

How do micro-placements in industry within an initial teachers' training programme contribute towards bridging the gap between education and employment?

Abstract

The complex interplay between labour market needs and education poses significant challenges to the teaching profession, frequently criticized for its perceived inadequacy in addressing contemporary work-life dynamics and professional practices. In response to these challenges, the '*Micro-Placements*' initiative was introduced in an initial teacher training program in Malta, aimed at providing students-teachers with practical exposure to different industries. This study reports on an evaluation conducted within an HEI, utilizing a responsive approach alongside RUFDATA evaluation framework to observe the value-added of having micro-placements in a programme that enables students to become teachers. Through qualitative analysis, this study underscores the value of micro-placements in enriching pedagogical practices by enabling teachers to integrate diverse workplace experiences, thereby fostering the development of skills essential for active citizenship among students. The findings advocate for the integration of micro-placements into initial teacher training programmes and for their incorporation into continuous professional development initiatives for educators.

Keywords: teachers' placements in industry, RUFDATA, evaluation, 21st Century skills

Introduction

Widespread, fast-paced technological developments have led to significant changes in the labour market, consequently driving changes in society's expectations of education's role in preparing future generations. Terms such as employability and competency-based learning have infiltrated the education discourse and spurred changes in education, particularly the role of teachers in the classroom. The teaching profession is expected to meet labour market needs while actively developing students to become active citizens. The neo-liberal view has

also influenced the way a teacher is perceived, that is, as a vital component in preparing their students for employability. In these circumstances, the Institute for Education, Malta has launched an initiative of micro-placements in different industries within a structured learning programme having at its core initial teacher training: The Bachelor of Education. This paper aims to review the micro-placement module after its first round of implementation in 2021 to respond to stakeholders' views on '*How do micro-placements in industry within an initial teachers' training programme contribute towards bridging the gap between education and employment?*' To address this research question, this paper first gives a situational analysis. An explanatory section detailing the responsive approach taken for the study is given, followed by the utilisation of RUFDATA to frame the main evaluative aspects: reason, use, focus, data, audience, timing and agency. The study outlines the qualitative findings and results drawn from questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews conducted with management, students, and employers.

The divide between education and the labour market is prevalent within the educational discourse. This skills gap is one of the main critiques towards the teaching profession, where it is argued that teachers are not in touch with the realities needed in the world of work and, therefore, students are not adequately prepared for labour market needs. Literature discussing the placement of teachers in the industry, therefore, an experience outside of the school/classroom context is few. Authors such as Farrell (1992), Perry and Ball (1998), Hu, Zwickl, and Carusone (2020), and Mulnix (2016) assert that teachers have a lot to learn from the industry. Consequently, there have been some attempts to integrate working in the industry as part of teachers' professional development, such as the *Teacher Release to Industry Programme* running in Victoria, Australia (Perry and Ball 1998). Other such programmes include *Teachers in Industry – Partnering with business to prepare the future*

workforce; a paid summer fellowship run by the University of Arizona (University of Arizona 2021).

The gap between education and employment is a challenge that is also present within the Maltese context (Ministry For Education and Employment 2014). Fast-paced developments in the labour market, as a result of rapid technological advancements and the ever-changing skills and competencies required in the workforce, have put the teaching profession under duress. Teachers are expected to assist students in developing skills and competencies that are relevant to current and future labour market demands. As remarked by Perry and Ball (1998, 73–74) *'the skills and competencies of teachers are seen to be a vital link in not only developing greater understanding about industry needs and expectations but also in the transfer of those skills and competencies appropriate to the workplace to their work with students.'* This was also supported by Hu, Zwickl, and Carusone (2020, 5) as the authors study's concludes that *'that industry experience should be added as a factor when studying teacher decision-making and instructional design, and that there may be value in providing teachers at all levels with some amount of professional work experience outside of an educational institution'*.

Institutional Context

These discussions and backdrop have led the Institute for Education to embark on a relatively new initiative at a national and European level. The Institute has developed within its initial teacher training programme, the Bachelor of Education, a *Micro-placement in the Industry*. This module aims to expose future educators to the labour market, whereby students are to complete eighty hours of training placement in different industries. The module parameters have been defined as follows: students are to choose a placement in an area of their interest in line with the programme they are following. Consequently, students pursuing the Bachelor of Education within a specific Vocational and Education Training (VET) area

(for example, Bachelor of Education: Hospitality Stream) are expected to choose their placement within that VET specialisation (for example, placements within the Hospitality Industry). The module's objectives are defined as an opportunity for future educators to have an entirely different experience from the classroom; therefore, students must seek work experiences outside of the school, classroom or teaching environment.

