

Using a Textbook in Class: A Guide for Student Teachers

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Abstract

This paper was undertaken to examine strategies of student teachers for using textbooks during teaching practice lessons. Some student teachers do not understand how and when to use textbooks effectively when conducting lessons during teaching practice. This qualitative study adopted an interpretive paradigm and purposively sampled 10 student teachers for observation. The data were analysed using thematic data analysis. The findings for this study revealed that most student teachers depended heavily on textbooks while conducting lessons. They introduced learners to textbooks at different times of the lesson and mostly inappropriately. Also, some student teachers did not know how to incorporate textbooks into the lesson. Lastly, as student teachers taught learners with their textbooks open, interactions between student teachers and learners became ineffective because learners relied heavily on textbooks for answers. Therefore, the implications of the findings propose that student teachers should understand the role of textbooks in teaching and learning settings and define their role as student teachers in relation to textbooks and teaching. Student teachers should refrain from instructing learners to open their textbooks when they are teaching because, firstly, this interrupts the attention and focus of learners on teachers and, secondly, it tempts learners not to think on their own but to copy answers from the textbooks when student teachers ask them questions.

Keywords: student teachers, textbooks, teaching practice, lessons, strategies

1. Introduction

Did you know that some student teachers do not know how to use textbooks appropriately when teaching during teaching practice? The failure to use textbooks aptly may create a morass for learners who sit in class waiting for the teacher to deliver the content vividly and effectively. Fadhil et al. (2023) regarded textbooks as the single most important source of support for teachers and learners. So, one of the functions of textbooks is to support both teachers and learners in achieving the desired learning outcomes. However, if textbooks are not used appropriately, they may not support the achievement of desired learning outcomes as anticipated. Kabir et al. (2021) warned that there should be a shift from using textbooks to control teaching to using textbooks to serve teaching. This shift can be achieved if teachers move beyond teaching textbooks to making better use of textbooks (Kabir et al., 2021). The emphasis is that in order to support teaching and learning activities, teachers should not teach textbooks but should use textbooks better to deliver the content to learners.

Student teachers are students from higher education institutions who are studying to attain their teaching qualification. For these students to fulfil the requirements for a teaching qualification, they must have participated in teaching practice for a certain duration. As they participate in teaching practice, they have the opportunity to bridge theoretical knowledge and classroom practice, allowing them to observe experienced teachers' pedagogy and implement their own instructional strategies in authentic settings (Salviana et al., 2021). By engaging with activities in a school environment, student teachers get socialised into the profession while getting opportunities to experience the realities and complexities of school contexts through authentic educational decision-making (Salviana et al., 2021). Other activities that are designed to help student teachers include weekly reflection through teaching journals, lesson plan development, and debriefing sessions with both mentor teachers and university supervisors (Liu, 2022). In essence, student teachers receive support and guidance from school mentors with a purpose of exposing student teachers to the reality of teaching and school environment (Dube, 2025).

Textbooks are structured resources that help teachers organise lessons and offer learners a clear learning framework (Fadhil et al., 2023). Without textbooks, teaching and learning may lack a central core, resulting in learners not receiving a systematically planned content (Muttaqin, 2018). As indicated above, textbooks support teachers by helping them organise lessons and providing learners with a clear learning framework. Textbooks not only provide structure, as argued above, but also lead to standardization and provision of quality resources (Febraningrum et al., 2023). This is because learners receive content that has been tried, tested, and appropriately paced (Abidasari et al., 2021). The tried, tested, and appropriately paced textbooks help to standardise and provide a quality resource that learners and teachers can refer to for curriculum implementation.

Textbooks should be used as a guide for teachers, a reference for students, a framework for curriculum implementation, and they can enhance the teaching-learning process (Febraningrum et al., 2023). If textbooks are used as a guide, this means student teachers should not over-rely on them but use them as a guide for their teaching and learning activities. Textbooks should be used to present study material, promote interaction, support independent

learning, and provide reference (Fadhil et al., 2023). Student teachers should be clear about the content knowledge to be presented so that they can learn how to promote interaction among learners. This may help to motivate learners and stimulate the learning process (Al-Abdullah, 2022; Astuti, 2022). This calls for student teachers to be clear about what they will be teaching in order to guide learners well throughout the learning process. Student teachers are expected to use these guidelines when conducting lessons during teaching practice. However, some learners do not use textbooks as required or expected. To this end, this paper examined strategies for student teachers when using textbooks during teaching and learning activities. Examining these strategies assisted in understanding the strategies that student teachers use during teaching practice. This paper closes off by proposing amicable strategies that can guide student teachers when using textbooks during teaching practice.

