



DEVELOPING STUDENT TEACHERS' APPROACHES TO GROUP TEACHING IN PLACEMENT LEARNING*

*Pham Duc Hiep, Doan Nguyet Linh, Do Thuy Linh**

University of Education - Vietnam National University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research aims to develop teaching methodology of pedagogical students through small-group teaching practice in group of 4-5 students. All activities that have been conducted by researching the lesson to advance the teaching method of students are: (1) setting goals: identify specific student needs and formulate curricular goals, (2) plans: develop lesson plans; devise data - collection strategies; rationalize the approach; anticipate students' responses, (3) implementation: one or two members of the team teach the public lessons in high schools where students from University of Education have placement learning, while other members observe and collect data, such as video documentation and working samples, (4) debrief: analyze collected data; discuss about students' learning, teachers' teaching, relative pedagogical content learning. We used Kobo software and Maastricht-Peer Activity Rating Scale in order to observe and evaluate the teaching – learning activities in small group of students. The results show that using reflection thinking while teaching by small group would help students to improve their teaching methods more efficiently.

Keywords: student teachers, placement learning, small group teaching.

TÓM TẮT

Phát triển phương pháp dạy học theo nhóm cho giáo sinh trong thời gian thực tập sư phạm

Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành nhằm mục đích phát triển phương pháp dạy học cho sinh viên ngành sư phạm thông qua phương pháp dạy học theo nhóm nhỏ cho nhóm từ 4 – 5 người. Quy trình nghiên cứu bài học nhằm nâng cao hiệu quả phương pháp dạy học bao gồm 4 bước như sau: (1) hình thành mục tiêu: xác định mục tiêu và xây dựng mục tiêu chương trình, (2) lên kế hoạch: thiết lập kế hoạch bài học, (3) triển khai: một hoặc hai thành viên của nhóm sẽ dạy bài học tại các trường phổ thông trên địa bàn Hà Nội – nơi mà Trường Đại học Giáo dục có hợp tác trong công tác kiến tập – thực tập sư phạm, trong khi các thành viên khác sẽ quan sát và thu thập số liệu như tài liệu video và các mẫu thực nghiệm; (4) xử lý số liệu: phân tích số liệu thu được; thảo luận về việc học của học sinh, việc dạy của giáo viên và các nội dung sư phạm liên quan khác. Chúng tôi sử dụng phần mềm Kobo và hình thức đánh giá đồng đẳng Maastricht-Peer Activity Rating Scale nhằm mục đích quan sát và đánh giá hoạt động dạy-học theo nhóm của học sinh. Kết quả cho thấy sử dụng tư duy phản biện khi dạy học theo nhóm nhỏ sẽ giúp các sinh viên sư phạm hoàn thiện tốt hơn phương pháp dạy học của mình.

Từ khóa: giáo sinh, thực tập sư phạm, dạy học theo nhóm nhỏ.

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* Email: dothuylinh@vnu.edu.vn

1. Introduction

1.1. Group- teaching

Developing student teachers' approaches to group teaching and learning in placement learning. We use the practice of teaching in small group of 4 or 5 student teachers. The small group teaching offers student teachers opportunities to discuss and refine their understanding of complex issues, to solve problems, to apply their knowledge to new situations, and to reflect on their attitudes and feelings.

Fisher and Ellis (1990) emphasize that most of the definitions of a group indicate the sharing element among members as the key factor which defines the existence of a group. The sharing can be around perceptions, motivation or goals, as well as around tasks, such as in a scenario group session. This sharing element can be greatly influenced by the group dynamic or climate of the group.

The structure of the group is another defining element - the roles, norms, values and power relationships that influence the behavior of group members and tie them to the group, providing the 'glue' of group structure. The structure of a group can influence the level and success of interaction in a group.

Small group work (also known as cooperative or collaborative learning or peer learning) involves a high degree of interaction. The effectiveness of learning groups is determined by the extent to which the interaction enables members to clarify their own understanding, build upon each other's contributions, sift out meanings, ask and answer questions.