The module was launched in May 2021, and it is divided into two parts: the taught component and an eighty-hour placement, which was completed by July 2021. It carries six (6) ECTS within the one-hundred and eighty (180) ECTS Bachelor of Education Programme and is assessed through a reflective journal that asks students to reflect on how this work-placement experience will impact their future teaching practices. The module is also focused on enabling students to identify twenty-first-century skills related to employability. It enables future educators to be further equipped with soft skills and develops their skills to recognise and reflect on necessary skills for the workplace. It is widely recognised that the industry is ever-changing. Therefore, soft skills are necessary for students who will be exposed to a competitive labour market where employers seek individuals who can adapt and perform various tasks in a flexible manner and within different environments.

This notion of teachers' exposure in the industry was a concept which the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry launched in 2018 through the pilot project '*GO4Industry Teacher Internship Programme*'. 'The first edition of the '*GO4Industry Teacher Internship Programme*' is aimed at exposing teachers of science subjects in secondary schools, to the opportunities and the cutting-edge technologies in Malta's manufacturing industry, in order for them to be more knowledgeable and better positioned to guide their students towards their future careers' (The Malta Chamber 2018).

Through the micro-placement initiative, the Institute for Education aims to reduce the gap between education and the labour market. This concept of teachers in the industry is not

entirely new, as authors such as Farrell (1992), Perry and Ball (1998), Hu, Zwickl, and Carusone (2020) and Mulnix (2016) have already indicated that teachers would benefit from an internship within the industry as it fosters collaboration and cooperation between employers and education (Andersson and Köpsén 2019). The micro-placement module offered by the Institute builds on the Malta Chamber's initiative and integrates short work placements within a structured learning programme with initial teacher training at its core.

The micro-placement module integrates a variety of industries in one module, with no technical experience required; its goal is to expose a student who will become tomorrow's educator to an experience within an industry environment of their choice. The choice for primary teachers is quite varied, and the requirement for a primary teacher was to choose a placement unrelated to the school environment. On the other hand, students preparing to become teachers in a specific VET subject must choose a relevant placement to the stream they will eventually be teaching. In its first round of implementation, there were sixteen students who took part in the micro-placement module. These were mature students, who were already working within schools as learning support educators or Supply teachers, and they were furthering their studies to pursue the teaching profession. For the first cohort of micro-placements, thirteen students were reading for the degree to teach in the primary area, while another three were studying to teach VET Hospitality. Therefore, the placements chosen by students were from different industries, namely: the hospitality industry, community services, private organisations and NGOs.

Responsive Approach

Since this is a new and relatively unique model within initial teachers' training, it is essential to evaluate the module to see its strengths, weaknesses and which areas of improvement are necessary. Evaluation is 'the purposeful gathering, analysis and discussion

of evidence from relevant sources about the quality, worth and impact of provision, development or policy' (Saunders 2006, 198). This study used a responsive evaluative approach as it 'is not particularly responsive to program theory or stated goals; it is responsive to stakeholder concerns. The understanding of goodness rather than the creation of goodness is its aim. Users may go on to alleviate or remediate or develop or aspire, but the purpose of this evaluation is mainly to understand' (Stake 2004, 4). Therefore, this study seeks to understand the programme by evaluating the experiences of the Institute's key stakeholders, namely, the management, its students and the employers who have taken students at their workplace – the placement providers. A responsive evaluation is characterised by eliciting stakeholders' concerns and issues as part of its main evaluation criteria (Abma and Stake 2001). More specifically, it 'gets acquainted with the concerns of stakeholders by giving extra attention to program action, to program uniqueness, and to the cultural plurality of the people' (Stake 2004, 2). In this case-study, the research is orientated towards the experience gained by students and employers during their micro-placement. In line with the stakeholder's centeredness of the evaluation, one 'pervasive theme is that the evaluator must work with and for a diverse stakeholder group' (Stufflebeam and Coryn. 2014, 192). It is based on the classic responsive approach in that it 'is pluralistic, flexible, interactive, holistic, subjective, constructivist, and service oriented' (Stufflebeam and Coryn. 2014, 192).

