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Dissonant Reflections: Art, Aesthetics, Negation, and Social Change in Adorno's Thought

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Abstract

Theodor W. Adorno, a central figure of the Frankfurt School, offered a multifaceted and often pessimistic analysis of art's relationship to modern society. His critique of the "culture industry" targeted the commodification of art and its potential to suppress critical thought, highlighting the homogenizing tendencies of mass-produced culture. Adorno emphasized the importance of negation – art's ability to reveal contradictions and resist easy answers—as a form of resistance and explored the inherent tensions within artistic autonomy under capitalism. This article applies Adorno's theoretical framework to analyze contemporary artworks, examining how artists negotiate these tensions, seeking critique within the very systems Adorno found problematic. Adorno's enduring relevance lies in his ability to provide tools for understanding the ongoing struggle for art's transformative power in our ever-changing cultural landscape. Additionally, the article explores convergences and divergences between Adorno's views and those of other Frankfurt School members, enriching the analysis of art's complex and challenging role within society.

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Introduction

Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), a central figure of the Frankfurt School, offered a multifaceted and often contradictory analysis of art's role within modern society. A philosopher, sociologist, musicologist, and cultural critic, his work compels us to confront the complexities of artistic expression under the influence of mass culture, consumerism, and power structures. Adorno's theoretical perspectives, while critical of much popular culture, have become surprisingly useful in analyzing contemporary art that often blurs distinctions between 'high' and 'low' forms (O'Connor, 2000, Comay, 2017). This unexpected applicability raises intriguing questions: Can the very tools he offered for critiquing popular art help us understand today's artistic landscape, one deeply immersed in the elements he warned against? Does this engagement with mass culture signify a surrender to its homogenizing forces, or do contemporary artists utilize Adorno's ideas of negation and critique in unforeseen ways? Exploring these tensions is crucial for understanding the ongoing relevance of Adorno's work in the 21st century.

Adorno's analysis is defined by contradictions, making his perspectives all the more fascinating. His focus on negation and resistance clashes directly with his pessimistic view of mass culture's co-opting power (Osborne, 2004). Examining these contradictions within his own writings provides fertile ground for analyzing art in a world Adorno would have found both troubling and a compelling confirmation of his concerns.

This article explores these key themes of Adorno's aesthetic theory while highlighting their relevance in understanding the 21st century's cultural dynamics. Adorno's thought provides tools for critically examining the interplay between art, technology, mass culture, and social transformation. Integrating discussions of contemporary artworks alongside Adorno's theoretical framework demonstrates his work's ongoing significance and potential to ignite further debate surrounding the role of art in our changing world.

The Culture Industry: Critique and Complication

Adorno's relentless critique of the "culture industry" was a defining feature of his work. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-written with Max Horkheimer, Adorno argued that modern mass culture, driven by capitalist forces, produces standardized and homogenized products designed for easy consumption (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944). This culture industry, according to Adorno, undermines critical thinking and reinforces existing power structures. He elaborated on this theme in *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, where he portrayed cultural products as reinforcing conformity and perpetuating a cycle of passive consumption (Adorno, 1991).

While primarily focused on his era, Adorno's criticisms resonate powerfully today. The increasing dominance of digital platforms, streaming services, and social media algorithms raises concerns about the homogenization of content and the manipulation of audiences for commercial gain. One can see Adorno's warnings reflected in debates about the impact of filter bubbles and the erosion of attention spans in the digital age.

A potent contemporary example is Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* (2010). At first glance, the piece—an installation of millions of individually handcrafted and painted porcelain seeds filling a vast museum hall—seems to be a direct commentary on the individual's place within the mass and the tension between standardized outputs and unique expression. However, a deeper Adornian reading reveals a profound paradox. The work was created through the painstaking labor of hundreds of artisans, subverting the idea of industrial mass production. Yet, it leverages a mass-produced *aesthetic* to lodge its critique, and it exists within the institutional framework of the international art market and major museums—core components of the modern culture industry.

This complexity challenges a frequent criticism of Adorno: that his culture industry thesis is too monolithic and fails to account for audience agency. While Adorno feared mass culture diluted an artwork's critical power, Ai Weiwei's work does the opposite. The piece is a perfect example of

Adorno's concept of *negation*; its genuine artistic expression lies in its refusal to conform (Osborne, 2004). By using the tools of the culture industry (spectacle, scale) against itself, the artwork performs a dialectical maneuver. It does not simply pacify the audience but implicates them, stimulating critical reflection by presenting the contradictions of reality and offering glimpses of alternative possibilities (Adorno, 1970).

Art as Mimesis and Negation

Adorno (1966) rejected the notion of art as simple imitation or mimesis. Instead, he emphasized its capacity for negation, as detailed in his work *Negative Dialectics*. True art, for Adorno, captures what society suppresses or excludes. Peter Osborne (2004), in his exploration of Adorno's theory in *In Search of the Lost Subject: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, further unpacks this concept. Osborne argues that artistic expression reveals the hidden absences and contradictions within dominant ideologies, offering a powerful form of critique.

This perspective challenges notions of art as purely decorative or escapist. Adorno's view aligns with artistic movements that deliberately provoke and disorient viewers. For instance, Dadaist and Surrealist works aimed to shock audiences out of complacency, revealing repressed aspects of the psyche and social order. This legacy continues in works like Kara Walker's installations. Kara Walker demonstrates how negation can be both formally sophisticated and broadly resonant. Walker employs the seemingly quaint 18th-century art of the cut-paper silhouette to stage brutal, panoramic scenes of racial and sexual violence from the era of American slavery.

The negation here is multifold. The genteel, decorative form is used to represent its own repressed historical foundation of brutality. The aesthetic pleasure of the stark, beautiful black-and-white forms clashes violently with the horror of the content. This creates a profound discomfort in the viewer, preventing any easy moral or aesthetic resolution. As Adorno argued, the work refuses to conform. It does not offer a clear narrative of redemption but rather confronts the viewer with the unresolved trauma embedded within American history. Walker's art, while challenging, is not merely an intellectual puzzle; its power is visceral and affective. It shows that negation, as an artistic strategy, can provoke a powerful critical consciousness in a wide audience, challenging the idea that such art is inherently elitist or inaccessible.

Doris Salcedo similarly employs the mimetic negativity Adorno theorized, imbuing everyday objects with a haunting presence that forces us to acknowledge absence and concealed trauma (Comay, 2017).

Adorno's rejection of simplistic mimesis extends to his broader critique of a society obsessed with surface appearances and the reproduction of the status quo. Art that merely reflects reality risks inadvertently reinforcing existing power structures. True artistic expression, in Adorno's view, challenges these dominant narratives. Artists may employ techniques such as distortion, fragmentation, or the juxtaposition of jarring elements to disrupt the viewer's complacency and expose the constructed nature of seemingly 'natural' social orders (Osborne, 2004).

Negation, for Adorno, is not purely destructive. By refusing to affirm or neatly resolve social contradictions, art opens up a space for critical reflection and the possibility of imagining something different. This echoes the work of avant-garde artists who aimed to shock the bourgeoisie out of their comfortable worldviews, paving the way for potential social transformation. This dialectical approach holds that even within negation lies the possibility of a creative impulse, demonstrating the complex and paradoxical relationship between art, society, and the search for transformative potential.

The Paradox of Aesthetic Autonomy and Social Practice

Adorno wrestled with the paradox of aesthetic autonomy. He argued that art must remain autonomous—separate from direct political or social instrumentality—to preserve its critical power; if it becomes mere propaganda, it loses its unique ability to critique (Adorno, 1970). Yet, he also knew

art was inevitably entangled in its social and historical context (O'Connor, 2000). This tension remains central to contemporary debates: should art engage directly in activism, or does it risk being co-opted?

Some critics argue that Adorno's focus on negation and autonomy can lead to political quietism (Rancière, 2004; Allerkamp, Genel & Hazoume, 2019). However, the work of contemporary artists engaged in "social practice" suggests an evolution of this idea. Theaster Gates, for example, blurs the line between artist, urban planner, and community activist. His projects, such as the *Rebuild Foundation* in Chicago, transform abandoned buildings into vibrant cultural hubs, directly engaging communities in actions that blend aesthetics with social activism.

From an Adornian perspective, Gates's work negates the concept of the art object as a useless commodity destined for a gallery. But it moves beyond a simple refusal. It channels the critical energy of negation into constructive, tangible social change. This practice challenges the strict separation between art and life that a rigid reading of Adorno's autonomy might imply. It suggests a way to resolve Adorno's paradox: art can maintain its critical autonomy not by remaining aloof from the world, but by redesigning a small part of it according to its own aesthetic and ethical logic, thus offering a "glimpse of alternative possibilities" in a direct and material way (Adorno, 1970).

The Constellatory Approach: Understanding Adorno's Fragmented Perspective

The constellatory approach refers to a way of interpreting Theodor W. Adorno's work that acknowledges its complex, fragmented, and often contradictory nature. Instead of searching for a singular, unified theory, this approach emphasizes (Jarvis, 2009):

Multiplicity: Adorno's writings encompass diverse topics, engage with various thinkers, and often present opposing viewpoints within the same text. The constellation metaphor signifies this interconnectedness and lack of a single, central message. Additionally, contemporary artists often embody this fragmented and open-ended approach. Consider Gerhard Richter's diverse body of work, which ranges from photorealistic paintings to abstract compositions. His refusal to adhere to a singular style reflects Adorno's emphasis on multifaceted perspectives and resistance to a unified artistic vision.

Tension and Contradiction: Adorno deliberately constructs tension within his arguments, exploring opposing ideas from multiple angles. He embraces ambiguity and resists simplistic conclusions, reflecting the complexities of modern society and art. Similarly, artists like Kara Walker or Ai Weiwei deliberately juxtapose elements within their works that evoke both beauty and discomfort, power and vulnerability. These contradictions mirror Adorno's approach, which aimed to highlight social tensions rather than resolve them through idealized representations.

Openness to Interpretation: Rather than offering definitive answers, Adorno's work invites readers to actively engage, draw connections, and develop their own interpretations. The constellation allows for multiple perspectives and interpretations without privileging one over another. This non-hierarchical approach aligns with conceptual art practices like those of Tino Sehgal or Yoko Ono, where instructions or open-ended situations invite viewer participation and individual meaning-making, a rejection of a singular authorial interpretation.

Importance of Context: Analyzing Adorno's ideas requires considering their historical and philosophical context. Understanding the intellectual discourse he interacted with helps illuminate the meanings and intentions behind his writings. The current wave of institutional critique within contemporary art, where artists interrogate the very structures of museums, galleries, and the art market, speaks to a continued grappling with the context of art, much like Adorno analyzed the ways in which artistic expression is both shaped by and reacts against the social and economic systems it exists within.