Whether teaching in a seminar, tutorial or a problem-based class, or setting students an ongoing group project over a period of several weeks, the small group teaching environment provides you with the opportunity to receive and give immediate feedback. It allows more hands-on tasks to support the academic learning experience, and gives you the chance to motivate and build student confidence. Students benefit from the small group environment by a much-valued contact with you on a more individual scale within the broader context of the academic community.

Seminars or tutorial sessions allow students to meet with small groups of peers or focus on the practical application of their studies in problem-based classes and project work. This environment allows you to tailor your teaching based on the immediate reactions of your students. You can more readily make sure you understand specific student needs and requirements.

Small group teaching allows the independent learning experience to come to the forefront of the class. It also helps students build communication skills through group presentations, contributions in class and other assignments.

As a facilitator of small groups, you need to demonstrate several skills to create and

maintain a “safe” environment which promotes active participation and interaction: empathic, positive (feedback), objective and neutral, able to listen and communicate and willing to devolve control.

An issue given considerable attention in the literature is the question of how to define what a ‘small group’ actually is. The premise here is that the quantity of participants defining the ‘small group’ has a direct impact on the quality of the ‘small group teaching’ taking place, and there is a point at which an increase in numbers has a negative impact on the effectiveness of the more intimate, individualized approach adopted for small group teaching. As suggested in the introduction, small group teaching can include a wide variety of activities, including seminars, workshops, tutorials, tutor-less or student-led tutorials, labs, problem-based learning (PBL) groups, and various online configurations of small groups of students learning together. Small group teaching might also take place within larger group teaching when students are broken down into smaller numbers for group work. Clearly, there will be significant differences in how small group teaching is approached in each of these contexts, even if the general principles of small group teaching remain the same in each. If you are interested in the debates around taxonomies of small groups, Exley and Dennick (2004) provide a detailed typology. As well as defining types of small groups, there have been numerous attempts to put an exact figure on how many students should be in a group in order for it to yield the most favourable results pedagogically – the ideal ‘small’ group for teaching. Exley and Dennick (2004), for example, draw on Booth (1996) to suggest that in general a ‘small’ group should consist of between five and eight people, with six an optimum number for tutor-style small group teaching. Brown & Atkins (1988), 12 on the other hand, suggest that no more than 20 students can be effectively organized for small group teaching. Jaques (2004) has pointed out, helpfully, that different group sizes may be preferable for certain activities; and we can infer that while six may be an ‘optimal’ number in some general sense, there is perhaps not a great deal of merit in searching long and hard for a ‘magic number’ when it comes to small group teaching. The key here is that in any given teaching context, the teacher considers it possible to interact with students in a way that facilitates the particular benefits of small group teaching (i.e. intimacy, interactivity, flexibility, reflexivity, immediate feedback, and the other strengths outlined in our manifesto). If the group is too large numerically, it will be difficult to achieve these aims. In any case, it is often beyond the control of lecturers and tutors to define the size of their teaching groups, particularly at the beginning of their careers. In this sense a general principle about the effectiveness of ‘small’ groups is much more useful than an ideal number.

1.2. Lesson study

Lesson study is a teaching improvement process that has origins in Japanese elementary education, whereby students work in a small group, teachers collaborate with one another, meeting to discuss learning goals, planning in actual classroom lesson,

observing how their ideas work in a live lessons with students, and then reporting on the results so that other teachers can benefit from it (Takahashi et. al, 2014, p. 13 - 21).

The aim of lesson study, a teacher-driven form of professional development that originated in Japan, is to improve instruction and advance student learning. Lesson study focuses on collaborative planning, teaching, observing, and debriefing of live lessons (Lewis, Perry & Murata 2006; Stigler & Hiebert 1999). In some cases, lesson study also involves additional debriefing of the lessons in preparation for teaching them a second time (Lewis, 2002).

