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EFFECTIVENESS OF B.ED TEACHERS PREPARATION PROGRAM OFFERED BY BAHRAIN TEACHERS COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT: *The teacher training program must be of paramount importance in order to establish a strong educational system that serves the objectives of the country's educational policy. Bachelor of Education program (B.ED) in Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) at University of Bahrain is specially designed to prepare an efficient teacher capable of implementing and achieving the educational objectives prepared by the Ministry of Education. This research aims to investigate the BTC graduates and school principals' views of the B.ED program of BTC, and to what extent it prepared and trained BTC students to put theories into practice. Data was collected through a questionnaire. The sample is consisted of 183 participants (83 graduates and 82 principals). The findings revealed that the program was effective in helping teachers to acquire the necessary skills of instructional strategies, use of technology and effective communication. On the other hand, some of the participants' responses demonstrated that some graduates are weak in content knowledge. Therefore, they suggest more emphasis on content knowledge for the specialization they have to teach.*

KEYWORDS: graduates, competencies, curriculum, teaching

INTRODUCTION

Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) was established in 2008 through a partnership with Singapore's National Institute of Education (NIE). The College offers Bachelor (B.ED), Postgraduate Graduate Programs in Education (PGDE), and Professional Development for in-service educators (PD). The curriculum and the operation policy of the BTC was designed with the help of the NIE. The B. ED program of Bahrain Teachers College, which is the focus of this study, has been created to train and prepare qualified primary school teachers in different disciplines to try to achieve excellence in education and empowering educators to build a better future for Bahrain. It is a five-year program. The foundation year is designed to provide students with the academic, language and learning skills needed for their study at the university. The first year is a generalist year that includes the selection of a specialist area of study. Specialist areas include teaching in Cycle 1 or Cycle 2 in either Arabic, Math and Science or English that lasts for 3 years (BTC, 2015). This research aims to investigate the BTC graduates and school principals' views of the B.ED program of BTC, and to what extent it prepared and trained BTC students to put theories into practice. It also aims to suggest some remedial actions if any weaknesses were found.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

A research study by Latham & Gitomer (2000) indicated that there is a strong relationship between teacher preparation programs and their performance in the classroom. Consequently, preparing well-qualified teachers is essential to the success of the educational process. This includes equipping teachers with all the necessary competencies they need to fulfil their duties professionally. According to Shahid (2007), the main goal behind teacher training programs is not only limited to teach and train student teachers how to teach, but it is a matter of developing their abilities and potentialities to make them dynamic and skilful to conduct their job proficiently. However, teacher-training programs must be flexible to accept any change or modification in accordance with the requirements of the case and follow up on the development in the level of technology, curricula, and teaching methods to catch up with the speed of the global changes (Qaiser et al., 2011). BTC teacher training program is centred on three categories: content knowledge, methods of teaching and educational requirements. This agrees with what has been stated by Jan (2017) that effective teacher training programs should focus on the content of the material to be taught by the teacher, as well as providing teaching opportunities under the guidance of experienced supervisors in a real classroom situation where they can practice various methods of teaching. She elaborated that adequate teacher preparation programs should include training student teachers regardless of their subject area on integrating technology in the classrooms to meet the students who are highly involved in the digital world. According to the standards for the accreditation of training institutions in the USA, teachers must demonstrate that they are fully familiar with the teaching methods, the content of the materials, the learning environment and all the professional requirements that could help students to learn (NCATE (2008). Similarly, the standards for the accreditation of teacher education in England, teacher-training programs are only certified if they consider the following standards. ‘’1) admission requirements. 2) Description of the training categories and their assessment. 3) Ways of collaboration and alliances between institutions and 4) mechanisms to ensure quality at training institutions’’.

A number of studies have investigated the effectiveness of teachers’ education programs in different contexts. For example, Sharma (2000) found out that too much emphasis placed on theories rather than application in some teacher education institutions in India. He added that student teachers apply effective teaching strategies neither during their training nor during their real teaching. Likewise, Siddique, (1990) reported that some teacher education institutions in Pakistan produce teachers with limited understanding of the content and methodology. In a longitudinal study of teachers’ professional identities, Flores & Day (2006) stated that the pre-service teacher education program had great impact on the graduates’ performance in the classroom, apparently because of the large gap between theory and practice during their studies. Findings drawn from a study conducted by Darling-Hammond (2006), revealed that efficient teacher-training programs should include the following common features: a clear vision of effective teaching, well-defined and consistently evaluated standards of practice and performance, learner-centred curriculum approaches, and advanced methods of teaching that help students understand the content and acquire the 21st century skills needed for their future career.