Adorno's fragmented and multifaceted perspective, open to interpretation within its historical context, offers valuable tools for navigating the complexities of contemporary art (Jarvis, 2009). While his emphasis on critique and negativity might seem bleak, it also compels us to look beyond the

surface and seek art's potential for resistance and social transformation. This critical function resonates particularly within the realm of music, where artists continue to grapple with societal contradictions and search for new forms of expression. In the following section, I will explore how Adorno viewed music's capacity for the dialectic of hope, even amidst a world shaped by mass culture and social inequalities.

Music and the Dialectic of Hope

Despite his focus on negativity, Adorno found a glimmer of hope within music. His *Philosophy of Music* (2009) offers a complex analysis of its potential for expression and resistance. Christopher Butler, in *Adorno on Music* (2002), further elaborates on Adorno's view that avant-garde and atonal musical forms embody a particularly acute awareness of societal contradictions. By defying conventional harmonies and expectations, such music reflects a fractured reality while gesturing towards the possibility of something different.

This critical function is powerfully evident in Kendrick Lamar's album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015). The album functions as a stunning example of Adornian negation in a sonic form; its jarring shifts between dissonant free-jazz, funk, and spoken-word poetry refuse the standardized structures of mainstream hip-hop. Tracks use unsettling chord progressions and layered, conflicting vocals to create a sound that is difficult and demanding. This formal complexity forces the listener into a critical, active engagement, mirroring the unresolved social and racial contradictions the lyrics explore. The album thus denies the listener easy pleasure, instead using its "difficult" form to reveal uncomfortable truths—a perfect execution of the critical task Adorno assigned to authentic art.

Interestingly, Adorno was famously critical of jazz, which he often viewed as standardized and commercial. The use of jazz in *To Pimp a Butterfly* as a tool for radical critique thus provides a fascinating challenge, suggesting that even a form Adorno dismissed can be re-appropriated for profound artistic negation. This complex use of aesthetic elements, which might draw an audience in only to disrupt their expectations, aligns with Adorno's broader emphasis on the dialectic of hope, even within a predominantly negative analysis (Witkin, 1998).

Adorno and the Frankfurt School: Convergences and Divergences

While Adorno shared the core critical stance of the Frankfurt School, his views on art diverged subtly yet significantly from some of his colleagues.

Adorno and Walter Benjamin both critiqued the effects of mass culture on art. They recognized the dangers of standardization and the ways commodification could strip artworks of their unique significance. However, their perspectives on its transformative potential diverged significantly.

Benjamin (1935), while acknowledging the risks, held a degree of optimism about the democratization of art through mass reproduction. He argued that the loss of the 'aura'—the uniqueness associated with an original artwork—could challenge traditional hierarchies and create new possibilities for collective engagement. The proliferation of copies, he believed, could enable new modes of viewing and interpretation, fostering a more critical relationship to cultural products.

Adorno took a far more pessimistic view. He feared that mass reproduction primarily served the culture industry's goals of pacifying audiences and reinforcing the status quo. The replication and standardization of artworks, he argued, diluted their critical power and transformed them into easily consumable commodities. Where Benjamin saw the potential for disruption, Adorno saw the increasing dominance of commercial interests and the decline of the artwork's capacity to resist.

Both Adorno and Herbert Marcuse offered deep critiques of modern consumer society, highlighting the manipulation of desires and the suppression of critical dissent. They viewed the culture industry as a powerful tool for maintaining social control, generating false needs and distractions designed to quell potential revolutionary impulses.

Despite this shared critique, Marcuse (1964) held a stronger belief in the capacity for liberation than Adorno. He viewed the working class as a potential source of resistance. While the culture industry sought to pacify and integrate laborers into the capitalist system, Marcuse believed the contradictions and exploitation inherent within it could serve as catalysts for a revolutionary consciousness.

Adorno, deeply impacted by the rise of fascism and the failures of past social movements, held a more pessimistic view. He doubted the possibility of a radical working-class consciousness emerging from within a culture so deeply saturated by commodification and propaganda. While Marcuse saw hope in the potential for organized resistance, Adorno focused more on the ways dominant ideologies were ingrained in everyday life and the resulting difficulties for achieving true social transformation.

Jürgen Habermas and Adorno shared concerns about the manipulation of public opinion and the stifling of critical thought. However, they proposed different paths toward a more just society. Habermas (1989) emphasized the importance of open, rational-critical debate within a healthy public sphere as the foundation for a democratic and participatory system.

Adorno, while valuing reasoned discourse, believed the very structure of mass culture undermined genuine public debate. He focused on the ways media, driven by commercial imperatives, distorted communication and manipulated audiences. Adorno was more interested in the ways art, through its negation and refusal to offer simple answers, could reveal hidden social contradictions and provoke independent thought. Where Habermas (1989) emphasized the role of communication in achieving social change, Adorno looked to art's disruptive potential to highlight cracks in the dominant system and stimulate resistance from within.

Adorno's focus on the unique power of negativity in art, the inherent contradictions of aesthetic autonomy, and his more pessimistic stance regarding transformative potential distinguish his perspective within the broader critical project of the Frankfurt School.

Implications for Progressive Education

The critical framework Adorno provides has profound implications for progressive education, particularly in an era dominated by digital media. His critique of the "culture industry" serves as a powerful theoretical foundation for critical media literacy. Progressive educators can use Adorno's concepts to design curricula that teach students to deconstruct the cultural products they consume daily—from streaming content and social media trends to advertising and news. The goal is to cultivate a student who is not a passive consumer absorbing standardized messages, but an active, critical citizen capable of recognizing and questioning the ideologies embedded in modern culture, thereby resisting the conformity the culture industry promotes.

Furthermore, Adorno's emphasis on negation and the value of "difficult" art offers a potent pedagogical strategy. By engaging students with artworks that refuse easy interpretation—such as the unsettling historical tableaus of Kara Walker or the haunting installations of Doris Salcedo—educators can foster a classroom environment where students learn to grapple with ambiguity, discomfort, and complexity. This process is central to developing the critical consciousness that progressive education champions. The educator's role shifts from a purveyor of knowledge to a facilitator of critical inquiry, guiding students through the dissonant experience of the artwork. The aim is not for students to simply "like" contemporary arts, but to be provoked by it into a deeper, more critical reflection on society, history, and their place within them.

Conclusion

Theodor Adorno's uncompromising analysis of art, despite his pessimism, remains profoundly relevant, and his insistence on the role of art in exposing societal contradictions continues to be a vital point of discussion (Cook, 1996). As this discussion has shown, his framework is not a static set of pronouncements but a dynamic critical method. When read against the critiques of his work and through the lens of contemporary practice, his ideas are illuminated and strengthened.

Artists like Ai Weiwei and Kara Walker do not simply fit into Adornian categories; their work embodies the very contradictions Adorno identified. They operate from within the culture industry to critique it, using beauty and spectacle to provoke discomfort and critical thought as the line between entertainment and commentary blurs (Morgan, 2009). They demonstrate that negation is not an end in itself but a potent strategy for forcing a confrontation with uncomfortable truths. Their work affirms Adorno's core belief that even in a thoroughly commodified world, art retains a fragile but essential power: the power to reflect our society's dissonances back at us, reminding us that the world as it is, is not the only way it can be.

The ongoing struggle of these artists mirrors the tension within Adorno's own thought, highlighting the enduring challenge and necessity of carving out spaces for critical reflection in our ever-changing cultural landscape.

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The Importance of Self-Directed Reading Habits for University Education and Career preparation: The Case of Female Students of the College of Law of Haramaya University, Ethiopia

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Abstract
This paper is based on a qualitative case study designed to investigate the experiences and viewpoints regarding the importance of self-directed reading habits for university education and career preparation of a group of female students studying at the Law College (LC) of Haramaya University (HU), Ethiopia. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceived use of their self-directed reading habits for their academic performance and readiness for the future workforce at Law College. This study employed qualitative research methods. In effect, FGD and one-on-one interviews and detailed self-completed written reflections were employed to secure data from purposively sampled participants. The data was then coded, categorized and thematically analyzed systematically. The findings show that the pre-university self-directed reading habits acquired over the years have a bearing on LC academic performance and self-preparation for the would-be jobs. Given the purposes of law and law courses reading requirements, the informants, however, viewed the self-directed reading habits reinforced in HU as having not much contribution to law academic performances and the legal professions of their interest. Our participants who felt no longer reinforcing desirable reading habits for the same or related goals, owing to the academic environment of the College/the University, constituted the majority. Based on the study we recommend the College to revisit course instructions and/or curriculum to ensure whether it addresses the intent of students' self-directed reading habits, law education and legal posts adequately. LC should encourage students to read around and beyond its curricula, by creating opportunities alongside the regular, field-focused readings.

Keywords: Self-directed reading, qualitative case study, academic performance, professional self-preparation, law females

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Introduction

Reading is a 'lifelong habit' of making meanings from varied sources: print, electronic or online materials, to thrive or survive the complexities of this century, the digital age. Indisputably, at the core of self-education and lifelong learning, lies avid reading (Chettri and Rout, 2013). This essentially requires wide reading beyond and above its basic consumptions (Ruterana, 2012; Du Toit, 2001) should the act is instilled in early age (Baba and Affendi, 2020; Chettri and Rout, 2013; Yallappa, 2022), transformed into a habit (Andayani and Maryam, 2018; Annable, 2017) in adolescence or adulthood (Annable, 2017; Waghmare, 2018), and become the reader's taste sustainably (Abeyrathna & Zainab, 2004). "The most effective and lasting method in the continuous transformation of the reading process" is "to gain reading habits" (Akçay, 2017, p44). The term reading habits is a crude concept (Moniek, et al., 2020). For this study, it is defined as self-directed reading habits wherein law females read physical and/or digital materials passionately, regularly and continuously at places and times of their choosing, for their own goals, without having feelings of pressure from tests, assignments, or case debriefings.

Although reading habits are best formed in childhood (Yallappa, 2022), Waghmare foresees that they become goal-oriented at university (2018). University age, 17-25, is the most intense and productive stage in formal education, requiring reading act frequently and necessarily (Nashath & Akram, 2021; Kamhieh, 2017). Kamhieh strongly argues that no ideal place on the ladder of education "than at the tertiary level," where students must read voluminous and lengthy materials to succeed (2017, p2). Yet as the modern technology use continues to revolutionize a university youth, this kind of reading is severely challenged (Balan et al., 2019; Hakemulder and Mangen, 2024), and a rapid shift in reading behaviors and habits becomes imminent (Garza et al., 2014), a felt challenge in Ethiopian universities (Mbhele, 2016; Misganaw, 2017; Tadesse, 2017). Consequently, inculcating a love of reading in students has become increasingly difficult for instructors (International Literacy Association, [ILA], 2019). Largely, that has impact on education and jobs (Shehu and Jeromes, 2022). Therefore, empowering learners to self-direct their reading lives is sought (ILA, 2019). At university, bad reading habits cause "difficulty in most academic courses…"and isolation from college life (Lowe, 1984, p22), whereas good reading habits contribute to improved academic, social and professional lives (Erdem, 2015; Nashath & Akram, 2021; Parlette & Howard, 2010). They increase an individual's knowledge (Ezeala, 2020), critical thinking skills and oral fluency (Balan, et al., 2019) reading strategies and study skills (Rosli et al., 2017), comprehension, and competence which positively influence students' academic success (Parodi et al., 2019). It follows from this that reading habits are a necessity for both the academic and the professional pursuits of higher learning institution students (Erdem, 2015; Kumar, et al., 2022; Rosli, et al., 2017).