Lesson study has attracted the attention of educators and scholars around the world, and related research has contributed to discussion on professional development, demonstrating that it is crucial for teachers to work together during planning, observation and reflection (Dudley, 2011; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Kriewaldt, 2012; Lewis, 2006; Stepanek, Appel, Leong, Mangan, & Mitchell, 2007; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Wang-Iverson, 2005). However, despite lesson study's emphasis on the importance of observing pupils, the majority of research has addressed groups of teachers and their teacher development activities, while fewer discussions have actually addressed issues concerning pupils themselves (Saito, 2012, p. 777 - 789).

According to Lewis (2006), using the five-step lesson study process, the student teachers planned, taught, and evaluated their lessons. The five steps in this process are the following: (1) the student teachers co-plan a lesson; (2) a student teaches the lesson; (3) the student teachers debrief (and usually revise) the lesson; (4) another student reteaches the lesson; and (5) the student teachers debrief the re- taught lesson.

Lesson study is a multi-step process in which teachers work together to create, study, and improve their lessons. In this approach, a member of the study group teaches a lesson while others make detailed observations. After the lesson, all members of the group meet to discuss their observations and to consider how the lesson might be improved. The lesson is taught again to a different group of students, and the process of observation, collaborative data analysis, and lesson revision is repeated. Lesson study is another model of using collaborative self-study of teachers' practices as a means to support teacher growth and instructional improvement.

1.3. Peer evaluation

Peer evaluation or peer assessment or self-assessment, is defined by Pond and Ul-Haq (1997) as "an assessment methodology that allows students to provide input into the assessment procedure through evaluating each other's performance in out-of-class learning activities, with control of the final grade remaining with the teacher". In theory, peer evaluation is an effective method of collaborative assessment. Several question have arisen about peer evaluation. Why should students evaluate their peers? Is it not the instructor's responsibility to provide instruction, assign learning activities, and assess students'

performance of those activities ? (Johnson, 1993). Using peer evaluation would help student relate to and practice for real-life experiences (Gueldenzoph & May, 2002). Students must have a clear understanding about the who, what, when, why, and how of the collaborative experience as well as the assessment process (Gueldenzoph & May, 2002).

- Exactly who will evaluate them?
- What does the evaluation include?
- When during the group project will the evaluation be done?
- Why are their peers evaluating them?
- How will their peers' evaluation affect their grades?

Several comprehensive studies (Beebe, 1995; Conway, 1993; Cres & North, 2000; Johnson, 1993; Keaten & Reichardson, 1993) have indicated the following criteria were typically used for peer evaluations:

- Commitment to the group (attendance at both in-class and out-of-class group meeting);
- Ability to deal constructively with conflicts that arise (communicates with the team);
- Active participation in decision-making process (devotes time to the project);
- Accountability for assigned tasks (do they do what they are supposed to do and is it quality work?);
- Assumption of initiative or leadership role (actual participation and interest in the process).

Research on student performance in lesson study is often based on student teachers' self-evaluation and the validity and reliability of self-evaluation is not optimal (Eva, 2001, p. 243–257). Yew and Schmidt (2009, p. 251 - 273) also argued that data gathered from observations instead of self- evaluations is preferable, because it allows you to be as close to the learning activities as possible. In this study we tried to get an even closer look at the contributions of student teachers, by using peer observations. Peers might have a more accurate picture of the how student teachers perform during tutorial meetings. There are two possible explanations for this (Eva, 2001, p. 243–257). Firstly, student teachers see their peers intensively (twice a week for period of 8 weeks) and secondly, each student is evaluated by multiple peers. Therefore, one judgment about an individual student consists of multiple evaluations.

2. Methodology

2.1. Questionnaire design

We used here the questionnaire for two objectives: pedagogical student teachers and lecturers at University of Education, teachers in high schools. We used the same questionnaire format following the Likert scale to assess the agreement level of our objectives on several issues related to implementation of lesson study in placement learning. We asked our student teachers, lecturers and teachers about three main problems: (1) how do they agree to apply lesson study to placement learning; (2) how they perform

lesson study in their placement-learning period; (3) what do they need to do to make lesson study more effective in placement learning. With objectives as student teachers, we asked for their perspective on suitability of peer evaluation in placement learning in order to evaluate lesson study activities. We also used an open question to take any recommendation or suggestion to improve effectiveness of lesson study in placement learning from pedagogical student teachers, lecturers and teachers.

