The Effectiveness of a Practicum in Education Model: Teaching Practice at the Bahrain Teachers College

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Abstract

The current study investigates the effectiveness of the teaching practice programme for pre-service teachers at the Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) using a descriptive approach. A survey was conducted to investigate the perceptions of pre-service teachers at BTC towards the effectiveness of teaching practice in terms of college competencies, supervision, and time. The obtained results indicated that the current teaching practice programs helped the pre-service teachers to develop their teaching skills. The findings suggested that restructuring the teaching practice program depends on the new international best practices in the pre-service teachers training field. The current study provides some practical implications on how to improve the influence of supervision to support pre-service teachers' experience at the BTC and helping them to acquire the skills and knowledge that the society needs whether in terms of developing education or enhancing the values that go with the developments around the world.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, teaching practice, practicum, teacher education, initial teacher preparation

1. Introduction

Teacher's preparation colleges offer their teaching practice program that involves theoretical courses with actual school experience. One of the main standards to the Council for the Accreditation of Educators Preparation (CAEP) standards is the second standard which is the clinical partnerships and practice. To ensure the high quality of the clinical preparation opportunities, pre-service teachers should improve their knowledge, skills, and professional reaction to impact the learning and development P-12 students positively (CAEP, 2020).

Many teacher preparation colleges worldwide develop their teaching practice opportunities depending on international standards and best practices.

The practicum courses nowadays are considered a vital part in any teacher preparation program as they play to bridge towards linking theory with actual practice for those teacher candidates. The Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) has adapted its own intensive clinical program that requires student teachers to spend significant amounts of time in schools throughout their 4-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Program. During this time, student teachers are supervised by Cooperating Teachers in their host schools and by faculty at the university, who both collaborate with the teacher candidates to facilitate their bridging from theory and practical application.

Many researchers suggested that further research investigates clinical practice assessment methods to assess pre-service teachers during clinical practice (Yahya & et al., 2017). In this study, we aim to shed light on the effectiveness of teaching practice for pre-service teachers at the Bahrain Teachers College.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

The framework was designed based on three dimensions: college competencies, supervision, and period of supervision (time).

1. College competencies: The college has nine competencies: content knowledge, student development, diverse learners, instructional strategies, learning environment, assessment, communication and instructional technology, school and community engagement, and reflective practice, ethics, and professionalism.

2. Supervision: The college appoints a supervisor for each student to direct the practical education period. He makes four visits and guides the students during the practical education period, in addition to a professor from the same school and specialty and a school coordinator for the students' work.

3. Time: During the operation period of the third year, the student must attend 20 full continuous days at the school to which s/he is assigned for an entire semester during their study in the fourth year.

1.2 Literature Review

Clinical models of teacher education were adapted from clinical models in medicine in which universities and teaching hospitals are affiliated in an effort to put theories into practice (Burn & Mutton, 2015). In education, universities and schools are closely aligned to allow preservice teachers to integrate pedagogical theory and hands-on practical training. Thus, preparing effective teachers requires forming clinical partnerships among stakeholders in teacher education, and these partnerships can be framed within various models and approaches. Today, there are many clinically-based teacher training programs that rely on partnerships built between universities and schools, and these programs can differ greatly in terms of the quantity and quality of supervision provided by university supervisors and cooperating teachers, the length of practicum courses, and the placement of preservice teachers in practicum schools. Researchers have found that each of these aforementioned factors –as well as many others- can have a direct impact on preservice teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their teacher training programs. Genca (2016) observed that the pre-service teachers had many problems such as classroom management, time management, feedback, and teaching strategies.

Literature shows that some pre-service teacher preparation programs have focused on increasing the schools' training period to help student teachers gain effective professional skills (Coiduras, et al., 2019). Mufidah (2019) finds that teaching practice courses support the pre-service teachers to develop their skills by getting instructions from their supervisors.

School-based practicums have been found to be transformative in preparing future generations of teachers. Therefore, clinical models of preservice teacher education have become the norm in most teacher education programs (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004).

Many studies recommend that teachers preparation colleges should offer more clinical practice opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand the teaching profession before they complete the programme (Zhao & Zhang, 2017; Foncha, Abongdia, & Adu, 2015). Heeralal & Bayaga (2011) recommend that the flexibility in time, content, instructional approaches and learning materials, and course delivery and logistics to develop pre-service teachers' skills. Cheong (2010) finds that the collaborative clinical preparation opportunity is more functional than individual approaches to clinical preparation.