Consistent with Stake's (2004, p.6) stand on evaluation, a 'Responsive evaluation is both criterial and interpretive, usually with more attention to interpretive observation than to criterial measurement.' In conducting a responsive evaluation, an interpretivist approach was taken as the study is constructed through the narratives and stories of the key participants of the micro-placement module.

When reviewing the module, it became increasingly evident that micro-placements are intrinsically linked to issues concerning employability. The Institute introduced the

module as an initiative with the main aim of giving a hands-on experience towards the identification of 21st century skills, so future teachers (i.e. the Institute's students) will then be able to translate them to children within the classroom. This presentation of the micro-placement was mainly a response to the ever-present critique towards the teaching profession, where teachers speak about 21st century skills or soft skills in the abstract. Therefore, the module aimed to introduce future teachers to a more hands-on approach within diverse work environments to equip them with more practical and relevant practices in the classrooms. While it can be noted from the documentation available on the module itself that this was the main aim of the micro-placement module, the approach taken in evaluating the module is based on the following concept:

People involved in the program are concerned about one thing and another (or are likely to become concerned or should become concerned). The evaluators inquire, negotiate, and select a few issues around which to organise the study. They do not replace the goal of finding the merit of the evaluand, but they do influence the meaning we are giving to merit in that situation (Stake 2004, 5).

By focusing on the stakeholders-centeredness of this approach, Stake (2004, 19) presents a systematic framework in the form of the responsive evaluation clock (see figure 1). This clock represents twelve events which can be conducted in a 'clockwise, contraclockwise and crossclockwise' manner (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield 1988, 235).

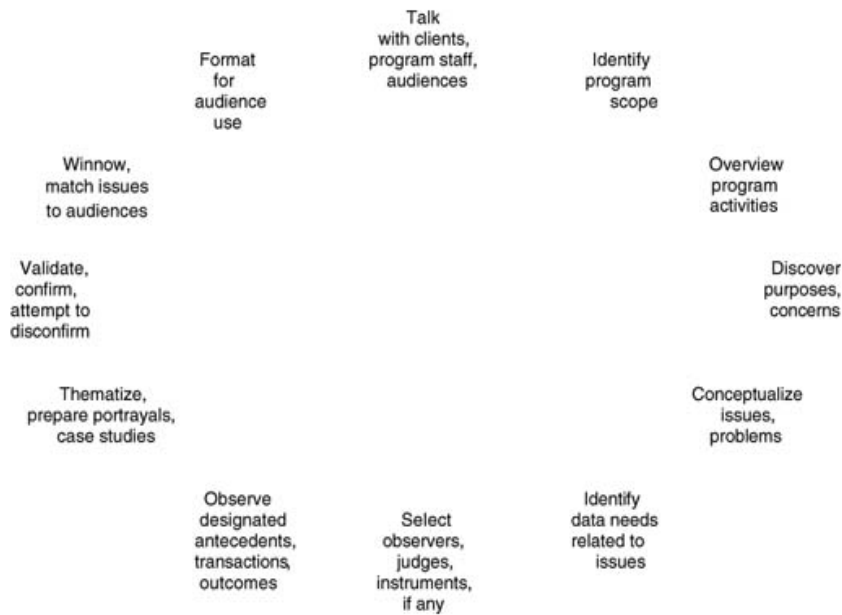


Figure 1: Responsive Evaluation Clock ((Stake 2004, 19))

Together with the responsive approach, this study makes use of RUFDATA. This framework is essential to frame the evaluation of this module since it is the first time it has been implemented. The RUFADATA framework presents an opportunity for the evaluation to be presented internally and considered a practical evaluative practice. Combining RUFDATA with a responsive approach introduced a new practical way of evaluation, which combined ease of practice – provided by RUFDATA and a systematic approach towards key stakeholders' involvement within the responsive approach itself.

RUFDATA

RUFDATA has been widely used in higher education program evaluations (Sherman 2016; Cheng 2018). The acronyms provided a practical evaluative framework for the micro-placement module: Reasons, Uses, Foci, Data, Audience, Timing, and Agency (Saunders 2000).