2.2. Direct interview

In order to look more deeply into all the problems in this paper, we have done several interviews with our objectives. Among our lecturers, teachers and teacher students, we chose several typical students to interview. We asked them about three main issues:

- How do they feel about lesson study? Do they think it is necessary to an effective lesson?
- How did they contribute their opinions to the lessons or assessments?
- What do they think the most important solution to assess the effectiveness of lesson study in order to develop the critical thinking of teacher students as well as high-school students?

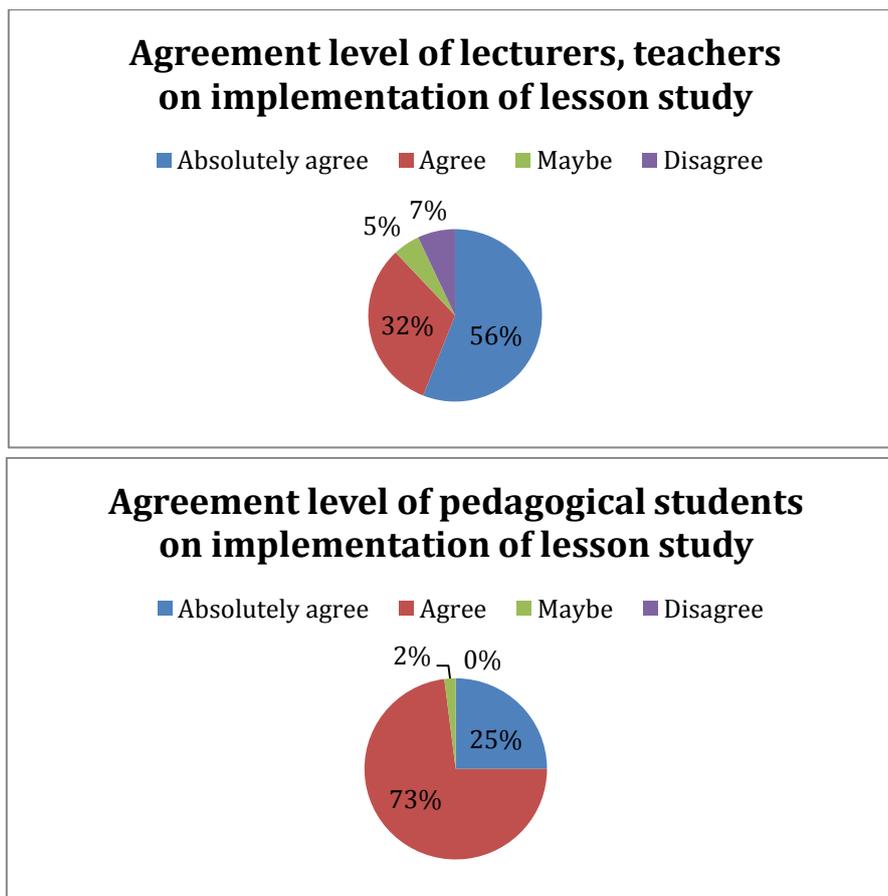
2.3. Samples

The study was conducted with sample of University of Education and eleven high schools which our university has cooperation with in placement learning. The questionnaire was administered by the lecturer to the student teachers within a class period of fifteen minutes and was filled out anonymously. Simultaneously, the questionnaire was also sent to the lecturers and high school teachers via email, and then was collected online by google questionnaire software.

3. Results

3.1. Agreement level on implementation of lesson study in placement learning

The agreement level on the implementation of lesson study in placement learning period of two objectives was presented in the pie chart as below. In order to examine the agreement level, we asked the objectives whether they are interested in doing lesson study with others or not. Besides, we asked them whether we should apply lesson study broadly not only for practicing to improve competency of pedagogical student teachers but also in teaching in high schools or not.



