AN EVALUATION STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED WORK OF INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN JORDANIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the participants' perceptions towards the school-based work of ITT and the partnership between training units at the universities and the partner schools.Questionnaires and interviews were implemented in this study. The views related to the school-based work of ITT were obtained from 195 participants in ITT (146 student teachers, 24 mentors, and 11 tutors).

The findings related to the school-based work of ITT showed that the observation stage was felt to be inadequate both in its length and organisation. Both student teachers and tutors expressed some reservations about the mentors' role in implementing the observation stages. The findings showed that the tutors and mentors mostly ignored the observation lessons, nor was there any organisation or plan for the observation lessons. Furthermore there is no real analysis or discussion of the observation lessons between student teachers and their mentors and tutors. The partnership between the partner schools and the universities was seen by most respondents in the study to be inadequate. Relationships and communications between the universities and partner schools are poor and there is a lack of support for partner schools from the Universities. There are no selection criteria for the partner schools other than their proximity to the universities and there is no student choice of schools. Facilities for students in school are limited and some headteachers regarded the student teachers as creating problems for the administration and facilities because of the large numbers placed with them. Many of the student teachers felt that the partner schools were not the most appropriate places for their training.

Keywords: Tutors, mentors,observation lessons

Introduction

Teacher education is of crucial concern in countries across the world and the development of teacher education and training programmes can reflect the whole of a country's development. The focus of interest varies from one country to another, but most countries have teacher education policy as a priority. It is evident that improving the quality of education in general is dependent upon the quality and relevance of teacher education. The priorities in the development of teacher education are now a global concern, but they are different in the developed and developing countries. In the industrial and developed countries the concern is the supply and quality of teachers, whereas in the developing countries the major issue is the need to upgrade teacher qualifications, particularly in the primary sector (Abu-Dalbouh, 1997; Moon, 1998).

There has been a major debate in teacher education about the link and balance between theory and practice. It is impossible to practise without theory and clearly no trainee should go into classroom without some rationale and theory about the teaching (Grenfell, 1993). Field-experiences (school-based work) are those in which the student teachers observe in classrooms or are actively engaged in the instruction and management of students. Teacher education programmes vary widely from institution to another. Most programmes abide by the premise that school-based experience can develop teaching competencies for student teachers and schoolteachers themselves (Hedrick et al, 2000). The basic structure of primary and secondary teacher education models includes three components. The first one is the academic preparation in the subjects or disciplines that the student is to teach. The second component is the theoretical foundations of professional education, such as courses in the philosophy, history, sociology and philosophy of education. The third component is the student teachers' school experience (Diamond, 1991). The student teachers' field experience is an essential component of learning to teach. Educators consider student teachers teaching practice to be an important, highly valued experience. It is a critical to the development of student teacher pedagogical skills (Dagmar, 1992). Thorogood (1993) assert that the curriculum of teacher education programmes should be planned around three major areas, general education, subject matter specialisation and professional education.

The assumption behind the school-based part of ITT is that the schools are the best place to help student teachers to develop their teaching competencies and to apply practical teaching skills (DfEE, 1993; Dunne and Bennett, 1997). The school-based work of ITT enables students to realise themselves as teachers, and it is where they expect to develop and test the practical classroom skills to which they have been introduced elsewhere in the course. Not only do trainees get the benefits of field experience but it

also gives the tutors rich opportunities to help trainees make connections with issues and ideas encountered in books, lectures and seminars. The tutors can share in the experience of day-to-day classroom practice by themselves teaching in front of, and alongside, the trainees. Moreover, for schools there is opportunity to make a significant contribution to the preparation of future members of the profession, and to benefit from trainees and tutors' presence in the schools (CATE, 1986). The Teacher Education courses and programmes benefit from the student teachers' knowledge and experience in improving their theories about schools and learning processes in general. In particular the pre-service teachers bring their practical experience about teaching and learning to their undergraduate education courses. Student teachers' personal history-based beliefs can serve as an invaluable framework into which new knowledge about teaching and learning can be integrated. Carter et al (1993) asserted that student teachers bring with them to ITT their personal experience of subject knowledge, attitudes and beliefs and various models of teaching. However these beliefs may be incompatible with the theories and ideas student teachers encounter in their education programmes (Glennon and Stevens, 1999).