On the other hand, Berliner (2000) argued that the training program might not be effective, regardless its content and the facilities provided, if the way of presenting the program is

inappropriate. Therefore, gathering information and evidences by external experts about the training institution and the teacher-training program is essential to see to what extent they meet the quality standards (Eurydice, 2006).

Research questions

1. What are the BTC graduates and school principals' views of B.ED program of BTC?
2. What are the most striking weaknesses and strengths of B.ED program?
3. How BTC educational program can be made more effective?

Significance of the study

The significance of this study derives from the fact that it would seem to be the first attempt to investigate this topic from the point of view of BTC graduates and school principals. Therefore, the findings of the study would have more credibility and originality that could bridge the gap in literature, and shed light on the weaknesses and strengths of the BTC teachers preparation program. In addition, the findings could be valuable for reconstructing and improving the program.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a quantitative and qualitative method to explore how effective are BTC graduates in the field of teaching in Bahraini schools from the perspectives of BTC graduates and school principals. The sample consisted of 165 participants (82 school principals and 83 BTC graduates).

Instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect the data that help respond to the research questions. The same questionnaire was used for both the principals and BTC graduates. The quantitative questionnaire consisted of nine categories, which represent the nine BTC competencies. The first and second competencies; *content knowledge* and *student development*, has three items each. The third competency; *diverse learners*, has four items. The forth competency; *instructional strategies*, has five items. The fifth competency; *learning environment*, has six items. The sixth competency; *assessment*, has three items. The seventh competency; *communication and instructional technology*, has five items. The eighth competency; *school, community, and civic engagement*, has four items. The ninth competency; *reflective practice, ethics and professionalism*, has five items. The students responded to a Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). On the other hand, the qualitative questionnaire consists of three open-ended questions where participants invited to give more detailed information about the effectiveness of B.ED program.

RESULTS

The quantitative data were collected and analysed as indicated in the tables below (1 - 8) which show some descriptive statistics; means and standard deviations, for both BTC graduates and school principals. The analyses of Likert scale were categorized as follows: A mean that is >

4.20 = strongly agree, a mean of 3.40 – 4.2 = Agree, a mean of 2.6 – 3.4 = Neutral, a mean of 1.8 – 2.6 = Disagree, a mean that is < 1.8 = strongly disagree.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the Content Knowledge

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Full knowledge of course content	3.40	.999	3.59	.800
Knowledge of concepts and theories on which content is based	3.59	.988	3.62	.796
Links content to everyday life so that it becomes meaningful	4.13	.808	3.84	.793

The results in table (1) show that both BTC graduates and school principals agree that the graduates have good knowledge of concepts and theories on which content is based (*Mean* = 3.59, *SD* = 0.99 and *Mean* = 3.62, *SD* = 0.80, respectively). They also have the ability to link content to everyday life so that it becomes meaningful (*Mean* = 4.13, *SD* = 0.81 and *Mean* = 3.84, *SD* = 0.79, respectively).

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for the Student Development

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Understands how students learn	4.20	.772	3.90	.640
Understands the stages of thinking skills development of students	4.29	.741	3.78	.770
How to find learning opportunities that help develop students' personality; socially, morally and emotionally	4.28	.738	3.91	.670

Table (2) shows that BTC graduates strongly agree that they understand how students learn (*Mean* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.77), they understand the stages of thinking skills development of students (*Mean* = 4.29, *SD* = 0.74). In addition, they know how to find learning opportunities that help develop students' personality; socially, morally and emotionally (*Mean* = 4.28, *SD* = 0.74). Similarly school principals agree that they understand how students learn (*Mean* = 3.90, *SD* = 0.64), they understand the stages of thinking skills development of students (*Mean* = 3.78, *SD* = 0.77), they know how to find learning opportunities that help develop students' personality; socially, morally and emotionally (*Mean* = 3.91, *SD* = 0.67).