The majority of lecturers, teachers and student teachers agreed that the lesson study should be applied broadly in not only placement learning but also in teaching in high schools. There is a little portion of lecturers and teachers (7%) and there is no student disagrees to apply lesson study broadly. This result is reasonable and comparable with the results of examining excitement of lecturers, teachers and student teachers on the implementation of lesson study. 85% of lecturers, teachers and 91% of student teachers feel very keen on trying lesson study with their colleagues.

In the interview, the teacher students and high school students said that they are very curious and eager to learn about lesson study when we explained the definition of lesson study to them. They think it is interesting and effective in improving thinking skills of students as well as critical thinking. However, teacher students were not so sure about the performance of lesson study. They hesitate to decide whether what they are doing in the class are lesson study activities or not.

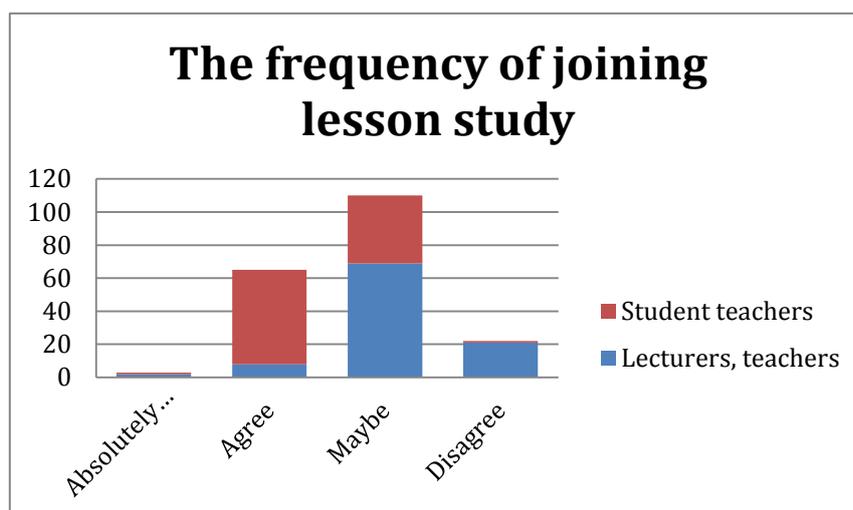
As for the teachers and lecturers, they have studied the used of lesson study before. They were totally agreed on the implementation of lesson study. They know all benefits that lesson study would bring to the students. However, there were a few lecturers claim

that lesson study is time-consuming and we should consider seriously about applying it to the lessons.

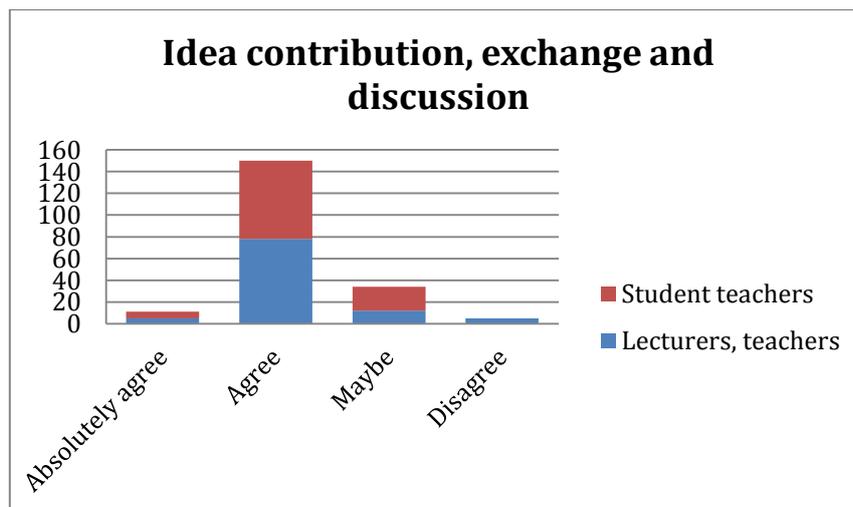
3.2. Performance of lesson study in placement learning

In order to examine the performance of lesson study in placement learning, we asked lecturers, teachers, and student teachers about how often they do join in lesson study with others, how much they contribute and exchange ideas, discuss with other with aims to improving their lessons, and their opinions on role of lesson study in completing teaching skills and developing critical thinking for pedagogical student teachers.