Importantly, students who enjoy personal, educational and professional success are those who maintain a consistent reading of academic and non-academic materials (Applegate et al., 2014; Balan, et al., 2019 Garza. et al. 2014; Huang et al., 2014; Mansur, et al. 2013; Mokhtari et al., 2011; Te Maro et al., 2019). Passionate readers, who read frequently even when the contents they read lacked a direct relation with their studies, would be better performers and higher achievers (Medina and Villarreal, 2020). In fact, reading should not occur as a result of conscious pressure resulting from academic works or as a way to prepare for employment (State et al., 2010). More importantly, students should be encouraged to read regularly and develop a self-directed reading habits (Annable; Erickson and Koppenhaver, 2007; ILA, 2019; Johnson & Blair, 2003; Oricco, 2017; 2017). If learners are self directed, then they are more likely to continuously engage in reading (Annable, 2017; Belzer, 2002), enhance their reading volume useful to grow as readers, increase their confidence, competence, and a love for reading (ILA, 2019). These inputs are thought to add to better academic achievement and learning (Chin Ee Loh & Baoqi Sun, 2019).

Professionally, it is argued that people have to develop themselves after formal education to adapt to change, for self-education and career growth (Buyukgoze, 2023; Erdem, 2015). For example, knowledge is continually updated and expanded, so the competences and skills acquired during the formal study should be actively improved (Foong & Khoo, 2015; Wielkiewicz & Meuwissen, 2014). Yet the generic skills a student acquired as a graduate attribute maybe inadequate to fit him/her for the

dynamic situations of employment and workplace (Jamaludin et al., 2020; Moore & Morton, 2017). However, it is also argued that people are unlikely to read, especially in Africa, once their study is over (Nalusiba, 2010). Evidently, the reading habits of educated Ethiopians were found to be poor (Hassen, 2016). For others, the nature of their jobs makes them too busy to read (Fernandez-Blanco, et al., 2015). Therefore, the undergraduates, the future professionals, should possess the habits of reading that elevates their intellectual capital and efficiency necessary for the social and the workforce (Buyukgoze, 2023; Erdem, 2015; Foong & Khoo 2015). Above all, the huge surveys regarding the abilities and general employability of graduates have led to current initiatives in universities both locally and globally to seriously focus on making graduates 'job ready' for their work in the professions (Gill, 2018; Moore & Morton, 2015). As such, there is a move towards making the skills and conceptions more noticeable and explicit in the higher education curriculum" (Gill, 2018). When it comes to reading, university time is an opportunity to create enjoying awareness and consciousness (Erdem, 2015) or an on-campus reading culture, by organizing book clubs, special interest reading groups and literary events (Hatane et al., 2021; Nathanson et al., 2008), and by encouraging students to share their favorite books and/or authors (Buyukgoze, 2023).

Of course, reading habits that ensure fruitful learning and profession are rooted in childhood (Davidovitch & Gerkerova, 2023). Still, good reading habits should prolong learning and/or reading beyond school. Impliedly, present-day performances are the byproduct of the past reading habits (Zare et al., 2023) and those that were sustained from the past and/or enriched during university years. But in tertiary-level studies on reading habits in general and field-specific reading habits of students (including law), this looked underestimated (Nicolosi & Reiter, 2024; Owens, 2016;Suresh & Thanuskodi, 2022). Hence, our study tried to address the issues, alongside their influences on current performances of law learners. It has been learnt that reading habits are priced more in law studies and jobs (McKinney, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Rani, 2022; Suresh & Thanuskodi, 2022; Spencer, 2004). In law, the act of reading demands both disciplined and imaginative habits of mind (Mitchell, 2012). Moreover, law is often transformative, often vague, and often difficult to conclude and being informed through persistent reading of print and digital genres is emphasized (Graham, 2013; Suresh & Thanuskodi, 2022). The academics also urge researchers to ensure law students read regularly and avidly, in considerable amount and complexity (MacKinney, 2012; Spencer, 2004). This was why this study prioritized law students, with our focal groups being female undergraduates (See Participants section for more rationales).

That said, except the common narratives that females outsmart boys or emphasis of girlhood in reading literatures, there is limited scholarly studies that inform what their reading habits are like (Lowe, 2016) and the impact of their readings. These included college-level gender-based and female only works (in overseas and in Ethiopia). The latter, published and accessible ones were done by Azad in 2019; Husaini in 2013; Jayamma in 2017, and Kamhieh in 2017. Azad studied 60 females reading frequency, preferred language and content, and factors debilitating their reading and the choices, through questionnaires. Husaini surveyed 105 undergraduate medical females' knowledge, attitude and practice` of reading habits. Kamhieh explored 40 off-campus women's book reading choices using survey methods, interviews and journals to identify their chosen literary genres, authors and actors. However, none of these studies examined whether their respondents' reading habits helped them to be ready for their esteemed jobs, and the present work was in part initiated in response to this. In Ethiopian context, literatures available to us include females general academic performances and achievements in school (Ali, 2018; Tadesse, 2009), in university (Marsha, et al., 2013) in national exams (like Grade 12 exam and university exit-exam). For instance, Ministry of Education of Ethiopia reported that females' scores for the school leaving exam of 2022/23 were far lower than that of males. Even the females who managed to join universities demonstrated lower academic performances (Tiruneh & Petros, 2014; Firew, 2013; Tadesse, 2009). A case in point is HU law graduates of 2023. Of all students, 86 (100%) only 7(8%) females passed the exit-exam (LC Registrar student records) although the College is thought to recruit 'higher performers' to join its field. However small and partial these data would seem, the results are negative when it comes to their performances. Likewise, no existing evidence (to our knowledge) expose whether or not their self-directed reading habits contribute to their university education and prospective profession. Thus, the current study aimed to

explore the views of regular, undergraduate, LC females regarding their pre-university (past) and present self-directed reading habits impact on their HU academic performances and self-preparation for their post-university posts. The study attempted to find the answer to the question: 'How do the females perceive the importance of self-directed reading habits for their academic performances and professional self-preparation?' This paper is further guided by the following two sub-research questions:

a) What do regular, undergraduate LC female students think about the importance of their past self-directed reading habits for their law academic performances and professional self preparation?

b) What do the students think about the significance of their LC self-directed reading habits for the ongoing academic performances and readiness for their preferred occupations, if anything?

Methodology

This study aimed to investigate the students' viewpoints about the importance of past and present self-directed reading habits for their LC academic and expected work lives. With this in mind, the researchers engaged in the research processes. This calls for what Bhattacherjee (2012) refers to as 'the subjective interpretation of participants involved', by interviewing them and by getting them to reflect on their self-directed reading habit influences, and practices, and then reconciling among their responses through their subjective perspectives. The study was informed by the interpretivist paradigm. Interpritivism promotes negotiation of meanings and perspectives. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Design

This paper is the outcome of a cross-sectional study done as part of a larger PhD dissertation project. It adopts qualitative research approach, with an interpretive case study design. One motivation to use the design emanated from the feeling that no research of similar intent has been done with the target participants. Thus, exploratory nature of data extraction or generation was felt more desirable (Creswell, 2009). Studying in depth, exploring their prior and HU reinforced self-directed reading habits, it was hoped to get a detailed knowledge (Singh, 2006) about views on their self-directed reading habits contributions to their academic performances and to equip themselves for their jobs.

Participants

Female undergraduate students in LC of HU were the study population. They were considered for the study at least for four reasons. One reason that drives this is our contention that they have been under pressure/unprivileged to develop and sustain their reading habits especially in our context. It follows from this that an insignificant number of them (compared to males) succeed in joining higher learning institutions even though their source population figure is considered far greater than any other members of society. As such, doing research with them to examine and understand their reading habits, and what consequence(s) that might have on their lives is felt as a moral and professional duty vested with a researcher. The second motive for their choice is the fact that (except comparative gender-based studies) relevant studies are scant. For instance, Lowe (2016) admit the presence of scholarly works that portrayed girlhood in widely read novels, but what "has seen little interest, however, is in the investigation of girls' reading habits in the past" (p, 340). The third reason is to do with the findings from our pilot study that law education and good law professions require deep and wide reading while the practice in the College environment appeared to be to the contrary, so the participant suggested the need for more investigation. To some extent, the findings that females are better in reading habits and outperformed their male counterparts were a captivating issue to do this research with, and this is the fourth rationale for their choice.

For the College had no third year by the time the data was taken, purposive sampling, which Clarke et al. (2005, p) claims is "the most successful technique" was applied to 34 female students in the rest batches. Their sample sizes were determined by the theoretical saturation principle (Flick, 2014). To reach the point, the data was collected and analyzed iteratively, switching back and forth

during the processes. The saturation was met as mentions of criteria became increasingly repetitive. The students had distinct sizes from one given year level to another. Then a proportional quota sampling was used to distribute the samples into the batches proportionally (e.g., to ensure sample representativeness).