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for the Diverse Learners

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Knowledge of students' different abilities	4.34	.769	3.79	.716
Understands the students' different learning styles	4.45	.753	3.83	.699
Provides equal learning opportunities commensurate with the diversity of learners	4.22	.812	3.87	.699
Deals with students well regardless of their levels, cultures and identities	4.34	.801	4.09	.724

When it comes to diverse learners BTC graduates indicated that they strongly agree that they have knowledge of students' different abilities (*Mean* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.77), they understand the students' different learning styles (*Mean* = 4.45, *SD* = 0.75), they can provide equal learning opportunities commensurate with the diversity of learners (*Mean* = 4.22, *SD* = 0.81) and that they deal with students well regardless of their levels, cultures and identities (*Mean* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.80). School principals' responses showed that they agree with all the skills related to diverse learners (*Mean* = 3.79, *SD* = 0.72, *Mean* = 3.83, *SD* = 0.70, *Mean* = 3.87, *SD* = 0.70, and *Mean* = 4.09, *SD* = 0.72, respectively) (See Table 3).

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for the Instructional Strategies

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Plans for teaching based on knowledge of content, students, community and curriculum objectives	4.18	.814	3.88	.866
Uses a variety of educational strategies	4.65	.652	4.30	.679
Encourages the development of critical thinking skills, problem solving and performance skills	4.23	.770	3.68	.844
Involves students in learning through appropriate classroom activities	4.47	.650	4.09	.652
Designs specific plans for student learning	4.16	.862	3.79	.716

BTC graduates have strong instructional strategies. They can plan for teaching based on knowledge of content, students, community and curriculum objectives (*Mean* = 4.18, *SD* = 0.81), use a variety of educational strategies (*Mean* = 4.65, *SD* = 0.65), encourage the development of critical thinking skills, problem solving and performance skills (*Mean* = 4.23, *SD* = 0.77), involve students in learning through appropriate classroom activities (*Mean* = 4.47, *SD* = 0.65), and design specific plans for student learning (*Mean* = 4.16, *SD* = 0.86).
School principals' responses showed that they strongly agree that BTC students use a variety of educational strategies (*Mean* = 4.30, *SD* = 0.68), and agree with all other skills related to instructional strategies skills (*Mean* = 3.88, *SD* = 0.87, *Mean* = 3.68, *SD* = 0.84, *Mean* = 4.09, *SD* = 0.65, and *Mean* = 3.79, *SD* = 0.72, respectively) (See Table 4).

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for the Learning Environment

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Creates an encouraging learning environment for group and individual interaction	4.48	.669	4.12	.692
Motivates students to actively participate in learning	4.46	.721	4.17	.540
Develops students' self-motivation skills	4.17	.730	3.88	.792
Sets rules for classroom management	4.45	.785	4.11	.754
Knowledge of how to deal with different behaviors of students	3.98	.987	3.66	.820
Optimizes the use of time well	4.12	.889	3.77	.879

Table (5) shows that BTC graduates strongly agree that they can create an encouraging learning environment for group and individual interaction (*Mean* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.77), motivate students

to actively participate in learning (*Mean* = 4.29, *SD* = 0.74), and set rules for classroom management (*Mean* = 4.28, *SD* = 0.74). They also agree that they can develop students' self-motivation skills (*Mean* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.73), have knowledge of how to deal with different behaviors of students (*Mean* = 3.98, *SD* = 0.99), and can optimize the use of time well (*Mean* = 4.12, *SD* = 0.89). Similarly, school principals agreed that BTC graduates do possess the skills related to learning environment, the mean ranged from 3.66 to 4.17 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.69 to 0.88.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for the Assessment

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Uses a variety of assessment strategies	4.24	.864	3.96	.675
Interested in the continuation of the intellectual, social and physical development of the learner through the evaluation process	4.20	.745	3.66	.789
Provides effective feedback to students	4.34	.769	3.85	.722

BTC graduates indicated that they strongly agree that they can use a variety of assessment strategies (*Mean* = 4.24, *SD* = 0.86), are interested in the continuation of the intellectual, social and physical development of the learner through the evaluation process (*Mean* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.75), and provide effective feedback to students (*Mean* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.77). In addition, school principals showed their agreement that BTC graduates have those skills (*Mean* = 3.96, *SD* = 0.66, *Mean* = 3.66, *SD* = 0.79, and *Mean* = 3.85, *SD* = 0.72, respectively) (See Table 6).