Cope and Stephen (2001) in their investigation into the problems which can arise from the location of initial teacher education in two contexts (higher education and schools) revealed that the use of practising teachers (mentors) in higher education has a number of advantages, such as the presentation to students of situated and practical knowledge of teaching and the opportunity for more consistent quality assurance of professional inputs to the programme. But questions are raised about access to the craft knowledge of the teachers and the relationship between theoretical and practical components of the course. They asserted that bringing practising teachers into the higher education context could act as a basis for the development of a more effective initial teacher education and for professional development of both teachers and lecturers working on initial teacher education programmes.

The practical engagement in teaching is a vital part of teacher education as it offers opportunities to acquire practical teaching skills, work directly with students, and apply their acquired ideas, knowledge and plans to actual classroom teaching (Selmes and William, 1996; Yarmouk, 1996). The aim of school-based work in ITT is:

> *"To train today's teachers for today's schools, and to prepare them for rapid change and development in schools" (Pomeroy, 1993, p51).*

On the other hand ITT aims to achieve a balance between academic study (the theoretical side of teacher education) and practical experience in the schools (the practical side of teacher education). It is

concerned with the needs of trainees and assumes that further professional development will be catered for through the post-experienced training, particularly in their first year of appointment in teaching (DES, 1992; Yarmouk, 1996).

Two main issues have been frequently focused on ITT: the amount of time trainees should spend in schools (school-based work of ITT) rather than in the training institutions, and the relationship between theory and practice (Beardon et al, 1995). There are two main reasons for teacher training moving into schools, first the desire to bridge the theory-practice gap, and second the recognition of teachers as professionals, capable of playing a full part in the training of their recruits and who have specialist skills and knowledge valuable to a beginning teacher (Moran and Dallat, 1995).

The period of school experience required in ITT varies from one country to another. For example, in the North America the amount and quality of time spend in school-based work increased at the end of 1980s, for example in Victoria, the minimum is 80 days of classroom teaching for all courses. The assumptions behind increasing the amount of time given for school-based work was the belief that:

> "*The best way to learn to teach is to learn from outstanding teachers in real world situation…further the notion was that the teachable moment accrues when student teachers experience the complexities of teaching and are given direct feedback, which, in turn, they can test by making the suggested correction and learning what happen as a result. Another assumption is that teaching is basically an art that should be structured less by scientific principals than by institution, common sense and lessons derived from experience." (Hawley, 1990, p90).*

In the Netherlands, Dutch primary teachers are prepared through a 4 year undergraduate programme and must complete 40 weeks of teaching (Moon, 1998). The reform plan for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in England and Wales suggested an increase in the amount of time student teachers spend in schools should be increased from 1994 to two-thirds of the secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses (Adey, 1997). Primary student teachers in this programme now spend at least 18 weeks in schools (EURYDICE and CEDEFOP 1995). The idea behind increasing the time of school-based practice was to integrate theory with practice so that the theoretical aspects studied are linked more directly to practical teaching experience as suggested by (Webb, 1984). According to

Circular 4/98 the minimum amount of time that will be spent on courses of ITT is 38 weeks for all full-time primary postgraduate courses and 36 weeks for all other full-time postgraduate courses (DFEE, 1998), whereas in Jordan it is 14 weeks only. It is clear that the amount of time allocated for school-based practice in England and France is given more emphasis as there are separate post-graduate training courses, whereas in the other countries it is a part of the undergraduate degree. In this respect Dunne and Bennet (1997) emphasised that increasing the proportion of time given to school based work could help student teachers to develop their teaching competencies, and to apply practical teaching skills in the schools, which are the best places for this purpose.