2. Literature Review

This section presents the literature review of the use of textbooks during teaching. Divrik et al. (2020) viewed textbooks as a tool that enables structured teaching and also helps teachers organise and make learning more accessible for learners. Without textbooks, it may be difficult for teachers to organise and facilitate learning. Teachers need to incorporate their teaching styles and adapt materials to meet learners' needs (Maijala, 2020). This argument is complemented by Arfani et al. (2021), who argued that textbooks should be parallel with learners' needs. According to Divrik et al. (2020), learners spend between 70-95% of their classroom time engaging with the textbook. It is therefore essential for student teachers to use textbooks appropriately so that they benefit learners, since most learners rely only on textbooks for their acquisition of knowledge.

The use of textbooks has some advantages for both teachers and learners. Textbooks ensure that teachers focus on preparing for teaching rather than worrying about material production because textbooks provide a ready-made material (Muttaqin, 2018). One could argue that the availability of textbooks saves time for teachers who, without textbooks, may have to seek information to utilise when teaching learners. Textbooks also allow learners to review previous content, prepare for next lessons, and use them for self-directed learning (Sianipar et al., 2020; Abidasari et al., 2021). With the availability of textbooks, learners can have independent learning where they learn on their own in the absence of a teacher.

Textbooks develop vocabulary for non-native speakers, especially for the less experienced and novice teachers (Muttaqin, 2018; Abidasari et al., 2021; Fadhil et al., 2023). Teaching may be difficult for novice and less experienced teachers when they start engaging with teaching and learning activities. However, textbooks can provide them with subject-specific concepts they may have struggled to find. In addition to vocabulary, textbooks provide a route map of the upcoming lessons and the completed work (Ahour et al., 2014). One might argue that textbooks serve as a guide for the work to be done and what has been done. This helps to standardise teaching approaches and thus ensures educational quality within classrooms (Banaruee et al., 2023). When teachers are well-versed in vocabulary, they can tailor their lessons to the objectives of the lesson. They can also adapt their teaching approaches accordingly to ensure

that they impart quality education to learners.

There are benefits to using textbooks when teaching. For example, textbooks provide well-designed materials that can help teachers organise the teaching and learning process (Astuti, 2022). When teachers, whether novice or experienced, have textbooks, they may not need to worry about searching and looking for material to use when facilitating lessons because textbooks encompass all the materials needed for facilitating teaching and learning activities. Through these well-designed activities in textbooks, learners' ideas are stimulated alongside interaction among learners (Al-Abdullah, 2022). The way textbooks are outlined with their clear structure and work programmes, they provide a systematically planned content (Abidasari et al., 2021), which makes it easy for both learners and teachers to navigate teaching and learning activities. This helps to meet learners' needs and learning contexts (Al-Abdullah, 2022).

Textbooks position teachers as facilitators of teaching and learning activities rather than as sole information providers (Suwanto et al., 2021). Teachers should always remember that learners are not tabula rasa, but they have a preconceived knowledge relative to the content of the day. Teachers only have to create an environment where learners can showcase their existing knowledge, which requires them to view textbooks as resources rather than prescriptive scripts (Noormohammadi, 2017). Textbooks, as resources, have structured and simplified content (Zupanc et al., 2021) that is meant to assist teachers in facilitating teaching and learning activities. They can use the available interactive activities in textbooks, such as role play, group work, and whole-class activities (Sianturi, 2021) when facilitating teaching and learning activities.

Textbooks provide step-by-step guidance with structured activities to achieve learning outcomes (Alkhaldi et al., 2020). By so doing, they support the learning process by motivating learners, representing information vividly, guiding knowledge acquisition, and providing self-assessment opportunities (Parthasarathy et al., 2023). Novice teachers can find it easy to undertake teaching and learning activities through the step-by-step guidance provided by textbooks, which can assist teachers in supporting learners during the learning process. This step-by-step guidance can motivate learners because they become aware of the learning activities. It also helps teachers when teaching because everything is clearly presented for them, hence they use this guidance to guide learners when acquiring knowledge. Textbooks can also help learners to assess themselves using activities that are incorporated in textbooks; hence, Ahour et al. (2014) argued that textbooks could help learners engage more deeply with the materials in textbooks.

