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Challenges in Teaching Practice at the College of Education based on the Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers: The Case for Kuwait University

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate challenges in teaching practice from pre-service teachers' perspectives. To achieve this purpose, a valid and reliable questionnaire with two domains was developed as follows: school and management; and design and implementation of lessons. A random sample of 128 senior students who attended the student training program was chosen as the unit of analysis. Results of the study indicated that challenges related to school and management were high primarily in the following two areas: large number of students in the classroom followed by school principals not interested in accepting pre-service teachers in their schools. With regard to the design and implementation of lessons, challenges were high in the following three areas: teaching competence requirements were not clear during teaching practice followed by the fact that pre-service teachers do not know laws or regulations related to teaching practice and finally inadequacy of the training period related to design and implementation of lessons. Significant differences were not detected based on gender and specialization. Finally, the study provided a number of recommendations for the field of study.

Keywords: *challenges, teaching practice, pre-service teachers, Kuwait University*

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Education is an important tool for the achievement of progress, and a major element in the national development process in today's changing world (UNESCO, 2005). However effective education cannot be achieved without teachers with professional preparation and a high level of competence that enables them to perform the roles imposed on them (Mutlu, 2014). Merc (2010) suggests that during teaching practice it is important to understand the extent to which teachers are able to put the theory they have learned during college study into practice in real teaching environments.

The teaching profession requires various knowledge, skills, abilities, and continuous training according to Flanagan's classification of professions (Abdehadi & Al-Ezzeh, 2012). Therefore, it is important to take care of teacher preparation and development programs, especially the pre-service teacher education program (PTEP), the most salient of which is teaching practice (Maphosa, Shumba & Sieborger, 2005). Teaching practice is regarded as the first opportunity for preparing pre-service teachers for real teaching contexts where they have the opportunity to employ knowledge, information, and theories acquired through their study (Kennedy, 2006; National Institute of Education, 2013). It is also the real practice of the teaching process through which students are allowed to investigate current work environment conditions, and explore internal and external factors affecting organizational structure characteristics and school planning activities (Al-Momani, 2016).

Teaching practice is the focus of all education systems worldwide due to its influence on the development of skills and behaviors of pre-service teachers, where several studies demonstrated its major role in bridging the gap between theory and practice, provides a framework for the acquisition and development of pre-service teachers' educational and personal competences (Smith & Levvari, 2005). It also provides them with and develops their knowledge about the teaching profession including: knowledge about people, self-knowledge, and self-control (Yan & He, 2010). Teaching practice also teaches pre-service teachers life skills such as independence in problem solving, group work with colleague teachers, and developing positive attitudes toward the teaching profession and career values (Tuli & File, 2009). However, Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri, and Abu-Awwad (2014) stated that pre-service teachers highlighted certain common challenges they encountered during their teaching practice.

Therefore, it was recognized that continuing professional education must find ways and means for pre-service teachers to cope with the complexities of the class-

room and the workplace. Recent reports indicate that new teachers are particularly unprepared for dealing with behavior problems in their classrooms due to their lack of experience (Mutlu, 2014).

Previous research indicated that pre-service teachers have high levels of pressure during their teaching practice experience and they do not engage positively in the teaching process. In addition to internship stress, supervision and administrative workload are examples of teaching practice defect issues (Ong, Shabudin, Azlian & Sharnti, 2004; Farrell, 2008). Shaheen's (2010) study reported problems during student practice related to the academic supervisor, cooperative school, and students. Josoh's (2011) study in Malaysia demonstrated that students faced several challenges, some of which are personal and related to students themselves, others are related to education means. Al-Jassar & Al-Tammar (2011) reported problems with teaching practice related to the role of the local supervisor and university supervision. Abbas and Iv (2013) analyzed student training at ten Chinese universities, which showed three common issues hindering the program as follows: teaching practice is a very short time period, inappropriate time to transfer students teachers to the field, and outdated methods of carrying out teaching practice. Al-Momani's (2016) study at KSA investigated teaching practice challenges at the faculty of education from supervisors and pre-service teachers' perspective. The results showed that these challenges of practice for pre-service teachers were related to the fear of teaching, communication skills, and the linkage between theory and practice.

Problem Statement

Teaching practice at Kuwait University is an important stage in pre-service teachers' preparation and an umbrella term of career development. It is designed to integrate professional practice, theory, and ethical standards within a supervised educational setting, and to provide pre-service teachers with a range of teaching skills such as managing the classroom, employing teaching strategies and teaching aids (Guide of the University of Kuwait PTEP, 2015). To the researchers' best knowledge, there has been limited systematic research into the challenges of teaching practice by pre-service teachers at the college of education. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate challenges in teaching practice from pre-service teachers' perspectives.

Research Objectives

Based on the purpose of the study, the following research objectives were formulated:

1. To determine the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during practicum training in the Faculty of Education at Kuwait University?
2. To determine if there are statistical significant differences in the perceptions of pre-service teachers based on experience, specialization, and gender.