Trustworthiness and Consistency

For this study, the format of the contents and structures of the instruments were modeled on the instruments of others (e.g., Annable, 2017; Moniek et al., 2020), but the order of the items within a given tool is more of our logical reasoning and experience of how they should be. To assess their dependability, the tools were piloted (Ronald et al., 2024). Isaac & Michael (1995) recommend sample sizes of 10 to 30 participants, and we trialed with 10 randomly chosen law female students. This helped to fix issues such as clarity, organization and length of the items. The modified versions were used for the main study. To make our study credible, we also tried best to collect and present accurate, rich, unbiased accounts of data as revealed to us, and as experienced by our participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Nowell, et al 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004). An almost 16 weeks engagement in the data collection process, staying in the setting presumably enabled us to realize the goal. Building trust and rapport between our respondents and us, we also feel that we were able to secure data that would translate in to accurate findings (Creswell, 2014). The accuracy of the analyses and findings was further checked through member-checks and external audits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given their sizes, the member-checking was done with some informants whose datasets were used in the study to answer the research questions, and where we felt unconfident on the accuracy of the transcriptions and analyses, but no inaccuracy reports were received. Two experienced PhD candidates assisted in auditing the transcripts, and we also got comments on the analyses, interpretations and conclusions of the study. Attempts were also made to prove the consistency of the analysis and findings across various researchers and different studies (Gibbs, 2007). Besides, much effort was exerted to describe the processes of our work in details so that future researchers might trace them (e.g., to replicate in similar contexts) incase they wish to do so (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, justifications for why and how we used certain theory, methods, analyses (Koch, 1994) was explained at each stage, hoping that our audiences would understand the rationales behind the decisions and assumptions made (Nowell, et al., 2015).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Three semi-structured instruments were triangulated to collect the data. One-on-one interview was used to get in-depth responses of the participants. Focus group discussions elicited a broad area of data covering their pre- and the while-university self-directed reading habits in context of the aforementioned objectives of this paper. For the same purpose, self-completed written reflections guide allowed opportunities to collect data requiring complete, detailed reflections which the format of the rest instruments would not support, and considered time-consuming, or boring, and thus leading to unwillingness on the part of informants. Additionally, the guide was expected to grant freedom and flexibility for the researched, while at the same time minimizing the data collectors' intrusion, thus maintaining positionality. The questions in all the tools are similar but they vary in number of items and level of details/sub-questions. The written self-reflection contain the largest number of items each with open-ended prompts (e.g., the Hows?, Whys?), to allow the participants to personally read and reflect on them in detail within a week. To give better context for analyses and interpretations of the data required to answer the research questions, the guide included background data. This was in part made based on Pallant's (2011, p., 53) advice: "In studies involving human participants, it is useful to collect information on the number of people or cases in the sample …education level, and any other relevant background information." Of the available law females (34), 25 of them willingly filled out paper-based self-reflection guide and returned them to representatives of each class. Thus, this study determined that their ages, ranging from 19 to 23, with most of them attended good schools, and had good reading motivations and positive attitudes. Many of them come from urban, educated families' with good reading culture.

The informants were contacted through the College personnel and law female representatives at their setting. Those interested in the study provided their names and phone numbers for follow-up contact, typically for one-on-one interviews. In order to encourage them to participate, they were informed that the interview would take not more than 60 minutes. Besides this, refreshments (Parlette & Howard, 2010) and mobile card gifts were incentivized to compensate them. As with refreshment, the groups were invited to coffee and/or tea. This was used as a platform to encourage the exchange of natural/casual conversations, thereby creating a more relaxed environment.

The interview took place in legal female students' office owing to their preference. Notes were taken during the interviews to supplement the interview records, to document the observations (e.g., of the relevant non-verbal signals noted as the interviews unfold) and to keep a back up incase the recording system fails (Mack, et al., 2005), or the interviewees were uninterested to be audioed. Actually, system failure happened while moderating one of the group interviews and we kept extensive notes as complementary data. As Dornyei (2007) correctly argues, "It is very difficult to get someone who is both competent and ready to engage in this time-consuming activity", so the present researchers conducted both one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The interview data were recorded with MiPad voice recorder. Then, the recorded data were coded. The coded data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the six procedures developed by Nowell, et al. (2017).

Largely, themes were generated from the data but the presentation of the results and discussions arising out of the data were organized around the two research questions above. The themes generated from the final codes were categorized under various themes and sub-themes. To ensure the quality of the analysis, data reduction, data display and data category strategies (Cohen et al., 2007) were also followed. For example, while analyzing the informants responses, two major themes emerged across the whole datasets, and the matching data were reduced to these emergent categories, to enhance readability, and to do further rigorous analyses and interpretations. Moreover, transcripts and analyses were done in line with ethical issues.

Results

The importance of past self-directed reading habits for university education

Here the students claimed to have had a base for the habits of reading developed since their childhoods, and that thought to have importance for their learning and their dream professions. For example, many of them commented that the materials they enjoyed reading mainly had no direct relationship with their academic and career ambitions but thought "the materials supported them in different ways." What Hasu and Feriha thought to be the direct effect of their self-directed reading in particular was critical thinking skills. Read the datasets taken from their interview responses consequently:

> *For example, I acquired critical thinking from it. Reading self-help books enrich critical thinking. ... This is essential for learning. And most of what we learn in law needs critical thinking. My reading habits helped me to view things in a multidimensional way. What we call critical thinking. When we entered law, we noticed this kind of thing more often. It has a connection with critical thinking. Being critical in turn helped me to understand subjects well.*

Both Hasu and Feriha had the idea that the critical thinking skills they acquired believed to be essential for their current area of study (law). Feriha perceived to have tested such skills in practice, and that they assisted her to view things from multiple angles and to internalize law subjects. On her part, Yabs remembered using (at home and school) Wi-Fi to download and read materials of her preferences (e.g., to review books) as a result of which she said to have learnt how to analyze and evaluate materials. Similarly, Rachas said that her parents used to encourage her to write reflections on and evaluations of the books she was reading, and she recalled that "…Now, there is some effect of it." For these readers, it could be said that their previous self-directed reading habits enabled them to acquire the skills of analyses, syntheses and evaluations of information/materials read. Not only this, their existing readings also thought to develop other life skills. For example, when Hasu was asked

whether she perceived her self-directed reading habits would prepare her for the expected job, she responded 'Yes' unequivocally. As an evidence for this, she responded that her prior reading content preferences mainly reflected the multifaceted aspects of life (e.g., social, occupational, spiritual, etc). When asked to clarify the reasons for the choices, she responded:

> Life is not academics only," and "We won't work on uniform things. We meet and work with different people. We find people following different religions.

This reflection would indicate that Hasu was conscious of the workplace behaviors, relationships and duties beforehand and getting herself ready for future coping mechanisms (Erdem, 2015). In other words, she was mentally and psychologically getting her ready at the College so that she might lead a successful professional life. On the other hand, Birukt and Yerus indicated that they used to read various contents during schools, most of which were large volume materials. Here follows Birukt's response in this regard:

> I like reading long story-based fictions. And my reading of lengthy books, I would say, reading much doesn't bore me for a longer time now…. I don't feel impatient. Mindset books change our minds and thinking, especially about the importance of goal-setting.

Here Brukt's responses appear to emphasize that her habits of reading lengthy materials in the past helped her to develop patience and stamina to stay reading for longer times at LC. Yerus shared Birukt's perception. Importantly, Graham (2013) states that "…effective legal analyst and writer requires practice and patience" (p, xi), and thus confirming the view of the respondents. Experiences also witness that students who have endurance to stay on the task of reading can increase the likelihood of reading amount, and better performances are highly likely. For example, prior findings revealed that the amount of reading is predictive of students' reading ability, overall performance and achievement (e.g., Winberg, 2022). In her extract above, Brukt also viewed that her self-directed reading habits benefitted her to be flexible, thoughtful and goal-oriented. In fact, some educationalists witness these to be among the qualities of successful students. They are flexible to change minds, or to take risks for their learning, if need be. At the same, Brukt and many other informants who claimed to read lengthy materials were to do with fictions (e.g., the novels). Although reading such kinds of materials as part of their leisure activities is presumably meant to have fun, but that could also positively affect their academic performance (Parlette & Howard, 2010). Yerus also said to have acquired oral fluency/communication skills due to her participation in school literacy contest that others (e.g. Bets, Fen, and Feriha) claimed to have the exposure, too. Researches on reading habits (e.g., by Rabaud et al., 2018) would approve that reading prompts interpersonal communication. Here is what Yerus has to say:

> There were three programs in a week. On Mondays, we were required to prepare and report news. On Wednesdays, we were expected to present book reviews. On Thursdays, we were required to read entertaining issues and present them. …I believe that this has helped me a lot.

This shows that the school created a positive reading atmosphere more likely to impact their habits of reading which may translate into their academic performances and enrich them to qualify for the work world at HU. For the school program, Yerus said: "Reading too much was expected of us highly." This experience actually might foster her ability to read the bulk of reading materials on law in the University and achieve progress in her self-education and associated benefits.

The importance of self-directed reading practices for future career

The participants had affirmative perceptions about the importance of their present self-directed readings in their education, and readiness at the College for the career. For example, Hasu said to have read both academic and non-academic materials extensively. Moreover, she talked about using Internet oftentimes to read widely around legal-based materials. Like Hasu, Aminch stated that she accessed Internet to download relevant and latest law books meant to read at her conveniences. In LC, Feriha liked to read "current law-related news, new arrivals and history" mostly whenever she went

online. Hasu particularly resorted to Internet to make up gaps in her lecture notes, attributed to the lecturers' instructional approaches. Here is what she said:

> *The lecturers have the trend of 'bulking up' lectures. Most of the time, they didn't point out the main point/topical idea correctly. Searching for the key point/main point on the Internet I read. Once I have grasped the key point and internalized it, I would go back to reading the 'wider' ones.*

As shown in the responses, the participants access/download Internet resources related to their law discipline. Evidently, Internet is used a strategy to get gist of lecture notes/to supplement lectures '(Hasu), to download updated law books (Aminch), to read recent law information (Feriha). Despite the differences in the volume of material, or specific purpose, the results for these participants witness that the primary intentions would be to facilitate their performance in law courses. On the other hand, "In the future, all what we do won't be identical. We will work with different people, so my reading habits contribute…." is the response Hasu gave to clarify that her present self-directed reading habits was also meant to prepare her for on-job requirements. Feriha also shared the expectations of Hasu as follows:

> *Law education requires reading a lot… Mostly we are expected to be good lawyers or judges…and this demands reading widely. Reading today makes our future job easier. And this is the culture of law. We need to read more yet. On her part, Rachas pointed out the following: … Unless you have some kind of reading base, it affects the job you want to do. You have to know what the case/accusations are likely to be about, what generates it, and the like. … You cannot represent your clients well. For the future job, we are even required to do more aggressive reading. Reading habits have effects on education as well as future careers.*

Overall, the responses indicate that being a good lawyer and judge, and law field in general needs reading broadly and critically, updating oneself from different sources. For both purposes, the results further expose that law students should build firm foundations of their reading habits at LC. In this regard, Tigy shared the optimism and asserted that, Reading is a must for academic performance. My reading habits of today are a base for my future career. I assume that my current reading is a preparation for the forthcoming thing. I think it enhances my research ability. Here Tigy underlines the necessity of having reading habits for academic performance and hoped that reading habits would benefit her in the future life, including job. In sum, these females at least in principle recognized that their present and past self-directed reading habits are essential for better performances in their academic and prospective careers. Conversely, the majority of respondents were either unhappy with or did not believe they were in the habits of reading (in terms of intensity, variety, frequency and time availability) in LC by then. Given facilities (e.g., Internet, library) in university, we found this to be against our expectations, and we were interested to raise further questions. Among the responses garnered, Feriha expressed that she was reading and writing better and made a big progress in her skills and thinking capacity in the past than when she was in LC.