However, the use of textbooks has some challenges that teachers should address, for instance, they do not cater for learners' diverse needs (Bakir et al., 2022). This means that textbooks do not take into account learning styles, abilities, backgrounds, and interests (Kabir et al., 2021). This is one of the biggest challenges that calls for teachers to play their roles as facilitators. Teachers should present lessons such that they accommodate every learner irrespective of their needs: they should be presented explicitly for all learners to acquire the desired knowledge, and they should be designed to meet the learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds of all learners.

In line with this argument, Bakir et al. (2022) postulated that the one-size-fits-all approach can be a problem for some learners because one learning style may not be appropriate for all learners; hence, they also should be accommodated in the lesson.

The excessive use of textbooks can de-skill teachers and reduce creativity and instructional decisions (Subekti, 2017). The over-reliance on textbooks may be a deficit in that teachers may not grow intellectually because they have everything they need from the available textbook. Teachers should be creative and be able to make instructional decisions. However, with the presence of textbooks, they may end up not sourcing additional information on what is entailed in the textbook and thus deskilling themselves. Subekti (2017) further argued that if teachers relied on one textbook the whole time, their instructional variety and adaptation to classroom dynamics may diminish. Therefore, it is critical for teachers to source out information to strengthen content knowledge acquisition by learners. This may enable teachers to employ different instructional methods and thus adapt to classroom dynamics. In the same breath, Mathew (2012) advised that over-reliance on textbooks could narrow down learners' perspectives to a specific content, thus hindering their progress and limiting exposure to diverse content.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper was framed using critical pedagogy theory (CPT) (Freire, 1970). This theory talks about empowering people so that they can change their life conditions. Freire (1970) proposed problem-solving education where learners should think critically and develop critical consciousness so that they could improve their life conditions. One of the benefits of textbooks is enhancing and promoting critical thinking; this ties very well with CPT, which advocates for an inclusive educational environment where every learner, regardless of background, ability, and learning style, can achieve the desired learning outcome. It was highlighted in one of the sections above that teachers should promote an inclusive environment where all learners feel at ease to learn. According to Sandars (2017), CPT antagonises societal inequalities emanating from socio-economic status, gender, and race. CPT strives to empower learners to actively participate in their communities (Kruszelnicki, 2023). This theory is underpinned by dialogical learning, which fosters a reciprocal exchange of ideas and deeper understanding of socio-political contexts (Noble, 2020). Teachers should use textbooks to create an interactive environment so that learners can engage in conversations within classroom situations.

4. Methodological Underpinning

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach because it is descriptive, focusing on human experience instead of numerical data (Sa'adah et al., 2023). Alongside the qualitative approach, this study employed an interpretivist paradigm because it focused on the subjective experiences of individuals with an aim of uncovering the meanings behind their actions and interactions (Adil et al., 2022; Alhoussawi, 2023). Both the adopted approach and paradigm enabled the researcher to source experiences from participants in order to understand their

strategies for using textbooks in class. Purposive sampling was used since it helps to understand complex phenomena through in-depth insights from knowledgeable individuals (Bell et al., 2022). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who met specific criteria aligned with the study objectives. The inclusion criteria of the target population included final-year B.Ed. student teachers, majoring in Social Sciences, History, or Geography; currently undertaking teaching practice during the six-week observation period, and consent to being observed in class.

A total of 10 classroom observations, each representing one student teacher, were conducted, and each observation served as a data unit. Data were collected using structured observation guided by a pre-designed observation schedule (or sheet). These schedules provided a checklist of specific indicators aligned with the research focus. The researcher, acting as a non-participant observer, sat in on each lesson and systematically recorded behaviours from the moment the student teacher entered the classroom until the lesson's conclusion.

The observation focused on the following key aspects:

- The initial stage when learners were referred to textbooks.
- The teaching strategy the student teacher used to incorporate textbook into the lesson.
- The interaction strategy the student teacher used with learners.

5. Presentation of Findings

For this study, student teachers' observations are referred to as ST1 – ST10.

5.1 Initial Stage for Using Textbooks during the Lesson

It appeared from observations of different student teachers that most of them centred their teaching on textbooks; they could not teach without having learners refer to or look at textbooks. The first thing they did upon entering the class and/or greeting learners was to advise them open textbooks on particular pages. Very few student teachers referred learners to textbooks in the middle of the lesson, and some never used textbooks at all, but only used them for class activity, not teaching. These approaches were consistent for all student teachers regardless of subject specialisation, whether it was Social Sciences, Geography, or History.

The researcher observed that:

- Some student teachers directed learners to take out their textbooks upon entering the classroom without even greeting or introducing the lesson.
- Some directed learners to textbooks while introducing lessons.
- Some introduced the lesson, started teaching, and commanded learners to open textbooks in the middle of the lesson.
- Some did not use textbooks for teaching but only for classwork.