1. Reasons

The micro-placement module is seen as an essential step for educators to become aware of changes in the labour market and the skills their future pupils will require as society's future workforce. As a result, after the module's initial round of implementation, the strengths and shortcomings were examined to improve its learning outcomes and operations.

2. Uses

This evaluation will be shared with management to assist in further strategic development and programme review. Results will also be shared with lecturing staff and micro-placement visitors.

3. Foci

Management, students, and employers' responsiveness towards micro-placements, in teachers' initial teachers' training programme, as an initiative to bridge the gap between education and employment, were the focus of the evaluation. Any changes in students' attitudes towards micro-placements and how this experience assisted them in their classroom teaching were recorded. The evaluation also reveals employers' perceptions of the validity of such a module with the purpose of narrowing the gap between education and employability.

4. Data

The evaluation followed a responsive approach (Stake, 2004), in which questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were utilised to learn about stakeholders' perspectives of the module. Semi-structured interviews allow for more discussion and therefore

permits the interviewee to provide more in-depth information during the interaction (Grix, 2019).

5. Audience

The evaluation is mainly responsive to identified key stakeholders of the micro-placement module; therefore, the information will be shared with the management, programmes department, lecturing staff and micro-placement visitors.

6. Timing

The study was guided by a responsive approach and divided into two phases. The first phase entailed circulating a pre-placement questionnaire during the taught component of the module between May and June 2021. The second phase of data collection took place after the placement in August 2021; students were given a feedback questionnaire to assess their entire experience. A questionnaire was sent out to placement providers at the same time. Between August and September, semi-structured interviews with management, students, and placement providers were also undertaken. The data received was analysed between September and October 2021.

7. Agency

After due consideration, the evaluation was carried out by self to safeguard the respondents' complete anonymity. Given the function held within the department, which comprises the management and coordination of micro-placements, it is a self-evaluation process. The author was the only evaluator for the review given the capacity held within the department, which allowed establishing trust with all key stakeholders identified for this evaluation.

Methodology

A responsive evaluation approach requires that the research methods enable the evaluator to observe its activities, hold interviews with stakeholders who had a role in the program, and review the documents available on the programme (Stake 2004). Since the responsive evaluation seeks to understand stakeholders' views, the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews complemented this evaluation. During August and September 2021, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six students, three placement providers, and one interview with the Institute's management. Ten interviews were conducted in total. The selection process for students entailed: a mixture of gender, age, and students pursuing a teaching career in the Primary sector and others aspiring to become VET teachers in Hospitality. The number of students available in the programme is relatively small; therefore, all students who demonstrated an interest in being interviewed were accepted. Interviews for employers were conducted according to their availabilities, and only three accepted to be interviewed. The necessary consent forms were circulated to students, employers and management who agreed to take part in interviews. These interviews aimed to discover how they perceive micro-placements within an initial teacher's training programme and their thoughts on its long-term impact. All the interviews were audio-visually recorded, and most of them were conducted in Maltese, so respondents were comfortable expressing themselves in their first language. The interviews were then transcribed and translated to English for further analysis. This research is guided by the 'view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed, and developed and transmitted within an essential social context' (Crotty 1998, 53). The evaluation was constructed through the narratives of the experience gained by the key stakeholders who took part in the micro-placement initiative. The stance taken for this

research was from a constructive point of view to enable the researcher to interpret the documents and data extracted from the pre-placement questionnaire, the feedback forms circulated amongst students and placement providers at the end of the module and the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews.

The evaluation was based on stakeholders' experience, and through qualitative methods, the study focused on the 'programme recipients' since they are experiencing the programme's effects (Saunders 2006). The data analysis was situated in an iterative, dynamic and recursive process, vis-à-vis the research question being posed. A thematic approach through the coding methods proposed by Creswell (2007) was used to categorise themes and issues put forth by all stakeholders. A first round of reading and transcribing served to familiarise the research with the issues and concerns brought forth by the respondents; consequently, the first salient points were extracted. A set of initial codes was then applied throughout the second reading and analysis of the data extracted, ensuring that excerpts with the same meaning or refer to the same situations/aspects have the same coding. Through coding, a set of themes were identified. Through the thematic approach taken on the data collected, four themes were identified, which provided information on micro-placements and their importance within initial teacher's training.