With reassessment of her readings over the four/five years in HU, Feriha regretted missing important qualities one would get by reading books, which in her view, had a lot to do with law education. As she was one of the would-be law graduates, this resentment might be triggered by the feeling of, for example, incompetence for the job(s) she was longing for. Conceptually, the viewpoint of Racha's was more alike:

> *Now we are more used to PowerPoint-based reading. And we are habited to looking for shorter versions to do assignments, or prepare for exams, and compete with others pretending to be smart.*

Here, in principle, using PowerPoint as a medium is not a problem. But their formats usually suit shorter versions (s), so they de-contextualize the wider concepts of the original information organized as part of a book, for example. Then, if the students rely on them for much of the

College/course requisites and feel 'satisfied' or learn that there is no need to read further beyond, shallow and shorter forms of reading habits are likely to prevail (Delgado et al., 2018). In case of Racha, she appeared to think that their present-day reading habits (e.g., reading shorter texts) were also shaped by technology-assisted instructional mode of lecturers. Yet she sounded unconfident and frustrated that this mode of reading is unlikely to assist in their better performances. Yabs and Tigy too, felt incompleteness with their ongoing self-directed reading habits but were optimistic about the importance of the habits for the said goals. Yabs hoped that her reading habits would empower her to become a better person, a lawyer or one who gets employed in international organizations. For this sake, Yabs admitted that reading research articles and books, and maintaining the habits is a necessity. In turn, this would have implications for the lecturers and the College at large, for instance, to create awareness raising activities, to give assignments and tests that encourage students to read beyond/around the power point-based lectures.

Moreover, what most of the participants thought to be impediments to reinforcing their present reading habits were being too busy. Azad (2019) and Spencer (2004) recognize this scenario. Law students are ''time-pressured and, in large numbers, not doing their reading''. One of the evidences cited in literatures is that the reading materials require higher cognitive skills and extensive reading habits to understand and perform better (Spencer, 2004, p, 9). From our experiences as instructors we also know that students, including those in law fields are required to be knowledgeable and 'experts' at least in the courses for which they were enrolled in the university. Then, they have to do interim assignments, case debriefings, debates (moot court debates) and take tests, including exit exams hoped to serve them as credentials for national-level requirements and largely for the workforce. This again needs scheduling extra sessions to train and/or revise the key areas in their disciplines hoping that they will be able to perform well and achieve better outcomes. Feeling overwhelmed with the tasks of reading, the learners' complaining about 'lack of time', therefore, started to loom up. On the other hand, our participants' actions and personalities, especially due to the new technology have been found to have fair shares in competing with their reading time. For example, Tigy, Yash, Mah, and Fen said that they were reading much during school times partly because they avoided keeping personal phones with them mostly due to restrictions by their parents and/or schools. But, they owned the devices as they came to HU, and more options (e.g., free access to WiFi) were available to them in the campus.

Here evidences from their datasets further indicated their interests particularly in social media for enjoyment far outbalanced the reading they should have engaged in. This may lead to bad reading habits whose outcomes could be difficulty with academic courses (Lowe, 1984), and their legal careers which essentially require nurturing deep and wide reading. In fact, the majority of the participants expressed their will (some with indignation) to change their reading behaviors and read more as long as they were in the University to help them do better academically and professionally. Such kinds of belief and interest are predictive of taking learning more seriously throughout their lives (Huang et al., 2014; Nathanson et al., 2008; Rabaud et al., 2018; Wielkiewicz & Meuwissen, 2014), implying future research to consider this area for further informed outcomes.

Discussion

The study suggested that female students' past reading habits they acquired overtimes had highly contributed to their present-time academic performances and preparation for their next jobs. For example, many of them commented that the materials they enjoyed reading mainly had no direct relationship with their academic and career ambitions but thought "the materials supported them in different ways." Here existing findings found positive link between the materials read regardless of whether the materials are related or not and performance and achievements of students (e.g., Medina and Villarreal, 2020), confirming the assertion of the informants. More specifically, the results further indicated that the reading habits the participants had helped them to get critical thinking skills, and analytical skills.

Both ingredients are considered to have higher importance to law academic performance and legal professions, as claimed by previous researchers such as Balan et al (2019), Graham (2013) and

Christensen (2007). For instance, most of the law school reading works are taken from casebooks, which were not also intended for law students originally, and are often difficult to understand, so "Higher-performing students tend to…apply critical thinking to their reading" (Christensen, 2007, p). Such line of thought broadly endorses the cognitivists' philosophy of reading. Moreover, such skills are needed in legal analysis (Graham, 2013), suggesting the need for encouraging self-directed reading habits to enhance law females higher cognitive skills should the College expect them to have better performances. However, our participants complained that the trend in the college of law in HU does not encourage this culture.

When asked if they have reinforced their past or acquired present self-directed reading habits during the LC study, and (if so) they felt the habits had importance for their education and careers, the majority of results reveal that participants were either dissatisfied with or did not perceive they were in the habits of reading by then. Given facilities (e.g., Internet, library) and in the University, we found this to be against our expectations, and we were interested to raise further questions. In our questioning, we found students do read for both for academic and non-academic purposes using physical and Internet resources during the College days. The findings, thus, align with Rani (2022), Spencer (2004) , and Suresh and Thanuskodi (2022). However, when they compared their present-day and past reading habits, they thought that their previous reading encouraged deep and wide reading. In contrast, the results hinted that the present self-directed reading habits reinforced at LC meant for their learning in the College were more characterized by shallow, short and quick reading. The participants concern could be likened to what Delgado et al., (2018) call The *Shallowing Hypothesis*. This type of reading habit encourages superficial interactions and likely to cause difficulty to engage in more cognitively challenging modes of reading requiring sustained attention (Delgado et al., 2018). The results stating the reasons of most of the participants indicate that they were too busy during the college years. Azad (2019) and Spencer (2004) recognize this scenario. On the other hand, evidences from their datasets further point to their interests particularly in social media for enjoyment far outbalanced the reading they should have engaged in. That is, what the media psychology call *Hedonic Motive* (Oliver& Raney, 2011; Hakemulder and Mangen, 2024) seemed to overtake their reading habits and behaviors. This may lead to bad reading habits whose outcomes could be difficulty with academic courses (Lowe, 1984), and their legal careers which essentially require deep and wide reading. This would have implications for the law instructors and the College in general to revisit the instruction and/or curriculum for improving the reading habits of the students that commensurate with the intent of law education and legal posts.

Conclusions

The results provided data for the perceived importance of self-directed reading habits for academic performance and self-preparation for the professions of LC undergraduate females. It is perceived that being a good legal professional and studying law in general needs wide and deep reading habits, updating oneself from different sources. The themes revealed that participants' pre-university experiences gained from self-directed reading habits were perceived to have significance to their overall LC academic performances and legal professions they endeared to secure in the future. Because of their past reading habits, a sizable number of informants claimed to have acquired and developed higher levels of cognitive skills, knowledge and strategies applicable to their college-time performances. Critical thinking skills were regarded as highly important skills for law education and legal careers. Moreover, lots of them felt that they were managed to keep the self-directed readings in LC on a regular and consistent basis. Given the depth and breadth of their readings, almost all participants, however, thought that their HU based-reading habits fell short of the 'standard' for law courses and law learning purposes, and ultimately for the performances supposed to ensure their success academically and professionally. Unlike the self-directed reading habits they were accustomed to in the past, due to the academic-based reading culture in LC, and found themselves under time and institutional pressures to work primarily towards this goal. Yet the findings witnessed that individual female learners' behaviors (the 'inappropriate' dispense of reading time typically for technologies, e.g., social media) use at the expense of reading had fair shares in the thought pressures, and interference with maintaining the reading habits useful for their personal and institutional purposes.

The study of self-directed reading of students may contribute for current research to thrive the reading engagement and love for reading which is already at stake with the rise of digital technology. It was also learnt that COVID-19 pandemic increased importance of self-directed learning and lifelong learning, which would also imply the need for fostering self-directed reading habits among learners so that they may turn themselves to self-directed readers in similar situations of national and global challenge.

The participated law females had concerns that LC environment emphasized shallow, forced academic reading culture and overburdened them with related works, so they failed to read as widely and thoroughly as required to perform well. Thus, we recommend the College to encourage self directed reading habits, by creating opportunities alongside the regular, field-focused reading/learning curricula. Based on previous literature on self-directed reading habits, we also suggest future researchers to investigate the culture, practices and facilities of the higher education institutions for the promotion of self-directed reading habits for undergraduates improved performance in learning and self-preparation for the jobs.

The research outcomes also revealed that the law female learners' personal factors (e.g., their mismanagement of time for using modern technologies for purposes other than reading) highly competed with their reading time. Here, they should be reminded that they have to be time-wise and purposeful. Moreover, the College should make efforts to offer short-term trainings especially before they join the discipline. Alternatively, it may be good if a student owns manual that guides them to adjust their reading behaviors, or to learn how to strike balances among their independent reading lives intended (be it for personal, social and fun), and for their educations and future occupations, especially as they go online.

This research was conducted with the majority of female participants from urban and semi urban backgrounds. Future researchers may further conduct study to examine how their self-directed reading habits would influence the academic performances and intended legal professions of law females from diverse backgrounds (e.g., rural areas or involve as many as possible). Moreover, our study is a year-long cross-sectional study. However, existing writers urged that designs of reading habits to be longitudinal (Kim-brough, 1972; Lamme, 1976). We suggest future researchers to consider the latter. This might involve following a cohort of learners over four periods of their study in LC so as to understand how their self-directed reading habits impact their academic and preparedness for their careers during the years.

Reports of academic achievements, as measured by CGPA of students would also be essential to show whether the claims of the gains of self-directed reading habits reflected in their academic achievements, too. Nonetheless, our current work is focused on obtaining their views regarding the importance of their self-directed reading habits for their academic and careers and did not examine their actual achievements. Future work may find this as a gap to conduct correlation research.

Adinew Tadesse: Conceptualization, Research Design, Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation, Supervision, Reviewing and Editing, Validation.

Ethical Statement: The researchers secured permissions from Haramaya University and the target participants verbally and in writing. The participants were assured for the anonymities of their identities and confidentiality of the data. If not for places, their real names were replaced by pseudonyms in the transcripts and analyses to protect their identities (Creswell, 2009).

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Pre-Service Teachers' Opinions On Microteaching Course Practices

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the micro-teaching course, which is included in the teacher education curriculum under pedagogical content knowledge, by examining prospective teachers' perceptions regarding in-class practices. The research employed a case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group of the research consists of fifteen volunteer teacher candidates taking the elective micro teaching course at a state university. The findings indicate that the participants generally perceived the course as effective and productive, reporting significant individually and professional gains. On a individually level, they highlighted increased self-confidence in their capabilities, as well as improvements in communication, self-assessment, and critical thinking skills. On a professional level, they emphasized the development of classroom management, lesson planning, and time management skills, along with an increased awareness of the importance of nonverbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that micro-teaching practices provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge, engage in self-reflection, and identify areas for improvement prior to entering the profession. Therefore, it is recommended that the micro-teaching course be included as a compulsory component in teacher education programs, with class sizes limited to no more than ten students per group to ensure its effectiveness.