School-Based Work of ITT In Jordan

The school-based work is the practical part of pre-service teacher training that prepares student teachers to participate in the practical activities of the partner schools. In this stage the student teachers are trained in how to prepare and write lesson plans and achievement tests and how to evaluate and analyse the curriculum and the textbooks. The student teachers visit the schools and are required to write reports about the teaching-learning process in school. During the training period at the partner schools student teachers are required to practise teaching, prepare teaching aids and plans and participate in the conferences, meetings and workshops held for student teachers in both the University and the partner schools. They also have to obey the school administrative instructions and abide with the school rules, write the reports required at the end of each training stage and produce any homework required by their tutors. Student teachers, during the school-based part of the training course at partner schools, are required to be well organised, to arrive on time, and to plan and prepare lessons effectively. They also are expected to develop good relationships with pupils and partner schools staff and to write the required reports at the end of each stage (Mu'tah, 1997; Jordanian University, 1997; AL-Sagrat, 1999).

The length of the school-based work is 14 weeks, and it consists of two main stages that are nearly the same in all the Jordanian universities:

1. The Observation Stage

Student teachers have theopportunity to observe the different activities of the school. The observation period is two weeks and it consists of two sub-stages. Stage one is General School Observation: this aims to familiarize the student teachers with the schools' activities and facilities and to observe the teaching process in general inside the classroom for one week. Stage two is Specialist Classroom Observation: student teachers are required to attend and observe a special primary class teacher for the grades 1-4. In this stage the mentors should improve the

ability of the trainee to recognize various methods, offer criticism, help them to acquire some experience from their mentors and build good relationships with their mentors. The length of this stage is one week.

2. Teaching Practice Stage

This stage aims to enhance the student teachers' knowledge and teaching competencies. The length of this period is 12 weeks, and it consists of two sub-stages:

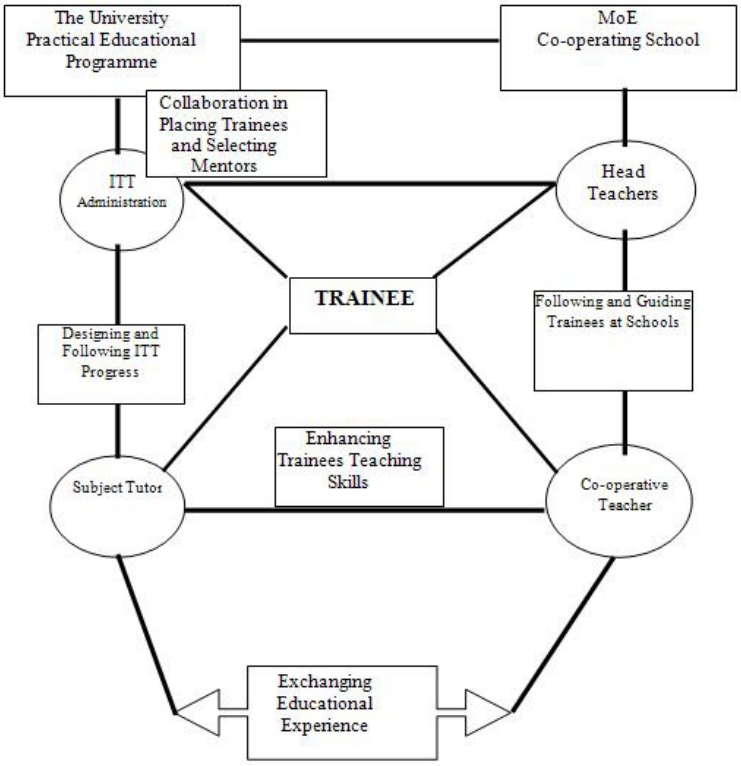
***Part-time Teaching Practice*:** Student teachers have to teach part of the co-operative teachers' plan (teaching load) for two weeks.

