

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES OF FEEDBACK PROCESS

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ABSTRACT: *In any teacher education program, the attention is always paid to the quality of feedback provided in the practicum courses as the cornerstone to improve future teachers' teaching performance. This includes the type of feedback provided by practicum supervisors, the timing and frequency of the feedback and the way of giving feedback. This study examines the perceptions of pre-service teachers studying at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC), University of Bahrain, about the quality of feedback received from their practicum supervisors. It also aims to find out to what extent pre-service teachers are familiar with the concept of feedback and which type (s) of feedback they prefer in improving their teaching practice. A quantitative and qualitative research method was used to answer the research questions. Data were collected using a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions for pre-service teachers who were taking TCPB 426 Teaching Practice 4 & Seminar course. The findings revealed that the participants demonstrated good level of awareness of the concept of feedback in addition to clear understanding of the role feedback plays in professional development. The quality of the feedback received from their supervisors was reported to be clear, straightforward and helpful in improving teaching performance. The findings could help in improving the quality of feedback by considering student teachers' needs and suggestions as well as in assisting supervisors, as decision makers, in making essential modifications to provide student teachers with more effective and constructive feedback.*

KEYWORDS: Feedback Process, Supervisors' Feedback, Practicum, Pre-Service Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Al Sohmani (2012) identifies school-based practicum feedback, offered in teacher education programs, as a highly important, influential and central component in helping student teachers learn to teach. Moreover, the type and the process of feedback provided to the student teacher during and/or after the practicum is viewed as an attempt to diminish barriers to effective practical teaching experiences for students (White, 2007). Consequently, research and publications in this field have significantly covered the determinant role that feedback and reflection play, specifically with regard to viewing feedback as a way that upsurges student teacher awareness and results in fostering positive change in teaching behaviour (Bailey, 2006).

Providing high quality and constructive feedback is one of the main components of the teaching practice program offered by Bahrain Teachers College (BTC). However, it has been observed by the researchers of this study that sometimes there is dissatisfaction on the part of student teachers with the type of feedback they receive and the way it is provided by their supervisors. This indicates a need to investigate the various perceptions of feedback that exist among student teachers; in addition to the quality of feedback given and whether or not it meets the criteria of high quality feedback.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions BTC pre-service teachers hold about the quality of feedback type(s) provided by their teaching practicum supervisors; and whether or not it meets the criteria of high quality feedback described by Thomas & Sondergeld (2015) ‘‘as timeliness, motivational, personalized, manageable, and directly related to assessment criteria’’ (p: 86) in addition to the criteria investigated by Hatti and Temperely (2007) which include ‘‘timing of feedback, the effects of positive and negative feedback, the optimal classroom use of feedback, and the role of assessment in feedback’’. The study also investigates the type (s) of feedback BTC pre-service teachers find most effective in improving their teaching performance.

The driving force behind the study is to address the following questions:

1. Are pre-service teachers aware of the importance of feedback received by their practicum supervisors?
2. What are the types of feedback provided by practicum supervisors?
3. What type (s) of feedback do pre-service teachers prefer?
4. How do practicum supervisors provide feedback to their students?
5. Which type (s) of feedback do pre-service teachers find most effective in enhancing their teaching practice process?
6. What implications, if any, do pre-service teachers suggest to help in improving the quality of the feedback process in any practicum course in teacher education programs?