Table 7 Descriptive statistics for the Communication and Instructional Technology

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Promotes the values of tolerance among students	4.18	.829	4.05	.627
Improves students' dialogue skills	4.05	.845	3.76	.810
Develops a culture of accepting others regardless of their multiculturalism and identity	4.20	.866	3.96	.711
Uses of educational technology effectively	4.27	.938	4.18	.772
Effective knowledge of verbal and nonverbal communication	4.10	.892	3.98	.684

For the communication and instructional technology, Table (7) shows BTC graduates' responses that they strongly agree that they can develop a culture of accepting others regardless of their multiculturalism and identity (*Mean* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.87) and use of educational technology effectively (*Mean* = 4.27, *SD* = 0.94). They also agree that they can promote the values of tolerance among students (*Mean* = 4.18, *SD* = 0.83), improve students' dialogue skills (*Mean* = 4.05, *SD* = 0.85), and have effective knowledge of verbal and nonverbal communication (*Mean* = 4.10, *SD* = 0.89). Again, school principals showed that they agree that BTC graduates have all those skills related to communication and instructional technology, the mean ranged from 3.76 to 4.18 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.63 to 0.81 (See Table 7).

Table 8 Descriptive statistics for the School, Community, and Civic Engagement

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Communicates effectively with parents to involve them in the educational activities that concern their children	3.73	.976	3.68	.799
Builds strong professional relationships with colleagues	4.09	.919	3.78	.847
Demonstrates the ability to work in teams	4.34	.785	3.95	.683
Shows the desire to participate in community service	4.33	.783	3.84	.824

Table (8) shows skills related to the school, community, and civic engagement. BTC graduates strongly agree that they can demonstrate the ability to work in teams (*Mean* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.79) and show the desire to participate in community service (*Mean* = 4.33, *SD* = 0.78). They also agree that they can communicate effectively with parents to involve them in the educational activities that concern their children (*Mean* = 3.73, *SD* = 0.98 and build strong professional relationships with colleagues (*Mean* = 4.09, *SD* = 0.92). In the same way, school principals agreed that BTC graduates do possess the skills related to school, community, and civic engagement, the mean ranged from 3.68 to 3.95 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.68 to 0.85.

Table 9 Descriptive statistics for the Reflective Practice, Ethics and Professionalism

Statements	Graduates (N=83)		Principals (N=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Has high morals and professional conduct	4.48	.755	4.06	.837
Engages in continuous professional development	4.46	.770	4.09	.613
Keeps confidential information about learners	4.45	.785	3.98	.753
Respects for the dignity and rights of all learners	4.63	.676	4.22	.588
Works within legal frameworks that define the professional responsibility of the teacher	4.47	.754	4.24	.579

In terms of the skills related to reflective practice, ethics and professionalism, BTC graduates stated that they strongly agree that they have high morals and professional conduct (*Mean* = 4.48, *SD* = 0.76. Besides that, the findings demonstrate that BTC graduates are aware of the dignity and rights of all learners (*Mean* = 4.63, *SD* = 0.68), as well as w

orking within legal frameworks that define the professional responsibility of the teacher (*Mean* = 4.47, *SD* = 0.75). In agreement with their previous responses, school principals do agree that BTC graduates do possess the skills related to reflective practice, ethics and professionalism, the mean ranged from 3.98 to 4.24 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.58 to 0.84.

It was noticed that BTC graduates almost strongly agreed that they have achieved all the BTC nine competencies and, not surprisingly, principals mostly agreed that BTC graduates have those competencies. Although there is a significant difference between their responses, $t = 4.25$ (163), $p = 0.000$, this indicates that school principals expect more from BTC graduates.

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Principals	82	3.891	.480	.053
Graduates	83	4.225	.513	.056

ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Content Knowledge

The quantitative data showed that BTC graduates and schools' principals both agreed that the graduates obtained good knowledge of course content, theories, concepts, and becoming able to connect that to the daily lives of their students indicating that the teacher education program at BTC is successful in preparing its graduates. However, in their responses to the open-ended questions many principals argue that graduates are weak in content knowledge. For example, one principal said "they [graduates] don't have deep understanding when it comes to content knowledge". Another principal recommended that "graduates need more training in the content knowledge for the specialization they have to teach". Many of the principals argue that BTC graduate while they are competent in teaching strategies and the use of technology, they are weak in content knowledge specially for Arabic language. Elmahdi and Fawzi (2019) reported weakness of content knowledge for students in their final semester at BTC during their teaching practice experience, so they recommended that 'The program needs to focus more in delivering the content knowledge for the departments of Arabic Language, Science and Mathematics' (p.308).