Main Findings and Analysis

Students' perspective on their micro-placement experiences was collected by disseminating a pre-placement questionnaire, a feedback questionnaire circulated at the end of the placement, and six semi-structured interviews carried out after the placements. The entire cohort responded through the pre-placement questionnaire, while 56% answered the feedback questionnaire. Eighty-four percent of the placement providers who participated in the micro-placement initiative responded through the feedback questionnaire, and three

accepted the invitation to be interviewed for this study. The perspective of management was collected through one semi-structured interview.

The thematic analysis yielded four topics of interest, each providing information on micro-placements and their importance in initial teacher training and their contribution towards bridging the gap between education and employment.

i. Drive Change in the Perception of Teachers' Role in the Classrooms.

Students have been exposed to the teaching profession throughout their three years of studies through teaching practices and their experience working in education; consequently, they have already formed a perception of a teacher's role in the classroom. One of the changes observed through this evaluation is the shift in attitude towards the micro-placement itself and the change in perception of the teacher's role in the classroom.

At the initial phases of the module, students portrayed their confusion about the purposes of the module; this can be attributed to the fact that most of them were mainly mature students who had other work experience before entering the education sector. Consequently, the feedback received before the placement showed a lack of understanding and, to a certain extent, some resistance from the students doing their micro-placements. Through the comments made in the pre-placement questionnaire, it was evident that students view the teaching profession mainly from a subject-based point of view. One of the respondents stated that:

Student 7: This micro placement is good for young students who have not yet experienced working outside the education sector. Other than that, in my case and at my age, I honestly do not see any relevance it may have with carrying out my teaching profession.

At the forefront, the module's aims and objectives are to equip teachers with the ability to integrate life skills and competencies throughout their pedagogical practices. One of the observations at the design phase of this module was that students reading for the degree, and those pursuing studies to have access to the teaching profession, have been relatively exposed to the same niche throughout their lives – a school-based environment. Consequently, it would be quite challenging for a teacher to give additional skills to children in the classroom if they have only been exposed to school-based contexts.

Placement Provider B: Well, I think, how can you teach different skills if you have gone from school to university, to become a teacher - into a classroom? You need a bit of life experience. Going into industries, you are getting that perspective of somebody else's world, and you can learn more to be able to pass on more.

Within that context, the Institute recognised that teachers need to be exposed to other work environments to share real-life working experiences. The Institute was also cognisant that its students may have diverse backgrounds and have worked in different working environments before choosing the teaching career as their vocation; however, micro-placement is a compulsory module within the degree. The management encapsulates the reason for this:

Management Interviewee 1: For those course participants who had previous work experiences outside the school environment, I say ... When you went for work during that time, without the aim of becoming a teacher, your target was different. You aimed to learn how to do that job. When you have a placement experience during this particular course, you go for your placement with a conscious intention of where you are going and what you will gain. You will internalise competencies that you will be using when you are teaching. The learning is in yourself, your capacity, and your ability

to transmit 21st Century skills to children in the classrooms. Consequently, the profile of a teacher is going to be enriched.

The above discourse denotes that the expectation of this module is to drive change in the role that a teacher plays within the classroom. There is a shift in perception, which is moving away from the notion of teaching solely subjects-based matters towards a teacher that should have the capacity to develop students holistically. There is a resonance between the management's expectations and that of the students. These major stakeholders have confidence that the micro-placement experience has allowed prospective teachers to self-reflect on their practices to become more holistic and better equipped to develop children into future active citizens. This initiative has created a closer link between the world of work and the classrooms, especially within the teacher's capacity of being a role model for their students.

Management Interviewee 1: A teacher should have the capacity to sow seed – magical beans – to develop an active citizen who will become part of a society, work in a society and perhaps even lead or hold leadership positions in society.

In the short term, this initiative drives change in the teaching pedagogies within the classroom as teachers are able to create a simulation in the classroom, and through the feedback that they give and in a transversal and inter-disciplinary manner, they will be able to transmit the competencies and skills acquired through this experience in their classrooms. Furthermore, this experience enhances the teacher as a holistic person by increasing their awareness of the services and industries they encounter in their day-to-day lives. The teacher will continue to develop; in a sense, the micro-placement serves as a 'wake-up call' towards making the teacher more appreciative of the skills and competencies needed around the various professions they meet in their daily exposure. Therefore, through this experience, teachers themselves are being put in a proximal development zone to address their gaps.