Perhaps the main factor that influences the preservice teachers' perceptions of their practicum courses is their university supervisors. Zhao & Zhang (2017) report that the university supervisors' support in the school improved the pre-service teachers' professional identity. Chien (2015) asserts this idea and elaborates that developing a positive attitude towards the teaching practice by preservice teachers is usually resulted from attitude toward their supervisors. Preservice teachers often report that their strongest support during teaching practice comes from their university supervisors while other stakeholders such as school principals provide the least support (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2006). Neville, Sherman, and Cohen (2005) found that the extent of success of preservice teachers' practicum experiences varies significantly based on the quality of their university-appointed supervisors and the amount of time supervisors spend with their preservice teachers providing feedback and advice. However, some strand of research indicated that the supervisors adopted a directive style of instruction and dominated the dialogue with the pre-service teachers (Mena et al., 2017; Mukeredzdi, 2017).

The influence of cooperating teachers who serve as mentors cannot be dismissed as they spend the largest amount of time with preservice teachers during practicum courses. Researchers have argued that cooperating teachers even have a strong effect on preservice teachers' formation of their own teaching personalities and identities (Gratch, 2000). However, while cooperating teachers are key to the success of any clinically-based teacher training program, few cooperating teachers receive training that adequately prepares them for their role as preservice teacher mentors (Sinclair, Dowson, & Thistleton-Martin, 2006). Moosa & Rembach (2020) found that the preservice teachers felt unsupported during the teaching practice by their mentors, and all that because negative engagement with their mentor. Clarke (2007) claims that few teacher training programs have a clear framework that governs the selection, training, and evaluation of cooperating teachers.

In addition to the influences that the university supervisors and cooperating teachers might have on the preservice

teachers' perceptions towards their practicum courses, some researchers have mentioned that type of the hosting schools can also play an integral role in shaping those preservice teachers' perceptions. Placement in certain types of schools can affect the perceptions of preservice teachers with regard to the success of their teacher training programs. Roofe and Cook (2017) collected data from 195 student teachers in the final week of their practicum course and found that not only did the respondents perceive their cooperating teachers in a moderately positive light, but the researchers also found that the student teachers' perceptions of their cooperating teachers were strongly affected by the type of school in which the student teachers were placed. Student teachers who were placed in practicum schools with better resources and those that are well-staffed tended to rate their cooperating teachers higher than those who were placed in schools lacking in resources or those that are understaffed.

The length and timing of practicum courses can also affect preservice teachers' perceptions of their initial teacher training programs. Many studies focus on offering more clinical practice opportunities for pre-service teachers. Genca (2016) recommended that pre-service teachers need more clinical practice hours to become competent teachers. Foncha & et al. (2015) suggested that the preservice teachers have more teaching practice experiences before they finish their study. Preservice teachers interviewed by Komba and Kira (2013) explained that they find the duration of their teaching practice course (8 weeks in one block at the end of their teacher training program) was insufficient in preparing them for full-time teaching. Researchers have argued that even 12 weeks of practicum training do not allow preservice teachers to gain what they deem to be adequate hands-on teaching experience (Nakpodia, 2011). Grundoff (2011) reported that the preservice teachers in one teacher education program found that their one full semester practicum course "did not adequately prepare them for the complexities and demands of full-time teaching, despite their consistently held beliefs that [the practicum course] was a key part of their preparation for teaching." (Grundoff, 2011, p.233). The reason for this seemingly conflicting result is that these preservice teachers completed their semester-long practicum course in the spring semester, and thus had no inclination of the demands on and responsibilities of teachers at the beginning of the school year in the fall semester. When these preservice teachers began their full-time teaching in the fall semester, they were overwhelmed with the responsibilities of setting up their classrooms, establishing classroom routines and rules, and introducing the curriculum. What researchers and preservice teachers appear to agree on is that when it comes to the duration of practicum courses, the longer the practicum, the better prepared preservice teachers become for all of the responsibilities of full-time teaching (Connelly & Graham, 2009).

The criteria that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the model are:

1. The quality of supervision received from university supervisors during teaching practice courses.

2. The quality of mentoring received from cooperating teachers during teaching practice.

3. The duration of the teaching practice experience.

The main objective of the study is to gauge the extent to which the BTC teaching practice model is successful in preparing future primary school teachers in their respective areas of specialization.