As can be seen from the data, lecturers, teachers and student teachers have joined the lesson study, but are not sure about the frequency. There is a difference between frequency of joining lesson study between lecturers, teachers and student teachers. Lecturers, teachers are not so sure about lesson study (8% agree and 69% maybe) compared to teacher students (57% agree and 41% maybe). They might not have enough time to discuss about the lesson, or they might join the lesson study but they do not know that.



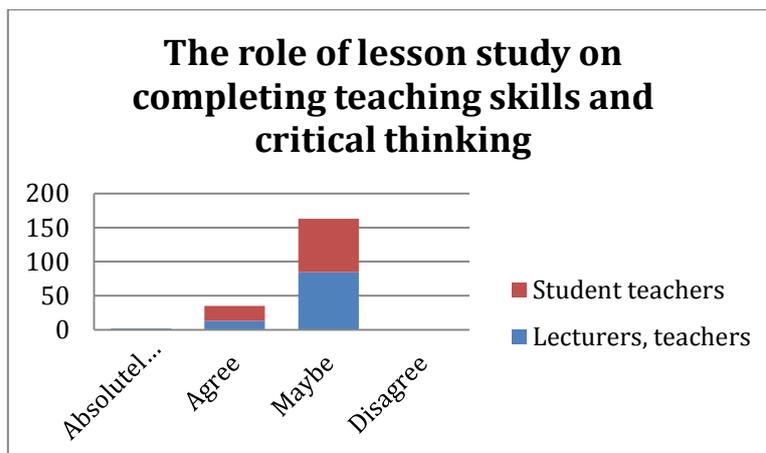
There is a similarity between the lecturers, teachers group and student teachers group in idea contribution and discussion after lesson. Both groups show their agreement (lecturers, teachers group: 78%; student teachers: 72%) about idea exchange and lesson discussion. This result and previous result show that lecturers, teachers group and student teachers group usually join the lesson study activities but they do not have enough knowledge and information about this. They do not have understanding about lesson study when they took part in lesson study. Lesson study is integrated naturally in teaching and learning activities of lecturers, teachers and student teachers, even though they are not sure about the definition of lesson study.



When interviewing the teacher students on the performance of lesson study, most of them feel uncertain about what is lesson study and how it perform. They actually have their own concept about lesson study in their mind, but there is still no correct and precise definition of it was shown. In fact, they conducted many activities considered to be lesson study activities such as idea contribution, giving feedbacks after lessons, solutions recommendation... They said it is really important to listen to others' trial lesson, take valuable ideas and knowledge and make feedback to the presenter. That would help teacher students to effectively review and improve their lessons before the real lesson in high schools. Lecturers and teachers also think teacher students need to clarify the concept of lesson study and try to apply it as frequently as possible in order to make their lessons more clear and full. Lecturers and teachers are always ready and enthusiastic to support teacher students to correct and improve their lessons.

On the other hands, both lecturers, teachers group and student teachers group are not so sure about the benefit of lesson study – teaching skills and critical thinking within the scope of this study. 85% of examined lecturers and teachers; 78% of examined student teachers chose “maybe” when investigating on the role of lesson study on contributing teaching skills and critical thinking).

Besides teaching skills, critical thinking is also very important to make a teacher student proficient. Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. It also includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking. With critical thinking, they always feel their lesson is not good enough and try their best to improve it. When reviewing others' lesson, if they teacher students have good critical thinking, they would look at every details very carefully to extract the feedback or recommendation. Unfortunately, most of lecturers, high school teachers and teacher students do not have enough awareness of the benefits of lesson study in developing critical thinking for students.



