest that reflection be integrated into lesson planning components of other modules. This will enhance the students' skills of post lesson reflections. The presence of mentor teachers during students' lesson presentations is also suggested. That means mentor teacher presence is of utmost importance to student teachers for guidance.

Conclusion

The quality of the students' post-lesson reflection is influenced by their own understanding of the concept. Students are not exposed to any model of reflection. Students are overloaded with extra work. The study confirmed that students are faced with challenges when doing their post-lesson reflections.

Findings of the study highlight the need for mentor teachers to offer guidance and mentorship to students during their post lesson reflections. By fostering a more conducive environment for reflection, we can enhance the quality of teacher preparation and ultimately improve the educational experiences of student teachers. Hence, policymakers should consider capitalizing in resources that support reflective practice, such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and reduced teaching loads of student teachers during their SBS. Such policies can

contribute to the professional growth of future teachers and, in turn, positively impact the quality of education in our schools.

Recommendations

School of education should expose student teachers to models, types and levels of reflection. Student teachers often struggle with reflection because they may not fully understand what it entails or how to effectively engage in it. Schools of education can incorporate reflection into their teacher preparation programs by offering workshops, seminars, or courses that explore different reflective practices.

Schools should consider reducing student teachers' work in line with the University guidelines. Student teachers often face overwhelming workloads, which can hinder their ability to engage in meaningful reflection. Aligning the workload with university guidelines can help ensure that student teachers have the time and energy to focus on their teaching experiences and reflective practices.

Further research can be conducted to explore the student teacher-mentor relationship. They can investigate how mentorship affects reflective practices, identify effective mentorship strategies, and assess the role of mentorship in shaping the overall development of student teachers.

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