About TCPB 426 Teaching Practice 4 & Seminar course

At Bahrain Teachers College, the course *TCPB 426 Teaching Practice 4 & Seminar* is a one semester long teaching practice course offered across disciplines in the final semester of the 4-year B.Ed. program. Based on the information obtained from the Teaching Practice office at BTC, the pre-service teachers spend 90 days in schools. Each supervisor is assigned 5 student teachers to whom he/she pays at least 5 visits during the semester. The pre-service teachers keep weekly observation logs; out of which 5 will be graded. Moreover, they are required to attend 2 seminars with their supervisors; observe and reflect on all responsibilities of their Cooperating Teacher’s (CT) classrooms as well as other teachers’ classrooms; teach 10-12 full periods per week, prepare lesson plans and reflect on a video recording of one of their own classes. Supervisors are expected to visit students during their teaching practice period, observe their teaching, look over their observation logs, and give them feedback, orally and in writing before, during and after each of the five school visits. Additionally, they are supposed to correct two observation log entries, with one entry focusing on assessment; five lesson plans and one reflection on a video recording of each student teacher’s classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Practicum courses are viewed as critical to the development of student teachers because it is their first hands-on experience with teaching (Al Sohmani, 2012). Hence, it is vital that pre-service teachers receive feedback in order to become professionally and academically qualified teachers. Moreover, feedback is seen as a method of creating a two-way professional dialogue

that leads to purposeful interaction between student teachers and their supervisors, which, eventually, fills the gap between teacher education theory and practice in a simple, meaningful and practical way (White, 2009). From the supervisors' perspectives, feedback is viewed as "shared understandings of the feedback process where each person has ownership of, in terms of their specific roles" (White, 2007).

A plethora of studies (Grainger, 2015; Yoon, Kim, Kim, Joung, & Park, 2013; Thomas, and Sundered, 2015; Poulos and Mahony, 2008; Hatti and Temperely, 2007) have investigated the important role which feedback plays in any teaching practice or practicum courses in teacher education programs. Consequently, research and publications in this field have significantly covered the determinant role that feedback and reflection play, specifically with regard to viewing feedback as a way that upsurges student teacher awareness and results in fostering positive change in teaching behaviour (Bailey, 2006).

Moreover, numerous studies (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Snead and Freiberg, 2017; Lizzio and Wilson, 2008; Akcan and Tatar, 2010; White, 2007; White, 2009; Yoon, 2009) found out that high-quality feedback in teacher education programs plays a fundamental role in helping pre-service teachers grow professionally. Nevertheless, what counts as 'high quality' feedback that impacts the teaching performance is different on the two ends of supervisors and student teachers.

On the student teachers' side, while some consider "time, honesty and availability" as elements that form the core of effective and constructive feedback (Hudson et al, 2008), others perceive feedback as "correcting their teaching mistakes" and "giving advice to improve their teaching practices" (White, 2007). Moreover, supervisors' availability "at all times through phone and emails to clarify queries; (Hudson, et al, 2008); modeling, giving helpful guidelines and shared experiences (Ali and AlDawi, 2013); conveying appraisal with compassion and empathy (Akcan and Tatar, 2010) were deemed as the key components of quality feedback which can positively change student teachers' teaching performance.

Furthermore, several studies discussed different modes of giving feedback. While White (2007) reports that oral feedback is the most consistently provided type of feedback that gives student teachers clear focus and direction for their future professional teaching practice, Ali and AlDawi (2013) note that written feedback, more than the oral one, is favored by teacher candidates during practice teaching. Additionally, Akcan and Tatar (2010) argue that oral feedback offered after the lessons observed and written feedback through evaluation sheets are regarded the most effective type of feedback. Martínez Agudo (2016) highly recommend supportive and effective feedback that integrates theory and practice.

Method

This study was carried out in Bahrain Teachers College at the University of Bahrain, a faculty with 83 students in the undergraduate teacher education program. To gain an in-depth understanding of student perceptions of feedback, the study used a questionnaire which consisted of four parts; in addition to an open-ended question to generate qualitative data related to the quality of feedback pre-service teachers' received by supervisors on their teaching performance and recommendations of how the can the feedback be improved

Participants

A questionnaire was distributed to a total of 83 student teachers, out of 158, across different academic divisions at Bahrain Teachers College who are taking the practicum course *TCPB 426 Teaching Practice 4 & Seminar*: (English Language Education 26; Math and Science 20, Cycle one 60 and Arabic and Islamic Studies 40). The student teachers were supervised by 18-20 faculty members with different degrees: professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers.