Student 2: Although I had different experiences in different workplaces, there were industry skills that I had not practised for quite a long time as it has been years since I last worked within an industry environment. Through this experience, you re-fresh what you used to do, and you realise that you need to give specific skills to children in the classroom.

One of the areas of improvement that the students mentioned is the logistics of the micro-placement as they were concerned that it took place during their summer vacation. Most of them were already in employment within the education sector; consequently, they reported that the summer is used as their preparation period for the next scholastic year.

Students also acknowledge that this experience has changed their perceptions of their role within the classroom. They now recognise that they are developing 'tomorrow's active citizens' who will need life skills to be adequately prepared for the future. There has been a shift from subject-based thinking to seeing children within the classroom in a more holistic manner who need to be taught life skills to be well-prepared for their future.

ii. Facilitates Reflection on Own Skills Gaps and Increase Identification of Skills Needed at the Workplace.

The responses through the feedback questionnaire and semi-structured interviews show that students have identified skills that were either newly developed or re-affirmed through the micro-placement experience. The skill most prominently identified by almost all students was **communication skills** and their variants. Students recognised the importance of having effective communication, complemented by active listening skills, observation of non-verbal communication and practising communication in a foreign language, namely English, in a multi-national work environment. During the interviews, all six students reported that although they were aware of the importance of communication and often referred to it during

their teaching in the classroom, this first-hand experience made them more conscious of having effective communication, which should be practised in the classrooms.

Several respondents identified **interpersonal skills** as one of the abilities they were made acutely aware of during the placement, amongst the most common ones being the ability to work in a team, followed by collaboration. Students commented that teamwork is not a skill that they get to practice frequently within a school-based environment—consequently, one of the aspects mentioned appreciatively was work relationships. During the interviews, students also commented that through this experience, they recognised that there is more room for collaboration and teamwork in a school-based setting. Students who have undergone the micro-placement initiative are more likely to discuss and collaborate with their peers. Many of them reported the importance of building such relationships with colleagues and developing professional relations with clients through work relationships. Related to this, students pointed out the importance of having conflict resolution skills, coupled with negotiation skills and diplomacy. These were new skills that students had the opportunity to develop and practice.

Placement Provider B: I also invited the student to the back of the house - the canteen - to stay with the staff and eat with them to share their break with them. When you are in the canteen, you know the staff's stories, their life stories. There is another world in the canteen. This is a very good exposure because the student got to see the staff at the front desk with their smile and maintaining the hotel's standards and at the back, with their life stories. Every day there is a story, a comment or an argument between the staff.

Being **empathetic** was also a skill that was mentioned. While all students pointed out that this was a skill they regularly practice within the school environment, through this experience, they can be more empathetic towards children as they are more conscious of

confidentiality issues and how to address them. Most of them could relate the importance of this skill within the classroom due to specific circumstances and baggage that their students bring to the classroom:

Student 4: 'Most of the time they end up confiding with you ... and obviously a person who is in our position should be equipped with these skills'

Other reported skills were **organisational skills**, time-management skills, self-regulation and prioritisation. These skills were highlighted as students could see the difference between practising them at the workplace and the school, where their time is managed through the school schedule. The ability to work under pressure in a time-constrained environment and multi-tasking were also mentioned. Filing was also regularly mentioned for students who undertook the placements in an office-based environment.

Technical skills related to specific fields were also reported. Many students remarked on the importance of having basic IT literacy to be versatile and learn new systems/software at the workplace.

Student 2: Being out there and experiencing a new work placement helped me understand the different skill sets needed to thrive in the workplace. Being aware of these skills will help me pass them on to the students to be better prepared for their future jobs.

iii. Fosters an Appreciation for the Teaching Profession and Provides an Opportunity for Personal Growth.

Through the student feedback questionnaire, it transpires that 44% and 56% of respondents, respectively, 'believe' and 'firmly believe' that the micro-placement helped them grow on a personal and professional level.