These observations were substantiated by the student teachers' own verbal reflections during the lessons.

ST4 instructed learners before introducing the lesson:

"Take out your textbooks and open on page 35."

ST7 told learners after introducing the lesson:

"Take out your textbooks and open on page 77."

ST2 advised learners while teaching:

"Ok, now take your textbooks and open on page 94, I want to show you something there...Ok now you can close your textbooks and listen to me."

ST6 told learners:

"Now that we have dealt with the Defiance Campaign, you can now take out your textbooks and do the activity on page 102."

These findings showed that most student teachers in the study depended on textbooks to facilitate their lessons, whereas very few could teach without textbooks and only use textbooks for classwork. These findings also revealed that most student teachers preferred to teach while learners had their textbooks open.

5.2 Incorporation of Textbooks in the Lesson

The observation of student teachers incorporating textbooks during lessons has shown that they used different strategies, some of which benefited learners, whereas some did not. It seems most of them did not incorporate textbooks amicably during the lessons. They sometimes read or asked learners to read and, thereafter, asked learners to explain what was entailed in the extract or paragraph they read. Unfortunately, they did this without taking the initiative to explain what the "read" parts meant. Telling learners to read the whole paragraph and thereafter summarise it with one or two sentences showed that some student teachers were not sure how to use textbooks during lessons. Observation further showed that some student teachers understood the book when teaching. That is why, whether they read or asked learners to read, they explained to learners each and every sentence, making meaning of each and every word in each sentence.

These observations were substantiated by the student teachers' own verbal reflections during the lessons.

ST1 explained:

"I'm going to read for you, so please listen carefully ... now tell me what you understood from what I have just read."

ST7 instructed learners:

"Please, all of you, read the first and second paragraph. I will thereafter explain what

they mean.”

ST8 affirmed:

“Can one of you read, then I will explain what is in the book sentence by sentence so that you understand.”

The findings revealed that student teachers tried to implement some strategies for incorporating textbooks into the lesson. They did this by asking questions and asking learners to interpret what the content entails. Student teachers also helped learners to improve their reading skills by reading textbooks aloud in class.

5.3 Interaction with Learners During Open-Book Lessons

It appeared from the observation of student teachers that most of them tried to interact with learners questions. However, learners found it easy to respond to student teachers’ questions because they looked for answers in the open textbooks. This manifested itself when, each time the student teachers asked the question, learners reacted by looking for answers in the textbook and not thinking through the answers in their minds. Even if learners were not finding it difficult to find answers, some student teachers encouraged them to look for answers in the book. Student teachers did not even wait for learners to try to suggest the correct answers, and seeing that they were failing, they then advised them to search in the textbook, but they encouraged learners from the outset.

The researcher observed that:

- Student teachers allow learners to look for answers in the textbook if they ask them questions.
- Some student teachers go to the extent of encouraging learners to look for answers in the textbooks.

These observations were substantiated by the student teachers’ own verbal reflections during the lessons.

ST3, ST5, ST7, ST8, and ST10 asked learners: *However, instead of learners thinking through answers, they decided to look for answers in the textbooks since the student teacher ordered them to open textbooks.*

ST4 encouraged learners:

“Look at your textbooks, you will find answers.”

Therefore, the observations have shown that even though student teachers try to interact with; and engage learners in the lesson, failure to discourage learners from copying answers from textbooks impacts the lesson negatively.

6. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings above, which revealed that most students depend entirely on textbooks for the facilitation of teaching and learning activities. By so doing, they may aggravate their identity through the inability to employ their instructional variety and failure to adapt to classroom dynamics (Subekti, 2017). Fadhil et al. (2023) regarded textbooks as the single most important source of support for teachers and learners. This means student teachers should use textbooks appropriately to support teaching and learning. However, the failure of student teachers to incorporate textbooks appropriately into teaching and learning activities may defeat the purpose of textbooks. Some student teachers do not introduce textbooks to learners at the right time: if they direct learners to open textbooks even before they start with lessons, it deviates and interrupts learners' attention because they may end up looking and focusing on textbooks instead of listening to the teacher.

Student teachers need to understand how to use textbooks to serve teaching and make better use of textbooks (Kabir et al., 2021). It appears as if some student teachers do not understand the impact of textbooks in a classroom situation. They do not understand that open textbook lessons may disturb the attention of learners. Findings showed that very few student teachers understood that textbooks should be used to complement what they say, even though they centred their teaching on textbooks, they introduced lessons and started teaching, but when there was a need, they then referred learners to textbooks. This helped to enhance the teaching-learning process (Febraningrum et al., 2023) because the student teacher had already made an impact on the learning process by making learning more accessible for learners (Divrik et al., 2020).