Importance of the Study

The presented study is important for a number of stakeholders. First, the Faculty of Education at Kuwait University will have a clear understanding of the challenges facing teaching practice offered to pre-service teachers. This in turn can be utilized to take proactive measures to overcome such barriers. Second, future pre-service teachers will benefit from the results of the study in developing strategies coping with challenges present during teaching practice. Finally, in-service teachers in cooperating schools may benefit from the results of the study where they can develop a training package for pre-service teachers that can help them overcome those challenges.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The total population of the study consisted of 625 senior students at the College of Education attending their teaching practice during the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. A random sample of 20% was drawn from the population of the study and based on that the sample comprised of 64 males and 64 females representing various academic majors as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample distribution according to academic majors

		Frequency	Percent
Major	Kindergarten	20	16.0
	English Language	18	13.7
	Arabic Language	7	5.5
	Islamic Studies	20	14.8

		Frequency	Percent
Major	Science and Maths	21	16.8
	Psychology	15	11.3
	Social Studies	16	12.9
	History & Geography	11	9.0
Gender	Male	64	50.0
	Female	64	50.0

Instrument

Data was collected using an instrument developed by the researchers based on a preview of related research and theory for the following two dimensions: challenges faced by pre-service teachers related to school and management (12 items), and challenges faced by pre-service teachers in the design and implementation of lessons (10 items). The second part of the instrument included demographic information including gender and specialization. A five-point Likert-type scale was used as follows: 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (neutral), 4 (disagree), and 5 (strongly disagree).

The content validity of the instrument was established by a panel of experts including in-service teachers and faculty members representing various disciplines. Based on their opinions and comments, the instrument was modified and some items were reworded and removed. The reliability of the instrument was established on a sample of 20 pre-service students chosen from outside of the main sample of the study. The reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.84 for the first dimension and 0.87 for the second dimension, which was suitable for the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected from the main sample of the study of 260 pre-service teachers toward the end of the semester. The researchers held a meeting with all the pre-service teachers participating in teaching practice, explained the nature and purpose of the study to them, provided instructions as to how to fill in the instrument and the time it takes, and assured confidentiality and the anonymous nature of the study.

Data Analyses

Data were statistically analyzed with the use of a computerized program called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). To answer the first research

objective, means and standard deviations were calculated. To answer the second research objective, analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to determine the significance of differences between various academic majors while T-test was calculated to determine differences according to gender.

Results and Discussion

Results related to the first research objective

The first research objective was to determine challenges faced by the pre-service teachers during their teaching practice in the Faculty of Education at Kuwait University. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the first dimension, which are the challenges related to school and management as shown in Table 2. As shown in the table, the overall average for this dimension was 2.83, indicating a high level of challenges faced by the pre-service teachers during their teaching practice. With regard to each item, the highest challenges were in the following two areas: a large number of students in the classroom followed by school principals not interested in accepting pre-service teachers in their schools. However, the lowest challenges were in the following two areas: the pre-service teachers understood and handled teaching assignments during their teaching practice followed by cooperative teachers were objective in their judgment of the pre-service teachers' performance during their teaching practice.

Based on above results, it is obvious that the most serious challenges faced by the pre-service teachers were related to the field (cooperating school, school principal, and cooperating teachers) (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013). This result might be due to the fact that the university system did not consider participating schools with regard to class size. It is important to choose schools in the future that meet the Ministry of Education proper class sizes not to exceed 25 students. With regard to the second challenge, it is speculated that the reason why school principals are not convinced in the role performed by pre-service teachers is because of the fear of parents' complaints regarding the experience and ability of pre-service teachers to perform compared to in-service teachers. Another reason might be due to the overload of the school principal to the degree that she has no time for supervising pre-service teachers.

In addition to the cooperating teacher's lack of knowledge regarding her role towards the student teachers and of the importance of the training stage for her, while university related themes (domains) [cooperating supervisor program preparation procedures] received high ratings, which are indications of the

existence of strong elements in aspects related to these domains and elements in aspects related to these domains and on its effectiveness in many aspects, and this might be due to the clarity of program preparation procedures and the existence of a training plan, and the training process passing through sequential and successive stages as well as administrative communication and control procedures with students to find out the important problem faced by students as well as solving difficulties as much as possible; as well as the supervisor's sense of responsibility and his commitment to his role and his provision of appropriate feedback that improves teaching skills continuously, and this is consistent with the studies byarrell (2008) and Josoh (2011).