2. Methodology

2.1 Context

The Bahrain Teachers College is a relatively young college of education in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It is in its 12th year of operation as one of the education reform initiatives in the Kingdom of Bahrain lead by the Crown Prince Sh. Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa to prepare students to be a teacher through international best practice, and an extensive review of the effectiveness of its teaching practice model is needed. This research study will thus examine preservice teachers' perceptions regarding whether their gained practical experiences during teaching practice courses are sufficient in preparing them for their future roles as primary school teachers or not.

2.2 Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative approach to investigate the effectiveness of a practicum in teaching practice at the Bahrain Teachers College [from the preservice perceptions]. The data were collected through a survey.

2.3 Participants

The participants were pre-service teachers who volunteered to be a part of the study. Two hundred fifty pre-service teachers were invited to do the survey. Out of these, 205 pre-service teachers completed the survey, comprising of 24 (11.7%) male and 181 (88.3%) female students; 63 (30.7%) year 3 and 142 (69.3%) year 4 students; 49 (23.9%) Arabic & Islamic Studies, 27 (13.2%) Math & Science, 35 (17.1%) from English specializations, and 94 students

were from (45.9%) Cycle One.

2.4 Instruments

Only year 3 and year 4 pre-service teachers enrolled in the B.Ed. Program at the Bahrain Teachers College participated in this study. The survey consisted of 31 closed-ended items in a questionnaire distributed to all participants in the semester 2 of the academic year 2017-2018.

The survey items were analyzed descriptively using means & standard deviations.

Three experts in the field reviewed the questionnaire to verify its reliability. The closed-ended survey was piloted for validation with approximately 30 pre-service teachers. The survey was administered in Arabic to ensure that all the respondents consistently understood the items. An Arabic language expert reviewed the survey to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the language.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Values (n= 30)

	Dimensions	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Values
1	Teaching Practice Competencies	17	.796
2	Quality of Supervision	10	.891
3	The time Devoted to Teaching Practice	4	.746
	Total	31	.878

The preliminary data collected from pre-service teachers during the pilot cycle led to the calculation of the survey Cronbach's Alpha. Table 1 shows that the overall instrument has high reliability (0.878 Cronbach's alpha).

3. Findings

The research results are presented according to the research objectives:

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Participants on Teaching Practice Competencies (n= 205):

N.	Item	M	St.D.	M	St.D.	M	St.D.
1	Teaching practice helped me in the reflection.	4.62	0.73	4.73	0.48	4.70	0.57
2	Teaching practice helped me find solutions to problems in the classroom.	4.10	0.87	4.37	0.82	4.28	0.84
3	Teaching practice enabled me to know the school environment's reality from the teachers' perspective.	4.60	0.64	4.77	0.42	4.72	0.50
4	Teaching practice helped me learn from experienced teachers' practices.	4.11	1.05	4.26	1.07	4.22	1.06
5	Teaching practice enabled me to apply the knowledge in the real environment.	4.30	0.78	4.40	0.83	4.37	0.81
6	Teaching practice helped me become familiar with the content of the curricula.	4.24	0.80	4.57	0.59	4.47	0.68
7	Teaching practice helped me develop the students' personalities.	3.81	0.96	4.20	0.86	4.08	0.91
8	Teaching practice helped me create learning opportunities that took into account students' differences.	4.00	0.84	4.21	0.84	4.14	0.84
9	Teaching practice helped me implement a variety of teaching strategies.	4.45	0.86	4.48	0.74	4.47	0.77
10	Teaching practice helped me acquire classroom management skills.	4.22	0.83	4.27	1.02	4.25	0.96
11	Teaching practice increased my ability to evaluate students' learning (strengths and the points that need improvement).	4.02	0.91	4.44	0.66	4.31	0.77

12	Teaching practice helped me to practice verbal communication with the students.	4.59	0.53	4.64	0.55	4.62	0.54
13	Teaching practice helped me to practice non-verbal communication with the students.	4.03	0.92	4.44	0.73	4.32	0.81
14	Teaching practice helped me to employ technology in the learning process.	4.30	0.99	4.37	0.90	4.35	0.93
15	Teaching practice helped me support the relationships with parents.	2.34	1.14	2.94	1.41	2.76	1.36
16	Teaching practice helped me nurture relationships with teachers in school.	4.05	0.92	4.23	0.96	4.17	0.95
17	Teaching practice helped me to recognize the ethics of the teaching profession.	4.49	0.64	4.58	0.75	4.55	0.72
	Average	4.13	0.85	4.35	0.80	4.28	0.82