During the interviews, the students remarked that this experience enabled them to reflect on their skills and become conscious of other not easily identified skills. They could

observe how they can improve these skills, which they found challenging to practice in the school-based environment. One student commented that:

Student 4: It enabled me to develop further my interpersonal skills whilst enabling me to work on other skills, such as negotiation

Through this experience, they have developed their personal growth by increasing their competencies in skills identification in areas which include: teamwork and collaboration, the ability to be flexible, relate one's thoughts critically, express themselves when they disagree with proposal/ action/ measure/procedures being made and be assertive in presenting one's ideas.

Student 6: I had the opportunity to observe good practices such as assertiveness within the workplace, something which I have been consciously working on for the last couple of years.

The above statement shows that the micro-placement experience enabled students to identify their own skills gaps and provided opportunities for improvement. One aspect of personal growth that several students repeatedly mentioned is their self-confidence. Through this initiative, they were exposed to instances where they became conscious of their limitations, and therefore, they had to build their self-confidence in an environment that took them out of their comfort zone.

Student 6: The main challenge was to overcome the initial overwhelming feeling since I was not fully prepared for the tasks and responsibilities I had to do.

Another aspect of personal growth identified is the ability to communicate with peers. Students commented that since their teaching job is mainly related to communication with children, their communication with peers needed to change. All students commented how they found it quite challenging to communicate their ideas at the workplace. It was commented that teachers are exposed to the same circle of people within the school-based

environment. Through the micro-placement experience, these students met with people whose concern goes beyond education. Students commented that they were exposed to instances where they had to manage conflicting situations such as client relationships and work with colleagues.

Student 2: My colleagues during the micro-placement taught me how to speak my mind and solve conflict without being rude or aggressive. I learnt how to recruit help when I encountered a problem in the tasks given.

Student 5: I gained new skills and observed, analysed, and evaluated other skills the colleagues were using during this job experience. I can now respond to others' issues and help them calm down while finding solutions to their problems.

The immediate impact of the micro-placement on future educators was that this experience increased their appreciation towards the teaching profession. This pride towards the role of teachers in society at large reflects their identification towards the responsibility that they carry in preparing future generations by giving them life skills to become active citizens. This job appreciation motivates future teachers to think about their role in society in a more holistic manner, so the micro-placement experience should be sought at the initial teacher's training level and as part of an educators' continuous professional development.

Student 2: One of the strengths of the micro-placement is that it equips educators with the ability to observe soft skills, even in our children. Moreover, we also need to know how to propose these skills to our students.

iv. Recognise the Importance of Integrating 21st Century Skills and Work Experience in the Classrooms.

One of the short-term effects of the micro-placement is that students undergoing initial teachers' training are more aware of labour market needs. They are more conscious of

the fact that they are preparing students to have the necessary skills to become active citizens and, therefore, become more employable. Several students pointed out that through this experience, they have broadened the way they plan their lessons. They are now in a better position to relate real-life experiences when teaching in the classroom and can contextualise subject-based material in a realistic experiential setup. They are consciously integrating life skills in their day-to-day teaching.

Student 3: I will be keeping in mind what I noticed and prepare my students for their future through my lesson plans ... I will encourage teamwork, collaboration, different roles in groups, communication, voice pitch and much more.

Student 14: This experience has polished up my skills and helped me re-invent myself in the classroom to set a different direction towards my goals and objectives for my students. It also enlightened me further, how I can help my students bridge the gap between the school desk and the world of work.

The micro-placement module also offered the opportunity for future educators to build their repertoire of networks in different industries. Through this experience, they have a closer link to the world of work, and they feel comfortable integrating people they have met on-site during their placement in their classrooms. They have also discussed with their placement provider the possibility of inviting them as guest speakers in the classrooms, based on the students' interests. As a result, this will make the students' learning more relevant as people in the industry will be sharing first-hand experience.

Student 6: I have a human library which I can use in class, and luckily enough, I have built good relationships with the employees in the establishment where I was, and they are willing to come and join my classroom where they would be giving a first-hand experience to my students.

The micro-placement experience increased educators' awareness of the benefits of having students visiting workplaces. Students following the VET hospitality stream consider taking their class on on-site visits to observe the hospitality industry. This experience shows that teachers are creating better links with the industry by integrating on-site visits within their teaching practices. The industry has also shown support and willingness to have a closer input in schools by hosting students at the workplace.

Student 6: I want to let my students experience being in a hotel/ restaurant and talking to different employees before I start teaching them about the job roles and all that goes on in a hospitality establishment.