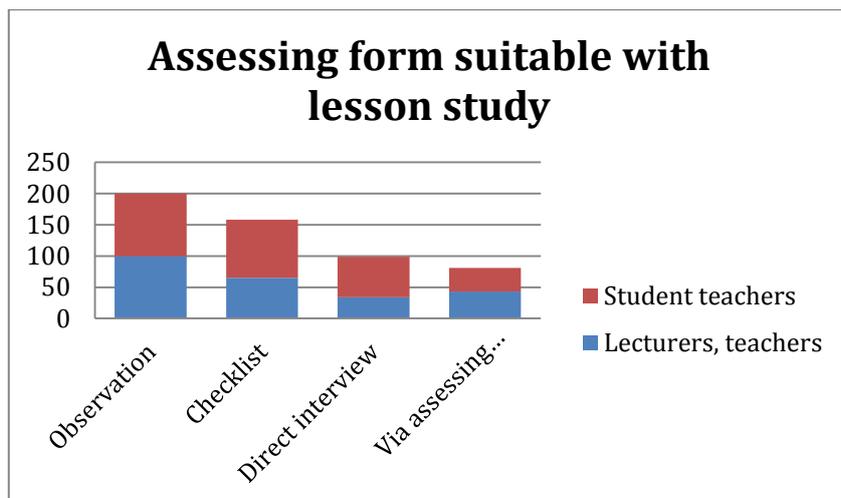
3.3. *What would make lesson study more effective in placement learning*

Within the scope of this study, we examined whether peer evaluation is suitable for assessing lesson study. We provided the definition of peer evaluation on the head of each questionnaire to clarify peer evaluation to lecturers, teachers and student teachers understand. 89% of examined lecturers, teachers and 83% of examined student teachers agree to apply peer evaluation to assess the effectiveness of lesson study. They are all aware of the importance of peer evaluation in evaluating process of lesson study. Through evaluating each other, they would know their advantages and drawback of their lesson, teaching skills, body languages...

When asking about the frequency of applying peer evaluation on assessing effectiveness of lesson study, there was a majority of teacher students have applied this type of evaluation to their teaching and learning process, but have no idea what it is. They admitted that peer evaluation would help them improve their lesson on the knowledge, teaching methods, body language... in lesson study. Being evaluated by their colleagues would push them to practise, train themselves as much as they can.

Both the lecturers, teachers group and student teachers group show their agreement on seeing observation and checklist as two most suitable assessing form for lesson study (100% on both groups for observation; 65% on lecturers, teachers group and 93% on student teachers group for checklist). Evaluating through direct evaluation seems to be the most effective assessing form for lesson study.

When interviewing the most appropriate method to evaluate lesson study, the result turns out that observation is the best way to assess the lesson of teacher students. By observing the process of teaching and learning, they are able to learn from experience or from others' failures. They could learn many things from observing others' lesson, such as the teaching style and skills, body language as well as how to handle the problems that have arisen in the class.



4. Conclusion

This study helps students to be proactive in their time, venues, and objects. It is the equitable, close and confident feeling that makes it easily accessible between teachers and observers in the exchanges and discussions. Valuable experience will be drawn from the same lesson delivered and attended by colleagues. Also, through trials, students will improve their skills in terms of knowledge, language, pedagogy and behavioural situations.

This enables students to learn from each other as both teachers and observers. This study aims to develop teachers' professional skills such as providing knowledge, practising skills, emotion and attitudes, allocating time for each item, practising problem-solving skills, if any, interactive skills between teachers and students and self-development ability.

In addition, this study provides observers with chances to compare their lecture design with their colleagues' regarding the same lesson, thereby eliminating shortcomings and learning other strong points while improving their skills of exchange, discussion, comment, criticism, and so on.