Instrument

The study used a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify pre-service teachers' awareness of the importance of feedback, professional beliefs about the quality of feedback received from supervisors, types of feedback and the impact of feedback on their teaching performance. The questionnaire was piloted for content and face validity by six experts at BTC in terms of focus, content and wordings. More adjustments have been made to the questionnaire items after validating it by conducting a reconnaissance on small sample of year 3 students. The questionnaire consists of five parts, the last of which is an open-ended question that meant to generate qualitative data about the quality of feedback supervisors' provide on student-teacher's teaching performance and what implications, if any, can they suggest to be improved. Coding scheme was used to analyze this part. The first part consists of six statements which intended to investigate pre-service teachers' knowledge and awareness of feedback and whether or not the type they receive is directly related to BTC assessment criteria. While the second part's seven statements are about the types of feedback preferred by students. The third and fourth parts included statements about timing, frequency and ways of giving feedback by the supervisors. Correlation was obtained to examine the association between the type of feedback received, and its efficiency in enhancing the teaching performance process.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research questions that direct this study, a quantitative and qualitative research approach was employed using a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. The data gathered were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings are presented under five headings: (1) Students' opinion, (2) Types of feedback preferred by students, (3) Timing & frequency of feedback, (4) Types of feedback provided by supervisors and (5) Ways of giving feedback, as illustrated below.

Quantitative results

Table 1: Students' opinions

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
I Know what feedback means	94.3%	5.7%	0%	0%	0%	100%
I'm aware of the types of oral and written feedback.	71.6%	27.3%	1%	0%	0%	100%
The feedback I received from supervisor was aligned with the theoretical input I received at BTC.	45%	26%	4%	4%	6%	100%

I consider the feedback I received from my supervisor is important for improving my teaching performance.	67%	14%	2%	1%	1%	100%
I take my supervisor's feedback seriously for future use.	68%	13%	2%	1%	1%	100%
Feedback provided by my supervisor helped me to improve the quality of my teaching.	56%	19%	6%	2%	2%	100%

Strongly Agree= SA, Agree = A, Neither = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD

The findings in table 1 illustrated that more than (94%) of the participants are aware of the importance of the feedback received from their supervisors. This shows the level of awareness that the participants have concerning the feedback provided by their supervisors and their keenness to develop themselves professionally. However, it is suggested by (Nicol 2009; Wingate 2010), that supervisors should explain and clarify to students the meaning, purpose and benefit of written and oral feedback and encourage them to develop action plans in response to their feedback.

The data also indicated that 68% of the respondents take their supervisors feedback seriously for future use, and 67% consider the feedback they received is important and helpful for their future career. This is in line with what has been stated by other researchers such as (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Snead and Freiberg, 2017; Lizzio and Wilson, 2008; Akcan and Tatar, 2010; White, 2007; White, 2009; Yoon, 2009) who argued that constructive feedback in teacher education programs plays a fundamental role in helping pre-service teachers grow professionally. Nevertheless, what counts as 'high quality' feedback that impacts the teaching performance is different on the two ends of supervisors and student teachers. In short, feedback 'can contribute to improving student teachers' professional teaching competency in terms of self-awareness' (Hudson, 2013).

Table 2: Types of feedback preferred by students

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
I prefer written feedback on my teaching performance.	39%	23%	7%	10%	6%	100%
I prefer oral feedback on my teaching performance.	35%	29%	13%	5%	3%	100%
I prefer receiving both oral and written feedback	60%	21%	4%	0%	0%	100%
I prefer receiving instant feedback on my teaching practice.	57%	21%	7%	0%	0%	100%
I prefer receiving feedback privately.	36%	16%	25%	6%	2%	100%
I prefer receiving feedback in the presence of other students.	24%	24%	17%	9%	11%	100%
I prefer that my supervisor takes my feelings and efforts into consideration when providing me with feedback (i.e. encouraging, humble and respectful).	53%	24%	4%	1%	3%	100%