Table 2. Challenges faced by pre-service teachers related to school and management

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Large number of students in the classroom did not affect cooperative teachers' performance.	3.70	0.45
2. School principals were not interested in accepting pre-service teachers in their schools for teaching practices.	3.61	0.59
3. Cooperative teachers were not interested in developing pre-service teachers' abilities.	3.47	0.58
4. Participating schools did not have an effects on academic achievement due to lack of training.	3.26	0.60
5. Pre-service teachers did not face any difficulties in transferring their university knowledge to real work environments.	3.26	0.73
6. School principals were not convinced in the role of teaching practice for pre-service teachers' development.	3.23	0.76
7. Pre-service teachers did not receive proper guidance from university supervisors.	3.12	0.71
8. Pre-service teachers were excited to participate in teaching practice.	2.85	0.72
9. Pre-service teachers were provided with adequate support from cooperating teachers.	2.01	0.94
10. Cooperative teachers' social relationships with pre-service teachers affected their final assessment.	1.84	0.78
11. Cooperative teachers were objective in their judgment of pre-service teachers' performance during teaching practice.	1.83	0.82
12. Pre-service teachers understood and handled teaching assignment during teaching practice.	1.71	0.97
Average	2.83	0.72

With regard to the second dimension, which are the challenges faced by the pre-service teachers related to the design and implementation of lessons, the overall average for this dimension was 2.69, indicating a high level of challenges (cf., Table 3).

Table 3. Challenges faced by pre-service teachers related to the design and implementation of lessons

	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	All professional teaching competences requirements were not clear during teaching practice.	3.71	0.45
2.	Pre-service teachers did not know teaching practice laws and regulations.	3.61	0.59
3.	Inadequacy of the training period related to the design and implementation of lessons.	3.47	0.58
4.	Pre-service teachers did not face any difficulties in transferring knowledge during classroom lessons.	2.90	0.88
5.	Educational supervisors interfered during lesson implementation.	2.88	0.88
6.	Limiting understanding of subject matter.	3.47	0.58
7.	Weaknesses in the use of educational aids and technologies.	3.26	0.73
8.	Teaching practice focused on theoretical knowledge more than applied knowledge.	3.12	0.71
9.	Pre-service teachers had positive attitudes toward using right educational aids.	2.85	0.72
10.	Educational supervisors were dissatisfied with the academic preparation of pre-service teachers.	2.01	0.94
	Average	2.69	0.67

As shown in Table 3, the biggest three challenges facing the pre-service teachers under this dimension were as follows: teaching competence requirements were not clear during teaching practice, followed by the fact that the pre-service teachers did not know the laws and regulations related to teaching practice, and finally inadequacy of the training period related to the design and implementation of lessons. These results can be justified by the fact that pre-service teachers are not equipped with the proper educational competences that qualify them for real work environments. This can be due to the traditional teaching methods that focus on memorization only and not connecting the material taught to real work experiences. Also, it seems that prior to sending pre-service teachers to teaching practice

schools, a training workshop for them should focus on the laws and regulations that govern their work. Finally, education systems should provide training periods equal to one year at least.

However, the lowest two challenges faced by the pre-service teachers were: the pre-service teachers had positive attitudes toward using right educational aids and the fact related to satisfaction of educational supervisors with the academic preparation of the pre-service teachers. It is speculated that pre-service teachers are eager to teach at schools and apply what they have learned in real life settings. This, in turn, affects the satisfaction of educational supervisors toward them. The above results are consistent with the study by Josoh (2011).

Results related to the second research objective

The second research objective concerned determining if there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the pre-service teachers based on specialization and gender. To answer this objective, a three-way analysis of variance was used. Table 4 shows its results. The results indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in the averages of the challenges facing the pre-service teachers due to specialization. These results are justified by the fact that regardless of specialization, university students are exposed to the same teaching methods and strategies

Table 4. Differences between challenges due to specialization

Major		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
mean_All	Between Groups	1.671	7	.239	1.760	.096
	Within Groups	33.645	248	.136		
	Total	35.317	255			
School and management	Between Groups	1.295	7	.185	1.193	.307
	Within Groups	38.446	248	.155		
	Total	39.741	255			
Design and implementation	Between Groups	2.588	7	.370	.768	.614
	Within Groups					

With regard to the students' gender, Table 5 indicates that there are no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the pre-service teachers related to challenges due to gender. These results can be justified by the fact that both genders have equal educational opportunities and come from the same culture.

Table 5. Differences between challenges due gender

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Eta Squared	Sig
Corrected model	966.675	3	322.22	4.012			
Interpret	123601.	1	124601.	6409.557	0.000	.990	
Gender	960.080	1	960.0801.	11.953	0.002	.151.	Not sig
Male	71.202	1	70.202	.090	0.766	.002	Not sig
Female	70.202	1	71.202	0.897	0.344	.012	Not sig
Error	5381.719	124	80.324				
Total	584332.000	128					
Corrected total	6348.394	70					

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

- conducting training workshops and meetings for university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and pre-service teachers to discuss and arrange their specific roles and expectations.
- conducting training workshops for pre-service teachers during field training to enhance their abilities in good planning and practicing modern teaching methods.
- the provision of guides specific to teaching practice with unified visions for educational supervisors, students, school principals and cooperating teachers.
- adding a practical part into the course description of other courses in the study plan because this practical part may increase students' academic achievement throughout their university study
- conducting similar studies with another larger and more representative sample and a study of these challenges from school principals' and cooperating teachers' perspective in order to be more comprehensive.

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