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Introduction

Teacher education is a field that continuously maintains its significance and undergoes updates worldwide. It is teachers who have the knowledge and take the responsibility for keeping this knowledge up-to-date and transferring it, conduct education and teaching, and serve as pioneers of development and change. Therefore, it can be suggested that teacher education is a priority area. However, defining a teacher only as a knowledge transmitter would be an incomplete perspective. Today, the ideal human model to be raised is an individual with a variety of skills rather than a knowledge recipient. An individual's ability to adapt to the social structure in which they live is closely linked to teacher education.

The main objective of a teacher education program is to equip teacher candidates with the ability to demonstrate accurate and effective teaching strategies and experiences (Ismail, 2011). In teacher education programs designed to prepare pre-service teachers for their profession, providing them with opportunities to gain practical experience in their fields is just as important as acquiring theoretical knowledge. Numerous studies in the literature confirm this information (Brent, Wheatley & Thomson, 1996; Dwayne, 1967; Gordan, 1996; Klinzing, 2002; Smylie & Conyers, 1991; Wasserman, 1993).

In teacher education programs, microteaching is a course that aims to equip pre-service teachers with effective teaching skills and experience before they enter the profession. Microteaching practices allow pre-service teachers to put the theoretical knowledge they have acquired into practice. Microteaching practices originated in the early 1960s at Standford University in the United States as an experimental study with students in an artificial classroom environment (Dwayne, 1967). Initially an experimental study, microteaching practices evolved into scientific content by creating a theoretical background (Murray, 1996). Today, microteaching is utilized to help pre-service teachers develop their teaching skills and gain experience in real classroom environments (Amobi, 2005).

Microteaching is defined in various ways in the literature. For instance, Jerich defines microteaching as a teaching method conducted in simplified teaching environments and supported by effective feedback on the teaching skills of pre-service teachers. Ananthakrishnan (1993) explains microteaching using a different analogy: He likened traditional classroom lecturing to swimming in the deepest part of the pool while comparing microteaching to an opportunity to practice in shallower and less intimidating waters. According to Quinn (2000), microteaching is a small group activity that can be effective for attaining skills. Küçükahmet (2007) calls microteaching a laboratory method that aims to simplify the complexity of teaching and learning processes in a real classroom environment. Further, Görgen (2003) explains microteaching as a method that facilitates the acquisition of critical teacher behaviours within a simplified teaching setting. Aydın (2005) describes microteaching as an intensified teaching experience in which student numbers are reduced and the scope of teaching is narrowed. Uzunboylu and Hürsen (2011) define microteaching as a technique that enables pre-service teachers to overcome their concerns, fears, and shortcomings related to the profession. In the light of all these definitions, it can be suggested that microteaching practices help create an environment where pre-service teachers can adapt the theoretical knowledge they have acquired before starting the profession to the actual classroom environment.

Revealing the relationship between theory and practice, microteaching has gained a prominent place in preparing pre-service teachers for their teaching careers. The primary goal of microteaching practices for the teacher candidate is not to convey a subject to the students but to apply a technique (Madike, 1980). Therefore, microteaching occupies a key place in training for the teaching profession since it provides pre-service teachers with the opportunity to integrate theory and practical knowledge. Studies on this subject highlight this integration (Bell, 2007; Dennick, 1998; Hall & Leveridge, 2006; I'anson, Rodrigues, & Wilson, 2003; Kinchin & Alias, 2005; Mellon & Dence, 1971; Kpanja, 2001; Klinzing, 2002; Metcalf, Hammer, & Kahlich, 1996; Saunders, Gall, Nielson, & Smith, 1975; Simbo, 1989). Through microteaching practices, pre-service teachers can refine their specific teaching skills by delivering short presentations to their peers (Orlich et al., 1990).

In faculties of education, the microteaching course is offered as an elective course for teaching professional knowledge. The purpose of this course is to provide teacher candidates with experience in turning the theoretical knowledge acquired before service into practice. This study aimed to obtain the opinions of teacher candidates enrolled in the microteaching course regarding their in-class practices and explore their views on the benefits of these practical applications.

Purpose of the Study

The study mainly aims to assess the effectiveness of the microteaching course by obtaining the opinions of pre-service teachers who participated in the microteaching course, which is an elective course within the scope of teaching professional knowledge, about in-class practices. To achieve this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the opinions of pre-service teachers regarding the concept of microteaching?

2. How do pre-service teachers believe the practices conducted within the scope of the microteaching course may impact their professional lives?

3. What are the suggestions of pre-service teachers about microteaching practices?

Research Methodology

The study was conducted at a state university during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year with students enrolled in the microteaching course, which is an elective course within the scope of teaching professional knowledge. A case study design, which is a qualitative research method, was used for this research. A case study is described as an in-depth study of a specific system, such as an activity, event, process, or individual, based on comprehensive data collection (Creswell, 2008: 476). In this research, the case study method was used to gather the opinions of teacher candidates about the microteaching course, offered as an elective course within the scope of teaching professional knowledge in the undergraduate program of faculties of education.

Participants

The study group comprised fifteen volunteer teacher candidates who took an elective microteaching course at a state university during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Four participants from each of the early childhood education, social studies education, and science education departments and three from the psychological counselling and guidance department participated in the study. While five of the participants were male, ten were female. A total of eleven participants were third-year students, whereas four were fourth-year students. Having participants from different departments allowed the subject to be explored from various perspectives. Demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information about the participants

Participant	Gender	Year	Department
Engin	Male	4	Social Studies Education
Emel	Female	3	Social Studies Education
Derya	Female	3	Social Studies Education
Suna	Female	4	Social Studies Education
Esin	Female	3	Science Education

Gönül	Female	3	Science Education
Ayşe	Female	4	Science Education
Deniz	Male	3	Science Education
Barış	Male	3	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
Bulut	Male	4	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
Onur	Male	3	Psychological Counselling and Guidance
Hande	Female	3	Early Childhood Education
Hediye	Female	3	Early Childhood Education
Gül	Female	3	Early Childhood Education
İrem	Female	3	Early Childhood Education

Data Collection and Analysis

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants. After reviewing the literature on microteaching and microteaching practices, the researcher developed the questions for the semi-structured interview form. The interview questions were refined based on the feedback from three experts in educational programs. The experts made no additions or deletions to the research questions; they only offered suggestions regarding the language of expression. The interview questions were finalized after conducting preliminary interviews with two pre-service teachers who were outside the participant group. The interviews took place in the faculty room on the day and time deemed suitable by the participants. Written and verbal consent was obtained from the participants, and they were asked eight questions in the interview. To explore their experiences with the microteaching course in detail, they were asked questions such as the definition of the concept of microteaching, their overall impressions of microteaching, the contributions of microteaching practices to their personal and professional development, the challenges they faced during the course, and their suggestions.

The content analysis method was used to analyse the data obtained from the research. The participants' statements were transcribed, and then the data were coded and organized into sub-themes. Coding is defined as the process of analysing data by breaking it into pieces (Creswell, 2013). To ensure the reliability of the research, the researcher had an independent field expert code the data and compared data to develop sub-themes. The overlap in the codes for the themes was assessed using the formula "Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The average reliability for the themes was found to be 92% (range: 75-100). Further analyses were made until the researcher and expert reached a consensus, which helped ensure consistency in the research.

Findings

As a result of analysing the data collected from interviews with the teacher candidates regarding microteaching course practices, five themes were identified. These themes include Microteaching as a Concept, Our Course: Microteaching, Benefits of the Course, Challenges Faced, and Suggestions.

Microteaching as a concept

Microteaching is defined as a small group activity that can serve as an effective tool for acquiring skills (Quinn, 2000). In this study, teacher candidates who were introduced to the microteaching course were asked to define the concept of microteaching. The teacher candidates defined microteaching as a laboratory method, a mini lesson, and an opportunity to experience teaching skills. The subthemes under this theme are presented in Figure 1.
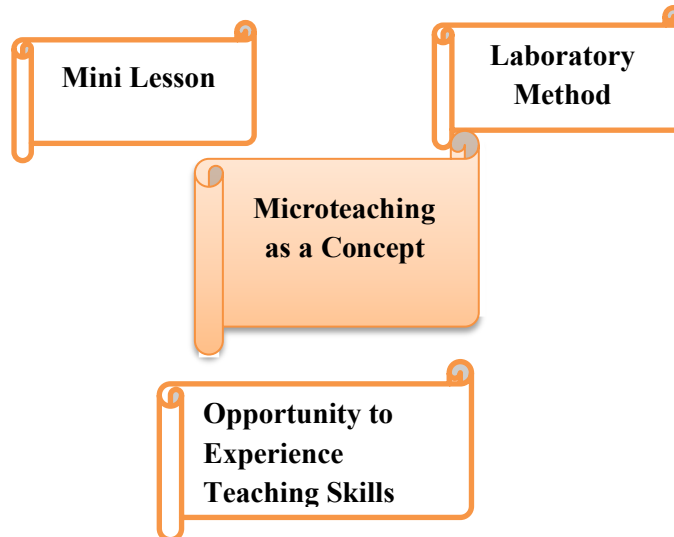
Figure 1. The Theme of Microteaching as a Concept and Its Subthemes

Pre-service teachers described the concept of microteaching as a laboratory method, defining it as mini lessons in which students could practice teaching skills. Their views on this subject are summarized as follows:

Esin explained the concept of microteaching by likening microteaching to a laboratory, saying, "*I think microteaching is a laboratory method. Concrete scientific experiments are conducted in the laboratory, and try-do-learn is hidden in this concept...*" A similar definition was echoed by Hande, explaining, "*…It is a laboratory method that aims to simplify the complexity of teaching methods…*"

Derya defined microteaching as preparing mini lessons in which she gained experience, saying, "*Microteaching involves preparing mini lessons with lesson plans. It provides short-term experiences before real-life teaching applications.*" Bulut had a similar definition: "*I can define it as a minimized version of real teaching.*"

Most of the pre-service teachers recognized microteaching as an opportunity to experience teaching skills. For instance, Emel emphasized this aspect in her definition by saying, "*It is a method used by teachers to gain experience by improving their teaching skills...*" Barış also emphasized the experience of teaching skills, stating, "*Microteaching is a method aimed at enhancing our in-class teaching skills as the pre-service teachers and provide preliminary experience…*".