Table 2 Showed that the overall mean of the sample responses is (4.28). The means ranged from (2.76) to (4.72). The majority of the participants agreed that the teaching practice program affected their learning competencies positively. Item no. 3 “Teaching practice enabled me to know the school environment's reality from the teachers' perspective” has the highest rank, while item no. 15 “Teaching practice helped me support the relationships with parents” has the lowest rank.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Participants on Quality of Supervision (n= 205)

N.	Item	M	St.D.	M	St.D.	M	St.D.
A. University Supervisor:							
1	The university supervisor was keen to meet with the cooperating teacher.	4.27	1.07	4.18	1.09	4.21	1.09
2	The university supervisor evaluated my lesson plans.	4.59	0.76	4.46	0.94	4.50	0.89
3	The university supervisor used a scale in evaluating my performance during the class visit.	4.34	1.10	4.22	1.07	4.25	1.08
4	The university supervisor provided immediate feedback after each class visit.	4.71	0.64	4.68	0.72	4.69	0.69
5	The university supervisor evaluated our professional discussions through meetings.	4.47	0.88	4.34	0.98	4.38	0.95
	University supervision (average)	4.48	0.89	4.38	0.96	4.41	0.94
B. Cooperating teacher:							
6	The cooperating teacher helped me plan lessons before I teach my lessons.	3.60	1.30	3.89	1.34	3.80	1.33
7	The cooperating teacher accompanied me while teaching in the classroom.	4.47	0.92	4.53	0.94	4.51	0.93
8	The cooperating teacher provided me with immediate feedback after my teaching.	3.65	1.29	3.82	1.34	3.76	1.33
9	I benefited professionally from the feedback given by the cooperating teacher.	3.39	1.41	3.91	1.35	3.75	1.38
10	The cooperating teacher was keen to meet with the university supervisor.	3.40	1.34	3.68	1.52	3.60	1.47
	Cooperating teachers (average)	3.70	1.25	3.97	1.30	3.88	1.29
	Average	4.09	1.07	4.17	1.12	4.15	1.11

As it is shown in table 3, the overall mean of the sample responses in university supervisor dimension is (4.41). The means ranged from (4.21) to (4.69). The majority of the participants agreed that the BTC supervision affected their learning positively. Item no. 4 “The university supervisor provided immediate feedback after each class visit” has the highest rank, while item no. 1 “The university supervisor was keen to meet with the cooperating teacher” has the lowest rank.

The results show that the overall mean of the sample responses in cooperating teacher is (3.88). The means ranged from (3.60) to (4.51). The majority of the participants agreed that the CT supervision affected their learning positively. Item no. 7 “The cooperating teacher accompanied me while teaching in the classroom” has the highest rank, while item no. 10 “The cooperating teacher was keen to meet with the university supervisor” has the lowest rank.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Participants on the Time Devoted to Teaching Practice (n= 205)

N.	Item	M	St.D.	M	St.D.	M	St.D.
1	The visits of the university supervisor are sufficient (3 visits for the third year / 5 visits for the fourth year)	4.35	1.09	4.49	0.97	4.45	1.00
2	The number of teaching practice period is sufficient (20 working days for the third year / 90 working days for the fourth year).	3.92	1.25	4.23	1.24	4.13	1.25
3	The number of full teaching sessions is sufficient (7 full lessons for the third year / between 10 and 12 lessons per week for the fourth year).	4.06	1.14	4.08	1.33	4.07	1.27
4	The number of observing lessons is sufficient (20 lessons for the third year / 15 lessons s for the fourth year).	3.53	1.50	3.89	1.51	3.78	1.51
	Average	3.97	1.25	4.17	1.26	4.11	1.26

The results also show that the overall mean of the sample responses is (4.11). The means ranged from (3.78) to (4.45). The majority of the participants agreed that the teaching practice period affected their learning positively. Item no.1 “The visits of the university supervisor are sufficient (3 visits for the third year / 5 visits for the fourth year)” has the highest rank, while item no. 4 “The number of observing lessons is sufficient (20 lessons for the third year / 15 lessons s for the fourth year)” has the lowest rank.