***Full-time Teaching Practice*:** Student teachers practise real teaching in the classroom for ten weeks.

The Partnership in ITT in Jordan

Implementing the pre-service teacher training course requires the establishment of links between the co-operative schools and the universities through a partnership. The pre-service teacher training course administration specifies the responsibilities for each one of the partners in the training course: tutors, mentors and headteachers of co-operative schools. Diagrammatically the partnership and the links between participants are represented in the following Figure 2.2

Figure 1: The Partnership in Pre-Service Teacher Training in Jordan



From Figure 1 we can see that the supervision of student teachers is shared between the university and the co-operating schools. There are different participants (in the partner schools and the university) responsible for guiding and supporting the student teachers during the training course. The participants in the partner schools are tutors, mentors, and headteachers. Each one of them has specific duties in the school-based work in pre-service teacher training courses. The following sections describe their responsibilities.

Field-teaching experience in ITT has been a concern of many writers and a variety of issues of school-based work of ITT can be seen. The partnership between schools and training institutions is one of the major issues investigated. Cope and Stephen (2001) in their study attempted to discover the problems that can arise from the location of initial teacher education in two contexts, namely higher education and schools. Williams and Soars (2000) discussed the role of higher education (HE) in the training of secondary teachers in England. The study uses the views of HE tutors, school-based mentors (that is, teachers with responsibility for monitoring, training and supporting student teachers) and student teachers about the sharing of responsibility for various aspects of the initial training of the student teacher. It revealed that the use of practising teachers in higher education has a number of advantages, such as the presentation to students of situated and practical knowledge of teaching and the opportunity for more consistent quality assurance of professional inputs to the programme. But questions are raised about access to the craft knowledge of the teachers and the relationship between theoretical and practical components of the course.

Other studies were interested in the participants' views and attitudes in ITT and the ways in which they influence student teachers' professional development. Merrett and Wheldall (1993) explored the teachers' opinions about the contribution of their initial training in preparing them for the problems that they had to face in their classroom. Zaghal (1990) assessed the effectiveness of practical training approach to the educational technology course, the use and production of teaching aids in the development of knowledge and practical experience competencies of student and the impact of this training course on developing positive attitudes towards the use and production of teaching aids. Duesterberg (1998) focused on answering questions about the culture and cultural identity which student teachers use in elementary classrooms. Duesterberg showed how culture can be used in the classroom to frame and limit children, and how the classroom might be a space in which culture and cultural identity can be explored, challenged, and recreated. AL-Sagarat (1999) and Diab (1999) explored the student teachers' attitudes towards ITT. The findings of the above studies were consistent

about the positive attitudes towards the school-based work of ITT and its impact in developing the trainees' teaching competencies.

The student teachers' problems were studied by Beach and Pearson (1998) who examined changes in pre-service teachers' perceived types of conflicts and tensions, as well as reasons and strategies for coping with those conflicts and tensions during their year-long clinical experiences and in their first year of teaching. McNally et al (1997) looked at the nature of the support student teachers received from the partner schools in making the transition from student to teacher. They found that the mentors perceived support as a concept of nurturing to support as a professional action as part of ensuring the development of appropriate competencies.

The previous studies were concerned with the perceptions and attitudes of the participants towards the school-based work of ITT and the initial training in general. There was more emphasis on exploring the impact of ITT on the student teachers' attitudes.However, the findings of the previous studies revealed that the field experience contributed most to the positive improvement of student teachers' attitudes, and the findings showed that the students teachers have positive attitudes towards the field experience, their tutors and mentors.