Our Course: Microteaching

The teacher candidates were asked about their views on the microteaching course practices. Their feedback on the course was categorized into four sub-themes: practical experiences, first rehearsal, effective lesson, and adaptation (Figure 2).
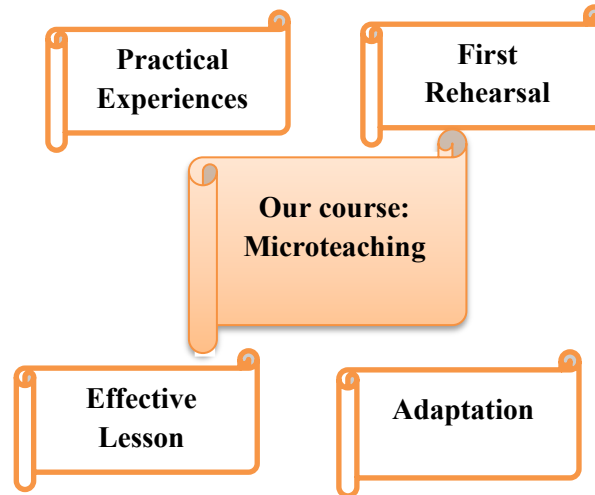
Figure 2. The theme of Our Course: Microteaching and its subthemes

In the theme of Our Course: Microteaching, teacher candidates shared their impressions about the microteaching course. They emphasized that the microteaching course practices were like a rehearsal for their future teaching profession and described the course as productive. They stated that they had their first teaching experience, which helped them adapt to their profession. The views of the teacher candidates on this subject are given below.

Barış noted, "*In general, the course allowed us to put the theoretical parts of the educational sciences classes taken throughout the university into practice….*" Ayşe commented, "*…Repeatedly recording and rewatching videos already gave us great experiences. We practiced as if we were practicing sewing; it was a rewarding experience….*" These statements illustrate that the teacher candidates saw the course as an opportunity to gain practical experience.

In addition to viewing the microteaching course as a means to gain practical experience, the pre-service teachers likened the pre-professional experience to a rehearsal before the stage. For instance, Bulut portrayed the lesson process by stating, "*…I can describe it as a good rehearsal for those of us who have not fully gained the experience of teaching yet …I think we had rehearsal for our profession before going on stage…*" Gül elaborated on this idea by stating, "*We rehearsed lesson planning and implementation processes before the actual teaching; in fact, these are the last rehearsals before going on stage…*"

Pre-service teachers also described the microteaching course as an efficient one, because it allowed them to apply much of the knowledge they had acquired: Damla noted, "*…We evaluated each component of the course separately, such as introduction and exploration phases, and since it emphasized the aspects we needed to pay attention to, I would define it as a useful and productive course.*" In addition, Engin evaluated the effectiveness of the course by saying, "*It was a very productive course in terms of teaching professional knowledge…*"

While some pre-service teachers defined the microteaching course as an effective and efficient course to gain experience, they also asserted that they experienced the process of adaptation to the profession within the scope of the course. For example, Hediye described the course saying, "*…It provided us with the opportunity to learn materials, games, and experiments by doing research and get prepared as if we were appointed and going to school, which I think will allow us to adapt to the profession more easily. I feel like we will not waver anymore…*"

Suna reported, "*I can define the course in one sentence: it is a complete adaptation course. It blanked out the question of how to adjust to the profession, the subject matter, the students, and everything else…*"

Similarly, Gönül noted, "…*The course literally explores what the adaptation process to teaching is like.*"

Benefits of the Course

Pre-service teachers were asked about the contributions of the microteaching course practices and their gains from it. They emphasized that the course contributed not only to their professional development but also to their personal development. Based on their answers, this theme was explored under two sub-themes: personal gains and professional gains (Figure 3). They highlighted the personal gains as enhanced self-confidence in their abilities, improved communication skills, and better self-assessment skills, and critical thinking skills. Professionally, they noted that they acquired classroom management, planning, and time management skills and developed professional awareness, including the importance of using gestures and facial expressions.

For example, Ayşe emphasized that the course was effective in boosting self-confidence in the profession by stating, "…*I gained self-confidence. I was not sure of myself before, but now I say I can do it. I think it is important to be able to say this for every profession…*". Likewise, as a personal gain, Suna reported that thanks to the course, she could say, "…*I now trust myself….*"

Most pre-service teachers touched on the change in their self-assessment skills as a personal gain. For example, Gönül expressed, "…*It is vital to be able to see yourself. We always used to evaluate others, but now I have seen myself and realized that I always need to see myself to make progress; and I think this is the biggest contribution of the course: self-assessment…*"

The pre-service teachers reported that they recognized they needed to pay attention to their communication skills and learned to approach issues critically. Esin, Barış, and Damla shared their thoughts on this issue: "…*Actually, I learned what aspects I should focus on, but I also learned to think from different perspectives. I learned that even when criticizing my friend, I should create an argument in my mind. I should not just say things as they came to me… Briefly, I developed the ability to approach critically. I always heard the term 'critical'; but I just understood what it means…*"

Similarly, Barış stated, "*Thanks to this practice, I improved my communication, critical thinking, and self-assessment skills, which contributed to my overall personal development.*" Likewise, Damla mentioned, "…*I was able to evaluate myself objectively, which is particularly important to overcome my shortcomings. I believe we developed a critical perspective by assessing ourselves from different angles. People used to talk about the importance of two-way communication in classroom management, but I figured out the significance of communication in this course. Even my interactions with my classmates increased, and I was surprised by my own progress.*"
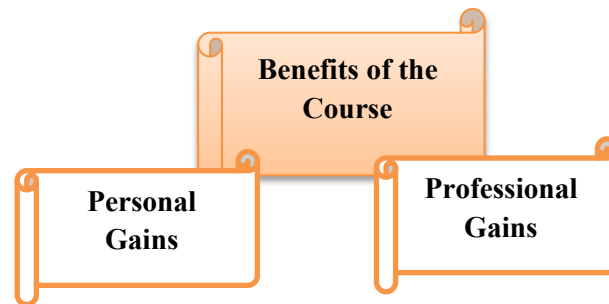
The pre-service teachers stressed that the greatest gain of the course was its professional impact. First of all, they emphasized that the course fostered professional awareness and underscored its effectiveness in helping them gain practical experience in classroom management, time management, and planning. They also learned the importance of using gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Below are the views of the pre-service teachers.

Hediye reported, "…*I clearly understood why it was a problem to teach with my back to the students on the board. I learned how to divide 40 minutes; I now know how much time I should allocate to different stages of the lesson. And, of course, the tone of voice is very important. At first, even I almost did not hear my voice, and adjusting your tone of voice requires practice…*"

Derya explained, "…*I definitely learned lesson planning and how to utilize every minute of the lesson. In other words, I improved my skills in classroom management, planning, and time management. I realized what it means to be a teacher. I recognized how even our facial expressions can affect students. In this respect, the contribution of the course is great.*"

Onur indicated, "*The course greatly contributed to my experience in classroom management, teaching strategies, and communication with students.*" Deniz explained, "*Actually, we gained a*

complete professional awareness. I learned how to communicate with students and how to use my hands and arms. I never thought that teaching with your hands in your pockets would have negative impacts. I mean, even those are important. I can even say that I realized that the most important aspect is planning and time management…"

Figure 3. The Theme of Benefits of the Course and Its Subthemes

Challenges Faced

The pre-service teachers reported having the most difficulty during the video recording of their microteaching practices. They mentioned that they got excited and felt anxious because of the video shooting and feared receiving negative criticism. Based on these findings, the subthemes "video shooting anxiety" and "fear of feedback" were developed under the broader theme of challenges faced (Figure 4).
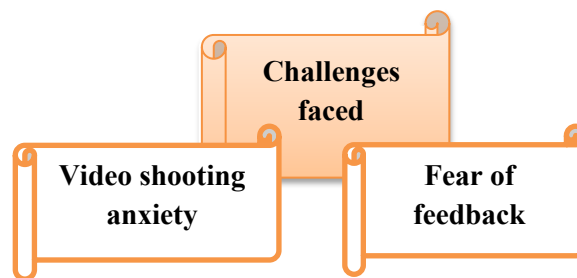
Figure 4. The Theme of Challenges Faced and Its Subthemes

The pre-service teachers expressed that they were anxious and nervous due to being in front of the camera. They added that they could not act very comfortably and even had difficulty in implementing their plans. Gönül, Emel, Gül, and İrem made shared their experiences regarding this issue:

Gönül said, "…*I mean, I was very nervous, especially during the first video shoot. I was in a lather, which, of course, affected my use of appropriate gestures and expressions. Even my voice trembled, but I can say that it was a little better in the subsequent shoots*."

Emel commented, "*I was nervous, especially during the first shoot; I had certain tension and difficulty because of the camera. I can say that at first, I focused on the camera and not the class. I do not know if it would have been better if it had been a secret video recording…*"

Gül mentioned, "…*I was nervous while being recorded, which I believe was a challenge, because the things I had envisaged in the lesson plan sometimes took on different phrases and expressions in the videos due to nervousness…*"

İrem specified, "*Oh teacher, I literally experienced video shooting anxiety at first, then it decreased. During the first shoot, my hands trembled because of nervousness, and I forgot what I was going to say, which made me even more nervous. I thought very seriously about it, but I'm actually not like that…*"

Most pre-service teachers feared receiving negative feedback and criticism, in addition to the anxiety of being recorded. For instance, Suna noted her fear of receiving negative feedback, saying, "*The purpose is to recognize our shortcomings, but I was worried that I would receive harsh criticism. It was actually good in a way, I mean, to do better, but I did not want to be criticized.*" Similarly, Esin expressed her concerns in this regard, stating, "*It is very valuable to be evaluated by our teacher and classmates after the recording for our development. However, of course, I had concerns like what if something negative was said, what if I made a mistake, or what if I embarrassed myself.*"

The pre-service teachers were asked about their suggestions for microteaching course practices. Overall, they emphasized that the course was very productive and should be offered as a compulsory course since it helped them gain awareness about the profession while underlining the necessity of much smaller class sizes. Based on the feedback from the pre-service teachers, the sub-themes "Compulsory Course" and "Class Size" were developed under the broader theme of suggestions (Figure 5).
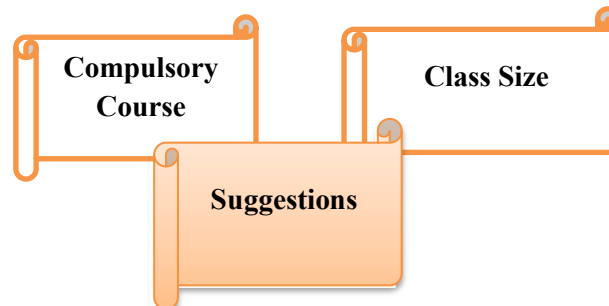
Figure 5. The Theme of Suggestions and Its Subthemes

The microteaching course is offered as an elective professional knowledge course in faculties of education. However, the pre-service teachers from various departments who have taken the course stated that the course was a productive and high-quality experience that should be taken before starting their careers and that every pre-service teacher should have this experience. They added that they wanted it to be offered as a compulsory course. Ayşe, Engin, and İrem shared their thoughts on this matter as follows:

Ayşe mentioned, "*This course has greatly contributed to us; we learned how and when to use many of the theories we had been taught. We even learned that we needed to adjust the tone of voice. I wish all students in the education faculty would take the course and it would be mandatory.*"

Engin expressed, "*Actually, I took this course without realizing it, but I am glad I did, because I think it was a course that should be compulsory. This can be my suggestion: this course should be compulsory…*"

İrem expressed, "*It should be compulsory, not elective. I informed my classmates about what we did in this course, and they all regretted not taking it this semester.*"

A total of twenty-one pre-service teachers from various disciplines attended the microteaching course. Class size may be considered adequate or even small for many courses at the university. However, it can be stated that small class size is an important variable in applied courses in order to allocate enough time to each student and conduct in-depth examinations within the limited class time. Since the pre-service teachers faced this problem during the course, they suggested that the class size should be reduced by half. For example, Deniz and Engin expressed their concerns about this matter.