Strongly Agree= SA, Agree = A, Neither = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD

In response to the second research question, concerning the types of feedback that pre-service teachers prefer, the data showed that 60% of the participants tend to prefer both oral and written feedback, whereas only 35% prefer oral feedback. This is due to the fact that written feedback could be used by participants to support the oral feedback. This indeed varies from one context to another. For instance, Poulos and Mahony (2008) have investigated the type of feedback preferred by students in the Faculty of Health at the University of Sydney and found that most students prefer written feedback over oral feedback because frequently failed to understand what their supervisors exactly mean. That is why some of the participants under investigation prefer both written and oral feedback because if they failed to understand their supervisors' oral feedback they can go back to the written notes.

On the other hand, the findings demonstrated 36% prefer to receive feedback privately whereas only 24% prefer to receive feedback in the presence of their colleagues. This in line with a study of medical students by Parikh et al. (2001) who 'found that "individual feedback was the most strongly preferred type.'" However, this finding contradicts what Hyland, (2000) and Weaver, (2006) highlighted in their findings; stating that the obvious preferences for oral feedback when it is addressed to students as a group, "whereas written feedback was preferred when specific comments are provided to individuals."

The results of the current study showed that 57% of the participants prefer to receive instant feedback. This in an agreement with the findings by Hattie & Timperley (2007) and Rucker & Thompson (2003) who suggested that "feedback is most effective when provided soon after task performance." However, researchers such as, (Hyland, 2000; Weaver, 2006), suggested that a balanced approach in providing feedback would be most effective to meet individual needs (that is, written/verbal, specific/general, group/individual).

Table 3: Timing & frequency of feedback

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
My supervisor provided me with feedback regularly.	46%	24%	6%	3%	6%	100%
My supervisor always provided me with feedback immediately after the teaching session	58%	15%	0%	0%	2%	100%
I receive feedback before the teaching session.	30%	10%	6%	21%	18%	100%
My supervisor provided me with delayed feedback (days after the teaching session).	6%	10%	11%	13%	45%	100%
My supervisor had never provided me with feedback on my teaching session	9%	3%	4%	13%	56%	100%

Strongly Agree= SA, Agree = A, Neither = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD

Table 3 presents the results of question 3 about the timing and frequency of feedback provided by supervisors. It illustrates that 58% of the participants received feedback immediately after the teaching session and only 2% did not receive immediate feedback. Although the finding of this study indicated that immediate feedback is preferable by supervisors, many studies have shown the superiority of delayed feedback (Brosvic, Epstein, Cook, & Dihoff, 2005). That is, students should be given enough time to think and reflect on what they have done before receiving any feedback from their supervisors.

The findings showed that 30% stated that they receive feedback before their teaching session, whereas 18% did not. The purpose of giving feedback at this stage is to look at the lesson plan to be implemented and the overall procedures prepared by the pre-service teacher to ensure that it meets the criteria and going in the right direction.

On the other hand, the findings indicate that 6% of the participants receive delayed feedback days after the teaching session, whereas 11% responded by ‘neither agree nor disagree’, and (45%) strongly disagreed. However, (Rowe & Wood, 2008), believe that choosing the right time in giving feedback found to be essential for professional development. For a long time, it was assumed that feedback is most effective when given shortly after the teaching session whereas other researchers such as (Swinnwn et al, 1990 & Fairbrother, 2010) argue that doing this actually impedes with learning. Instead, it is a good idea to let learners think critically about what they have done on their own before providing them any feedback. This point of view also supports Sadler (1998, as cited in White, 2007) who emphasizes that “feedback must let learners identify gaps between current and desired performance, and take some action that will close the gap.”