Placement Provider B: the teachers would have exposed themselves to the way things are done in the hospitality industry today and be adjourned to translate it in class.

As part of the processes of the micro-placement, the Institute also offers the services of micro-placement visitors to visit students on-site during their placement. Their role is to observe students whilst performing their tasks and engage in discussions with the employers to familiarise themselves with the workplace. Micro-placement visitors help students identify additional skills whilst performing tasks, give them indicators on skills identification, identify good attitudes and practices observed and give recommendations for improvement. They also discuss how students can ingrate this experience within the school/classroom environment. The students commented that they appreciated that the visit was not an assessment but an opportunity to discuss and assimilate their experience.

Implications of the Study

Extend Micro-placements From Initial Teachers' Training to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for All Educators.

Employers and students both commented that this experience was beneficial as it created an opportunity for both the industry and the teachers to discuss how learning can be made more relevant and how both can aid in the development of children within the classroom to become active citizens. Through this initiative, all stakeholders believe there should be a closer link between education and the world of work. Micro-placements are fit for purpose and are to be integrated within a structured programme that leads to the formation of educators within the classroom, as it helps teachers see their role in the context of labour market needs. It makes them conscious of skills identification, industry needs, and the skills needed for future citizens to succeed.

Students and employers alike reported that micro-placements in different industries as part of initial teacher training are integral to teachers' formation. These significant stakeholders assert that the micro-placement should look towards expanding its remit, from a module within a qualification structure to a CPD for teachers who are already in employment. In the long run, it should foster a teacher's professional attitude to recognise that one micro-placement experience during their course is not enough. Skills change, situations change, labour market needs change, and skills needed today may become redundant, so the micro-placement initiative must give teachers the ability to recognise that they have been out of touch with labour market needs. Therefore, they should seek to improve their capacity outside of the school /classroom environment throughout their career.

Student 3: Would I recommend this micro-placement to others? Yes, of course! There will be a time when you enter a routine, and this placement offers the opportunity to do

something new, renew the awareness of your skills, and keep abreast with what is happening in the industry. Teachers are to be exposed to skills and work experiences that are relevant and up-to-date. While it is true that I was working in a different industry twenty years ago, skills have changed so much, and this initiative made me realise this. The micro-placement should be done not only as part of initial teacher's training, but it should also continue to be offered to teachers [who are already working] as part of their CPD.

Conclusion

Predominantly, institutional evaluative practices mainly focus on students' performance and results, while feedback is sought primarily to assess students' satisfaction rates on the delivery and assessment of the module. This evaluation took a different stance for module evaluation, where it also involved key stakeholders' perspectives on the module and the value of the micro-placements. A new form of evaluation was used at an institutional level, which moved away from student performance to the value-added of having short placements in an initial teacher's training programme. This study proposed another evaluation method that integrated external stakeholders' views into the evaluation through a responsive evaluative approach. Therefore, this study proposed using responsive evaluation together with RUFDATA framework as part of institutional programme review. As for the limitations of this research, the focus was on a relatively small number of interviews. Future work would focus on integrating a larger number of interviews. Exploring the evolution of micro-placements - as part of initial teachers' training and as teachers' continuous professional development - after the self-imposed time frame of this research will shed more light on its effects on education and employment and its impact on teaching pedagogies.

The research showed that the concept of giving a hands-on experience to prospective educators in diverse work environments is a valuable one, which should be upheld not only as

part of initial teachers' training but also as a continuous professional development for teachers throughout their career. Key stakeholders involved in this initiative highlighted the importance of getting teachers out of their routine and comfort zone. These short placements in the industry enable educators to reflect on their practices and their role in the classroom. Staying in touch with the necessities of the labour market helps teachers make their teaching pedagogies more relevant. Engaging in this experience also amplified their job appreciation; consequently, teachers feel that what they are doing is relevant and, therefore, their students are more engaged.

This initiative exemplifies that teaching needs to be au-courant to society's necessities. The importance of having closer links with the world of work was shown through this evaluation, as having teachers doing micro-placements allows them to see the importance of integrating 21st-century skills in their teaching pedagogies. They have acquired skills and an understanding of labour market needs, and at the same time, it allowed them to experience other workplaces to form their teaching perspectives.

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