Deniz reported, "*I wish we could divide the class into 5 or a maximum of 10 students. You had to cut a lot of time, and we had to shorten many topics due to time constraints. We added some of the things, thinking that we could pretend to do them, but we weren't able to implement them. If the class size had been smaller, we would have had enough time, and it would have been more productive…*"

Engin also highlighted the significance of small class sizes by stating, "*If there had been 10 students in the class, we would have had the chance to shoot more videos and evaluate them. Thus, my suggestion is to limit the class size.*"

Conclusion And Discussion

Microteaching is an empirically tested technique that closely examines the teaching process as a scaled-down teaching sample (Orlich et al., 1990). Included as an elective professional knowledge course in the faculties of education in Turkey, microteaching is of great importance in terms of developing the professional skills of pre-service teachers before they start their careers. It allows pre-service teachers to acquire basic skills such as course presentation, classroom management, and communication skills before being in a real classroom environment. Enabling pre-service teachers to put the theoretical knowledge they have acquired at the faculty into practice, the microteaching course prepares them for professional life.

In this study, which aimed to gather the opinions of students who had taken the microteaching course as an elective professional knowledge course offered in programs in the faculty of education regarding the in-class practices and effectiveness of the course, pre-service teachers defined the concept of microteaching as a laboratory method, mini lesson, and an opportunity to experience teaching skills. Similar descriptions are used for microteaching practices in the literature as well. For example, Allen and Ryan (1969) described microteaching as an educational approach that can be applied for the professional development of teachers before service (as cited in Benton-Kupper, 2001) and added that it is experiencing the teaching process before service. Similarly, in their definition, Cruickshank and Metcalf (1993:87) defined microteaching as mini-lesson practices by describing it as a minimized teaching that is made in a short time to a group of 3-5 individuals, highlighting that it enables pre-service teachers to perform their teaching skills. Küçükahmet (2007) compared microteaching to a laboratory designed to simplify the complexity of typical learning and teaching processes, stressing that pre-service teachers can gain experience. Based on these definitions, it can be asserted that pre-service teachers made correct inferences about the concept of microteaching.

While pre-service teachers defined the concept of microteaching as a laboratory method, mini lesson, and experience, they described the microteaching course as a productive lesson in which they gained practical experiences as the first rehearsal for adaptation to teaching. This perspective aligns with findings from various studies in the literature (Akalın, 2005; Amaobi, 2005; Benton&Kupper, 2001; Ceyhun & Karagölge, 2005; Erökten & Durkan, 2009; Ismail, 2011). Regarding the objectives of the microteaching course, it has been stated that pre-service teachers can attain teaching skills in appropriate learning environments in which they can have teaching experience before service (Allen&Ryan, 1969). Fernandez (2005) also highlighted that microteaching practices help pre-service teachers increase their in-class experiences during the teaching process. The pre-service teachers in the present study also defined the microteaching course as a productive course in which they gained practical experience. In another study, as emphasized by Ismail (2011), one of the objectives of an effective teacher education program is to ensure that pre-service teachers demonstrate effective teaching strategies and gain valuable experiences. In this respect, it can be suggested that the course achieved its intended goal.

The pre-service teachers stated that they made positive personal and professional gains thanks to the microteaching course practices. Regarding personal gains, they highlighted improvements in their self-confidence, communication skills, self-assessment skills, and critical thinking skills. For professional gains, they noted that they acquired classroom management, planning, and time management skills and developed professional awareness of the importance of using gestures and facial expressions. The characteristics stated by the pre-service teachers as personal and professional gains in the study align with the objectives of the microteaching course specified in the literature (Allen & Ryan, 1969; Brent & Thomson, 1996; Cruickshank & Metcalf, 1993; Fernandez, 2005; Kpanja, 2001). The pre-service teachers declared they gained self-confidence that they could become successful in the profession thanks to the practices in the course. Self-confidence, as defined by Akın (2007), refers to people's belief that they will successfully perform a certain activity and their trust in

their own judgment, ability, power, and decisions. The first condition for an individual to accomplish something is to believe in their own capabilities; in other words, success relies on self-confidence. It can be argued that pre-service teachers met the first condition for succeeding in their profession thanks to microteaching course practices. Likewise, the findings of the studies on microteaching practices in the literature indicated that in-class practices increase pre-service teachers' self-confidence (Amobi, 2005; Görgen, 2003; Ismail, 2011; Küçükoğlu et al., 2012; Kpanja, 2001; Şen, 2010).

Communication, the main function of which is to share feelings, thoughts, knowledge, and skills (Yalın, 2003), is undoubtedly one of the essential skills for a teacher. Teachers with effective communication skills can enhance their teacher characteristics by establishing positive relationships with students throughout the teaching process (Tümkaya, 2011). In this study, the pre-service teachers stated that they learned how to form bonds with students and what aspects to focus on, thanks to the microteaching course practices.

Self-assessment can be defined as the process of making a judgment about oneself. By asking a student who has performed a task to evaluate his/her own performance, the goal is to increase his/her awareness of the work done and share the responsibility of his/her own learning with the teacher. In this way, those who can self-assess their own performance acquire critical thinking skills by both criticizing their own performance and being criticized by others (Kösterilioğlu & Çelen, 2016). The basic premise of the microteaching course practices is that individuals evaluate their teaching skills by watching recordings of themselves. Those who can effectively evaluate and criticize themselves are likely to have gained self-assessment and critical thinking skills that are professionally required. In this sense, microteaching course practices can be claimed to have achieved their purpose. The literature also indicates a positive relationship between microteaching practices and pre-service teachers' self-assessment and critical thinking skills (Bilen, 2014; Schmitz & Schwarzer, 2000; Subramaniam, 2006; Üredi & Üredi, 2005; Yılmaz et al., 2004).

Pre-service teachers emphasized that the most significant benefit of the microteaching course was professional. For one thing, they stressed that the course enhanced their professional awareness and helped them gain practical experience in classroom management, time management, and planning. They also learned the importance of using gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice while teaching. The classroom is the area where teachers interact with students. It can be asserted that spending quality time in the classroom depends on the skills of the teacher. As declared by Sarıtaş (2003), a teacher must be both an instructor and an effective manager within the classroom. A teacher's responsibilities in the classroom include organizing and managing the learning environment and experiences; that is why, the teacher must know the principles and methods of classroom management (Aydın, 2007). Putting theoretical knowledge into practice or turning it into a skill requires time and experience. The teaching profession is also a profession of experience in this sense. Especially during the initial years of teaching, classroom management takes up teachers' time. Many young and inexperienced teachers may encounter various disciplinary problems in the classroom (Gordon, 1996). However, this research has shown that microteaching practices have provided pre-service teachers with the opportunity to experience the aspects they need to focus on for effective classroom management. Improved classroom management, in turn, brings about time management. Planning by foreseeing all kinds of positive and negative conditions that may arise in the classroom and achieving the course outcomes require careful planning and time management. In this respect, through the microteaching course, the pre-service teachers have realized the critical aspects they need to pay attention to in time management through the planning process.

The pre-service teachers were also asked about the challenges they faced during their microteaching course practices, and they stated that they had the most difficulty during the video recording. They mentioned that they felt anxious and nervous because of being recorded. Apart from the video recording, they also feared receiving negative feedback. One of the key components of microteaching practices is to record the candidate on video while they are teaching. However, not having encountered such a practice, the pre-service teachers got anxious. This situation also brings with it the need for stress management skills. They must cope with the challenges of standing in front of students in an actual classroom setting. Therefore, microteaching practices can be claimed to

prepare the pre-service teachers for this situation, too. As noted by Görkem (2003), the microteaching practice offers valuable experiences to pre-service teachers through a systematic approach and enables pre-service teachers to gain teaching skills in a low-risk environment by giving them the opportunity to manage their behaviours. In the literature, similar to the results of this research, problems such as the excitement of teaching in front of an audience and lack of experience are among the difficulties experienced in the classroom (Bilen & Görgen, 2003; Karadağ & Akkaya, 2013; Kılıç, 2010; Kuran, 2009; Küçükoğlu et al., 2012; Özdemir, 2016).

In addition, the pre-service teachers were asked for their suggestions to increase the efficiency of the microteaching course practices. While they generally emphasized that the course was very productive and should be made compulsory since it helped them develop awareness about the profession, they noted that the class size should be much smaller. A class size of more than fifteen students causes the video recording and evaluation processes to become rushed. More time or fewer students are required to make detailed comments and give constructive criticisms. Under normal conditions, microteaching practices are conducted in small groups of 4 to 10 people (Remesh, 2013). However, the course is an elective course in faculties of education, and a minimum of fifteen students is required to open the course.

In conclusion, applied courses are an important opportunity for pre-service teachers to gain the ability to apply the theoretical courses they have taken in the faculties over four years. Microteaching practices have been used since 1960 to help pre-service teachers transfer the theoretical knowledge they have acquired into skills (Higgins & Nicholl, 2003). Microteaching is an empirically tested process and a technique that allows teachers to closely examine many aspects of the teaching process (Çoban, 2015). Microteaching course practices in education faculties are also included in education programs for this purpose. In this study, it can be stated that thanks to the microteaching course practices, the pre-service teachers had the opportunity to get preliminary experience in teaching professional knowledge thanks to the practices they carried out in a simplified environment.

Recommendations

Enabling teachers to apply their knowledge before they enter the profession and giving them a chance to assess themselves and identify their weaknesses, microteaching practices allow pre-service teachers to address their deficiencies before starting their careers. Therefore, the microteaching course can be offered as a compulsory course in programs of the education faculties. To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the microteaching course, class sizes can be arranged in groups of 10 students.

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