Table 4: Types of feedback provided by supervisors

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Both written and oral feedback were provided to me by my supervisor	52%	12%	6%	10%	5%	100%
My supervisor preferred oral feedback	30%	17%	29%	5%	4%	100%
My supervisor preferred written feedback	13%	14%	32%	12%	14%	100%
I have always received detailed feedback from my supervisor	38%	22%	9%	5%	10%	100%
My supervisor was very objective in his/her feedback	38%	21%	11%	8%	7%	100%
My supervisor focuses only on my teaching weaknesses	6%	12%	11%	19%	35%	100%
My supervisor focuses only on my teaching strengths	8%	3%	14%	28%	32%	100%
My supervisor focuses on both my teaching weaknesses and strengths	55%	17%	3%	4%	6%	100%
My supervisor always provided me with logical feedback	47%	25%	3%	3%	7%	100%
The feedback I received was dialogic	57%	16%	4%	3%	5%	100%
The amount of feedback I received on my teaching was appropriate	38%	29%	6%	7%	5%	100%
My supervisor's suggestions in the feedback helped me to improve my teaching performance	55%	21%	3%	2%	4%	100%

Strongly Agree= SA, Agree = A, Neither = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD.

In response to question 4, the results showed that 55% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement that their supervisors focus on the weaknesses and strengths of their teaching performance, and only 6% who stated that their supervisors focus on their weaknesses only neglecting the strengths. Similarly, 55% strongly agreed that the feedback received from their supervisors was helpful in improving their teaching performance, whereas only 4% who strongly disagreed with the statement. The data also indicated that 52% strongly agreed with

the statement that says “ both written and oral feedback were provided by their supervisors and 5% disagreed, whereas 6% neither agreed nor disagreed. Another striking finding presents in table 4, is that 57% of the respondents strongly agreed that the feedback they received was dialogic, 4% neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed.

It can be concluded that the type of feedback provided by supervisors was balanced as it was given orally and in writing, it was also objective and covers the weaknesses and strengths of the student-teacher performance. This could reflect the supervisors’ experience in providing feedback. However, for feedback to be constructive and lead to better teaching quality, it should be: detailed, objective, focused on strengths and weaknesses, legitimate (i.e. supervisors gave reasons for the comments provided) and it should offer: advice, suggestions, tips and opportunities to interact with the supervisor taking into account the students’ feelings (Percara, 2014).

Table 5: Ways of giving feedback

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
My supervisor used different ways in giving feedback.	24%	23%	21%	9%	8%	100%
My supervisor provided informal feedback on my teaching via messaging apps as WhatsApp	19%	17%	8%	20%	21%	100%
My supervisor sent the feedback by email after the teaching session.	15%	11%	10%	18%	31%	100%
My supervisor gave feedback in an encouraging way.	44%	21%	9%	6%	5%	100%
My supervisor gave feedback in a clear and straightforward manner.	51%	21%	6%	2%	4%	100%
My supervisor gave an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the feedback I received.	46%	25%	4%	4%	6%	100%
The way the supervisor used his tone negatively affected my confidence	10%	13%	11%	20%	31%	100%
My supervisor gave me his feedback on my teaching performance privately.	17%	16%	11%	26%	14%	100%
My supervisor gave feedback in the presence of other pre-service teachers.	26%	29%	11%	6%	13%	100%
The way the supervisor gave feedback didn't affect the relationship with him/her.	48%	17%	7%	5%	8%	100%

Strongly Agree= SA, Agree = A, Neither = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD

As it is shown in Table 5, more than half of the respondents strongly agreed that they received clear and straightforward feedback from their supervisors, whereas 4% strongly disagreed with this statement, and 6% neither agreed nor disagreed. On the other hand, 44% believe that they receive feedback in an encouraging way and only 5% strongly agreed with this statement. With regard to the statement ‘the way the supervisor gave feedback did not affect the relationship with him/her’, the results show that 48% of the participants strongly agreed with it, whereas 8% strongly disagreed and 7% neither agreed nor disagreed. This result supports the study by Hudson et al (2008) who studied the impact of the relationship with their supervisee after giving them feedback .They found out that majority of students accepted and welcomed their feedback in an open-minded way. Similarly, Percara (2014) demonstrated that both students and

supervisors reported that students never felt angry as a consequence of receiving feedback from their supervisors during the teaching practice. In short, the importance of supportive relationships between supervisors and supervisee should be stressed as it is crucial for professional learning and development (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015).