Some student teachers struggle to incorporate textbooks appropriately into the lesson. They do a good thing by letting learners read for the whole class because by so doing, they ameliorate their reading skills. However, some student teachers fail to interpret, simplify, clarify, and explain sections that learners read; this has a bearing on the achievement of learning outcomes. The way some student teachers conduct lessons and fail to explain content to learners may demotivate learners and disrupt the learning process (Al-Abdullah, 2022; Astuti, 2022). In line with the critical pedagogy theory, these student teachers fail to empower learners so that they can change their life conditions (Freire, 1970).

However, it is good to learn that some student teachers are doing good in terms of incorporating textbooks into the lesson and know when and how to use a textbook during the lesson; unlike others, who would simply start by commanding learners to open textbooks before introducing the lesson. These student teachers know that they should introduce the lesson and start teaching the content of the day, and then, when there is a need, they can refer learners to textbooks. This enables learners to acquire knowledge through the mouth of the teacher; in fact, this is what teachers go to class for: they should be able to provide dialogical learning where there is an exchange of ideas (Noble, 2020) and use textbooks as resources (Noormohammadi, 2017) for learning.

Freire (1970) advised that critical pedagogy theory stimulated learners to think critically and develop critical consciousness. However, with student teachers conducting lessons with open

textbooks for learners, the observations have shown that most learners do not think critically. Instead of thinking, they look for answers in the textbook and thus make no attempt to think the answers through. Fadhil et al. (2023) argued that textbooks should promote interaction: it becomes baseless and irrelevant if learners cannot engage with their minds before answering questions, which are meant to enhance interaction during the lesson. If student teachers want learners to think critically, in line with critical pedagogy theory, they must not teach with learners' textbooks open.

7. Conclusion

This paper examined strategies for using textbooks during teaching and learning activities. It sought to understand the teaching strategies that student teachers use when conducting lessons. As a sequel to this, this paper concludes that some student teachers do not understand when to introduce textbooks to learners during a lesson. Some refer learners to textbooks at the wrong time, thus distracting their attention. Some student teachers do not understand how to use a textbook in class; hence, they teach learners with their textbooks open. The strategies for effective interaction between teachers and learners may not be successful if learners have their textbooks open as the lesson progresses, because they refer to the textbook each time they are asked a question. They may also compare what the teacher says with what is written in the textbook. This can make them lose some parts of the lesson. Some student teachers lack the skill of incorporating the textbook into the lesson. In fact, they do not know how to teach using a textbook. This manifested itself when they failed to explain the content to learners. This showed that some student teachers do not prepare themselves thoroughly for the lesson, or they do not know how to prepare thoroughly for the lesson.

8. Implications of Findings

After examining strategies for using textbooks during teaching and learning activities, it became clear that some student teachers need to know the role textbooks play in class. They need to know that even though textbooks can be used in class, they cannot supersede the impact student teachers should have on learners in terms of knowledge acquisition. They need to understand that textbooks are there to supplement what they teach learners, not to supplant them. Therefore, they must not rely heavily on textbooks during the lesson but should use them as a guide and prepare for the lesson so that when they come to class, they are ready to facilitate teaching and learning activities by themselves. For them to do this, they need to understand that they go to class to teach, which entails explaining, clarifying, and simplifying the complex content for learners.

Student teachers need to prepare themselves thoroughly before undertaking teaching and learning activities. It is recommended that they prepare their own notes that will be used in class, which may minimise overdependence on textbooks. Sometimes, when reading a textbook, a student teacher may seem to understand, but when in the class, it is a different story. There is a difference between understanding content for one's own consumption and

understanding content for conveying it to learners. If one needs to understand for the sake of conveying the content, one must also think about how to cascade or convey this message to learners. This requires calls for awareness of the teaching style and method.

Interaction during the lesson may not be effective if teachers facilitate teaching and learning activities with open textbooks. This is because when teachers try to interact with learners through questioning, learners always look for answers in textbooks and do not think for themselves. Student teachers should ensure that if they ask questions, learners close their textbooks so that they can recall answers from their minds and think critically. This may assist the student teacher to see if learners understood the content or not. However, if learners read answers from textbooks in response to questions, student teachers will be deceived in thinking that think that learners understood the lesson, which is in fact not the case.

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