Student Development/ Diverse Learner

One of the 5 aspects that the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA) gives strong attention in the schools' review is the student development aspect. It has strong impact on the students' academic achievement. Hence, the role of the teacher to inspire, motivate and encourage his/her students is crucial in the process of student development. The results showed strong evidence that BTC graduates possess the required knowledge and skills to help student to develop socially, morally and emotionally. So, this is another important positive sign that BTC teacher preparation program is in the right track in preparing its graduates. BTC graduates' competency in the student development aspect was reflected in their abilities to deal with the students' diversity in the classrooms. It appears that graduates are prepared to create safe learning environment conducive to diverse learners. It accommodates students with special needs, different learning styles and respect different cultural identities. One item that related the diverse learner that BTC graduates need to give more attention as shown in the data is the "knowledge of students' different abilities". Perfection in teaching is always a target that teachers aim at so long they are practicing teaching as Danielson in a youtube video (ND) in which she is promoting her renowned book *The Framework for Teaching* stated "when I talk about teacher growth and teacher learning is not because I think the teaching is poor quality and has to be fixed. It is the teaching is so hard that never be perfect."

Instructional strategies/technology and assessment

The results also show that BTC graduates are highly skilled in using variety of instructional strategies as an indication of a successful teacher perpetration program. This was echoed by several principals in their responses to the open-ended questions. For example, one principal stated "[graduates] teaching skills are excellent due to the appropriate training that BTC provided to its graduates". Another principal agrees that BTC graduates "possess high teaching skills, diverse instructional strategies and teaching methods that attractive to students". To credit BTC for good preparation of its graduates one principal said, "BTC graduates have teaching skills more than other colleges graduates as a result of the intensive training they received". In the same lines, another principal argues "BTC graduate are recognized by having diverse teaching strategies that they employed in an effective manner in classrooms". The results also show strong evidence of good preparation of BTC graduates in applying assessment in the instructional process. Moreover, the result indicated good training of BTC graduates in providing constructive feedback to their students. For a successful teaching experience BTC graduates should give emphasis for assessment for learning rather than depend entirely on assessment of learning.

Along with good preparation in employing diverse and useful instructional strategy, BTC graduates are also commended for their high skills in integrating technology in their teaching processes. This not only evident in the qualitative data, but also many first teachers and principals pointed out that. For example, one principal said "they have high ability in employing technology and digital tools [in classrooms]. In the same lines, another principal stated, "what makes BTC superior to other colleges in the University of Bahrain is the diversity of teaching strategies and the use of technology". In their responses to the open-ended questions BTC graduates argue that BTC trained them to apply diverse teaching strategies enhanced with the use of educational technology.

Learning Environment

In terms of BTC graduates' competency in creating safe learning environment that encourage learning, the result show strong agreement from both BTC graduates and principals. This conclude that BTC provides its graduates with good training to be effective teachers regarding managing the learning environment. It is important to point out that creating good learning environment is crucial to successful teaching experience. While classroom environment "does not deal with instructional skills, its components make the teacher's exercise of instructional skill possible' (Danielson, 2007, p. 64).

Professional Responsibility

Professional responsibility is determinant factor for effective teaching. Therefore, teachers specially the new graduated should go through the appropriate training before permitted to put foot inside classrooms. At the top of the professional responsibilities is teachers' commitment to "high ethical and professional standards and seek improve their practice" (Danielson, 2007, p. 92). One area related to professional responsibility that BTC graduates need more training in, is communicating with parents. In their responses to the open-ended questions many graduates pointed out that BTC needs to do more in training its graduates in commitment to professional ethics. For example, one graduate said, "wasn't given the due importance during my study in BTC". Another graduate stated that professional ethics were taught indirectly".

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrated that BTC graduates and school principals all have very positive views towards B.ED program of BTC. They claim that the programme succeeded in preparing and training the teachers to put theories into practice. According to their responses, the BTC graduates have shown very good command of skills related to instructional strategies, use of technology and effective communication. In addition, they know how to create effective learning opportunities that help develop students' personality; socially, morally and emotionally. However, in their responses to the open-ended questions some principals argue that graduates are weak in content knowledge. Therefore, for this program to be more effective, graduates need more emphasis on the content knowledge for the specialization they have to teach. It is also recommended that, more investigation should be conducted to find out the areas of content knowledge that needs to be considered.

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