Another important finding showed that 46% strongly agreed that their supervisor gave them the chance to ask clarification questions whereas only 6% who did not. This shows that the supervisors are open minded and believe that feedback is a two ways process.

Regarding the means of providing feedback, only 19% strongly agreed that they received feedback via messages or online applications such as WhatsApp. This is in line with the findings presented by Percara (2014) which indicated that 71% of the participants never received feedback through emails. This indicates that supervisors in different contexts tend to provide face to face feedback rather than using online means.

Qualitative Results

In addition to the quantitative results, respondents were given one open-ended question so as to gather more detailed information about their opinions about the quality of their supervisors' feedback. The question asked "What implications, if any, do pre-service teachers suggest to help in improving the quality of the feedback process in any practicum course in teacher education programs?"

The responses given through the open-ended questions provided insightful data. For example, student teachers expressed their gratitude towards their supervisors for the constructive feedback and endless support they received throughout the teaching practice period. Some of them added that they received effective feedback on their lesson plans prior to their teaching sessions which was very useful and helpful in modifying the lessons' procedures and assessment.

On the other hand, other participants suggested that "supervisors should provide immediate oral feedback and then email the written feedback" in case students were not able to catch the oral feedback due to language barrier. They also added that supervisors should "use simple and direct language that can be easily understood". In addition, student teachers believed: "supervisors should also ask if we would like to have our feedback session privately or not."

On the other hand, the findings showed that there are contradicting opinions in accepting the student teachers' written lesson plans in stating that: "different supervisors have different understanding and ways of crafting lesson plans and writing learning objectives." As a result, some of them got confused whether to "satisfy" their supervisors or to "follow what they have studied at the BTC as this confusion "has led to getting low grades."

The data demonstrated that feedback should cover the flow of the lesson when submitting the lesson plan. For example, whether the objectives are carefully ordered or need to be shifted from one stage to another; whether or not the activities clearly support the learning objectives, if not suggestions should be given by supervisors.

The participants found that the feedback received from their supervisors was clear, straightforward and helpful in improving their teaching performance, yet they found some contradictory among supervisors in terms of accepting their work. Other participants suggested that student teachers should be given the opportunity to evaluate their performance by thinking

critically recognizing their weaknesses and strengths before receiving the supervisor's feedback. Furthermore, the findings indicated that some participants would prefer to be given feedback based on graded rubric for each session to see the improvement over the teaching practice sessions. Finally, one student teacher commented: "I would prefer to hear from my supervisor what can I add instead of what I did."

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the perceptions of pre-service teachers studying at Bahrain Teachers College about the quality of feedback they receive by their practicum supervisors. The findings revealed that the participants demonstrated good level of awareness of the concept of feedback. They reported that the feedback received from their supervisors was clear, straightforward and helpful in improving their teaching performance. They also showed clear understanding of the role feedback plays in professional development.

It was also obvious that immediate feedback, oral and written, were the preferable types of most participants. However, the study recommends that supervisors must adopt the "balanced approach" suggested by Hyland (2000) and Weaver (2006), for providing feedback which "would be most effective to meet individual needs (that is, written/verbal, specific/general, group/individual)."

On the other hand, the findings of this study illustrated some valuable suggestions that need to be considered by supervisors. For instance, "supervisors should ask if student teachers would like to have their feedback session privately or in the presence of other students". They also suggested that "feedback should be given based on graded rubric for each session to track the improvement over the teaching practice sessions." More focus should be placed upon "what they should add or do differently rather than what they did wrong."

Finally, the findings of this study could help in improving the quality of feedback by considering student teachers' needs and suggestions as well as in assisting supervisors, as decision makers, in making the necessary modifications to provide student teachers with more effective and constructive feedback.

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