4. Discussion

The results showed that the teaching practice program at the Bahrain Teachers College had the satisfaction of all the respondents whether they were third or fourth-year pre-service teachers, since the averages are relatively high in all the items and dimensions. This could be due to the merging of teaching practice courses in all years of the programs. Moreover, the findings of the current study are in alignment with other studies conducted by (Zhao & Zhang, 2017; Foncha, Abongdia, & Adu, 2015; Genca, 2016; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011), and there are many requirements that the pre-service teachers must meet in order to succeed in these courses, for example, teaching, attending a certain number of observations according to the requirements of their level, preparing lesson plans, writing a reflection on a self-recorded lesson, professional commitment, and participating in seminars.

Pre-service teachers in the third year are assigned to attend the teaching practicum course for a limited time (20 school days in four weeks) to apply their teaching strategies and classroom management skills, especially as there are other requirements also that pre-service teachers must fulfill to pass the teaching practice course. The pre-service teachers do not work directly with the students' parents during teaching practice courses, as the cooperating teacher is mainly responsible for this. Therefore, the percentages of this item on the survey were low, and the researchers believe that the teaching practice program should be reviewed in line with the pre-service teachers obtaining this type of experience.

Therefore, teaching practice is an important stage of a teacher's pre-service learning stage, since it is the opportunity where the teacher can apply the knowledge, skills, and the latest techniques in the teaching process, under the

supervision of a university professor, cooperating teacher, school principal, and school coordinator, who provide them with constructive and instant feedback, which help them to interact with different situations and accept the instructions. Boz & et. al. (2019) indicate that the teaching practice program and supervisors' guidance contributed positively forming teachers' beliefs. Mena & et. al (2017) suggest that the communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers should be reconsidered to let the pre-service teachers express their opinion freely.

The effectiveness of teaching practice depends on the support that the pre-service teachers get from the school staff (cooperating teacher, coordinator, school administration, other teachers) with whom they are trained, who are expected to transfer the best practices and experiences to the trainees.

The results showed that the pre-service teachers feel that cooperating teacher in school does not have a significant role in the teaching practice and providing guidance as compared to the Teaching Practice supervisor from the university. Researchers refer it to one of the teaching practice requirements that the Teaching Practice supervisor gives immediate feedback to the pre-service teachers during visits and comments on lesson plans before their visit when received from the pre-service teachers and before they teach. On the other hand, the TP supervisors and cooperating teachers have other tasks that they are obligated to undertake, such as teaching and other administrative work, and to follow up the pre-service teachers in schools.

Third-year students see that 20 school days are not sufficient to gain adequate experience and apply what has been learned in the BTC, since there are many requirements that must be fulfilled within 20 days, but fourth-year students see that the time is adequate because they spend a whole semester in teaching practice without any other academic requirements. With regards to the certain number of observations, the researchers believe that these requirements are important so that students can identify new experiences and benefit from observations in developing their capabilities. For year 3, if we divide the number of observations by the total number of teaching practice days, it will be one observation per day, as this is not an unreasonable amount of work required from the pre-service teachers to do during the period of teaching practice. Many studies indicate an increase in the periods of teaching practice and its distribution throughout the program, and this is what the Bahrain Teachers College is doing (Zhao & Zhang, 2017; Foncha, Abongdia, & Adu, 2015; Genca, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Based on the results, it is recommended for the Bahrain Teachers College to restructure its teaching practice program so the students can get effective experience in teaching. However, the teaching practice program should take into account the following: (1) the duration of the teaching practice should be increased for year three so that pre-service teachers can see their influence on the pupils' behavior. (2) The program should consider the relationship between pre-service teachers and the parents and how it can be strengthened. (3) The role of the cooperating teacher in the teaching practice program should be reviewed.

The findings of this research will have an impact on future reviews of the teaching practice program at the BTC. Modifications may be made to the program based on the results of this study in order to increase the effectiveness of the BTC teaching practice model. Furthermore, the results of the study may have implications for other teacher education programs that follow a practicum training model similar to the one used at the BTC.

The spread of the Coronavirus worldwide changed many concepts and methods in teaching and learning, such as educational curricula, courses in general, and practical teaching practice courses. The teachers' preparation colleges should be reconsidering according to new developments in the field of life and knowledge, and an attempt to benefit from this pandemic in creating new opportunities for society, and helping pre-service teachers to acquire the skills and knowledge that society needs yet, whether in terms of developing education or instilling values commensurate with developments around the world.

Two significant limitations in this study could be addressed in future research. Firstly, the sample focused on third—and fourth-year students, however, it is preferable to take all the years of teaching practice so that the image would be clearer. Secondly, the participants took part in this study were only students, other people involved in the teaching practice program as supervisors, cooperating teachers, and coordinators should also be considered in further research.

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