Teachers and observers always change positions for each other. After each comment, teachers are given the opportunity to retry and the observers can also verify their comments. Hence, good results will definitely be achieved from officially delivering lectures to students while their instructors will not have to spend much time commenting and editing the lectures.

Overall, this study provides a theoretical foundation for implementing group teaching practice guidance for pedagogical students with the goal to improve the guidance towards high professional development in students' teaching practice. Through our study, instructors will be persuaded that lesson research can be a highly effective form in teaching practice in small groups of 4 to 5 students. It creates autonomy and flexibility in designing lectures as well as bringing valuable opportunities for students' collaboration and critical thinking skills. This study is limited by our thought that it is difficult to observe and evaluate student participation in discussions, lesson design and classroom teaching practice

while instructors cannot always be with students during the group work. Therefore, in further studies, software (like Kobo software) is expected to be used for observing and giving timely comments to students during their teaching practice. Besides, we also would conduct a research to raise the awareness of lesson study for students and help them to apply lesson study to their own placement learning period.

5. Appendix

5.1. Questionnaire for pedagogical student teachers

“Lesson study” term used in questionnaire table below is understood to be a means of improving the student’s ability in pedagogical practice – listen for practice unit of study through studying, improving the teaching activities in specific lessons. The student teacher group will work together to design a lesson plan, organize to observe the teaching lesson of each other, discuss about observed things in lessons and give comments about impact of lessons, questions, duties... that teacher student intends to give students, from which to learn from experience and adjust the plan, content and method of teaching so that the lesson is taught on the actual class better.

Please assess your agreement level on the following content for the lesson study activity:

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In course of pedagogical practice – listen for practice, are you usually to join in lesson study activities with other teachers or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In course of pedagogical practice – listen for practice, are you excited with lesson study activities with other teachers or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In course of group activity, do student teachers contribute the idea, discuss, exchange with each other with aims to improving its teaching lesson or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In comparison with professional skill which teachers are implementing at current, is lesson study activity more suitable and effective or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Should we apply lesson study activities broadly not only for practicing to improve competence of student teachers but also in teaching at high school or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Does lesson study activity contribute in completing teaching skill and developing critical thinking for student teachers?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Does lesson study activity support for professional activities in the future major of student teacher?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Is coequal assessing form (teachers self-assess each other) suitable with lesson study activity ?

- 1-Absolutely agree

- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Which assessing form is the most suitable with lesson study activity ?

- 1-Observation
- 2- Checklist
- 3- Direct interview
- 4- Via assessing note

Other item:

If any, please propose measure to improve effectiveness of lesson study activity in improving capacity, competence and quality of pedagogic student (please write in detail)

Your answer.

5.2. *Questionnaire for lecturers from university of education and high school teachers*

“Lesson study” term used in questionnaire table below is understood to be a means of improving the student’s ability in pedagogical practice – listen for practice unit of study through studying, improving the teaching activities in specific lessons. The student teacher group will work together to design a lesson plan, organize to observe the teaching lesson of each other, discuss about observed things in lessons and give comments about impact of lessons, questions, duties... that teacher student intends to give students, from which to learn from experience and adjust the plan, content and method of teaching so that the lesson is taught on the actual class better.

Please assess your agreement level on the following content for the lesson study activity:

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In course of instruction, are you usually to join in lesson study activities with other student teachers or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In course of instruction, do you see student teachers are excited with lesson study activities or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

In comparison with professional practice activities at current which teachers are implementing, is lesson study activity more suitable and effective or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Should we apply lesson study activities broadly not only for practicing to improve competence of student teachers but also in teaching at high school or not?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Does lesson study activity contribute in completing teaching skill and developing critical thinking for student teachers?

- 1-Absolutely agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- May be
- 4- Disagree

Which assessing form is the most suitable with lesson study activity ?

- 1-Observation
- 2- Checklist
- 3- Direct interview
- 4- Via assessing note

Other item:

If any, please propose measure to improve effectiveness of lesson study activity in improving capacity, competence and quality of pedagogic student (please write in detail)

Your answer.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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