This study endeavours to investigate the effectiveness of the primary ITT in the state Jordanian universities. This study will highlight in particular the participants' perceptions towards their training courses. More specifically this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the trainees, tutors and mentors perceive the school-based work of ITT?
2. In what ways can the school-based work of ITT be developed to meet the primary teachers' professional needs as perceived by trainees?
3. What are the areas of co-operation between the universities and the schools in the ITT?
4. How do the tutors mentors, and headteachers perceive the partnership between the partner schools and universities?
5. In what ways can a partnership between the partner schools and universities be developed, which is effective for students, tutors, mentors and headteachers?

The Research Methodology

This study analyses the perceptions and practices of the participants who were involved in the primary pre-service in the state Jordanian Universities. The subjects in the study were drawn from the student teacher population at the Jordanian State Universities, all the Primary Education Tutors at all the Universities, mentors in partner schools who agreed to take

part in the study, and a random sample from the headteachers of partner schools. The researcher distributed 178 questionnaires for all of the student teachers, and 146 were returned, a response rate of 80%, (12 % Male and 88% Female). Interviews also were implemented in this study with a random sample of headteachers of co-operating primary schools consisting of fourteen subjects who collaborated with the Jordanian Universities. Twenty-four primary co-operating teachers (mentors) and eleven tutors

The Findings of the Study

The findings from the questionnaires and interviews of this study were divided into three parts as follows:

The findings related to the Observation Stage

This stage aims to offer opportunities for student teachers to become familiar with the school environment and with the different activities of the school (Yarmouk, 1996). The observation period is of two weeks duration and comprises two sub-stages: general school observation and specialist classroom observation.

In the general school observation the student primary teachers observe all the primary classes for grades from one to ten for one week. They watch and observe the teaching process in general inside the classroom. Student teachers are also expected to observe the daily workings of the school as the start of the school day (7.30 a.m.) until the end of the school day (2 p.m.). This stage aims to make the student teachers familiar with the schools' activities and facilities e.g.: sport yards, library, and laboratory (Yarmouk, 1996).

The specialist classroom observation aims to acquaint the student teachers with a variety of teaching methods and skills and to analyze what is happening inside the classroom during a lesson. The student teachers are required to attend and observe the teachers while they are teaching for one week. During this week the students are given the opportunity to discuss with their mentors any issues related to the teaching practice and to acquire some experience of their mentors' practice and develop a good relationship with them (AL-Sagrat, 1999). In this stage student teachers are required to attend and observe primary class teachers for the first three grades (6-9 years). The student teacher completes his or her training under this teacher's supervision until the end of the training course.

To explore the participants' views of the observation stage the researcher asked student teacher (through the questionnaire), tutors and mentors (through interviews) to state their opinion about the value of lessons observed by student teachers. Beginning with the questionnaire findings the Table 1 shows the outcomes of the questionnaire related to the student

teachers' responses about the quality and variety of training lessons and observation in partner schools.

Table 1: Student Teachers' Responses Related to the Observation Stage

Item	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
The variety of lessons I spent on school observation was adequate	76	52%	70	48%
The variety of lessons I spent on specialist classroom observation was adequate	61	42%	85	58%

F: Frequencies of the sample. % The percentages of the frequencies.

The lessons spent in observation during the field experience at partner schools were not seen to be sufficient for the student teachers. It can be seen from the findings of the questionnaire shown in Table 1 that half (48%) of student teachers were dissatisfied with the variety of lessons spent in school observation. Fifty-eight per cent of student teachers were dissatisfied with the lessons spent on specialist classroom observation. Specialist observation is more demanding and more pointed as it is interesting to note that they were less satisfied with this than the general observation. To get further understanding of the trainees' responses and the actual situations of the school-based work these questions were transferred to the interviews in addition to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The findings of the interviews related to the observation lessons spent on school observation confirmed the questionnaire outcomes. The interviews showed that more than half of the tutors (6 of 11) and half of mentors (14 of 24) were dissatisfied with the school observation phase. Not only the duration of 'one week' of school general observation seen as insufficient for the participants, but also the way it was implemented. Many of the trainees reported in the open-ended questions that they did not in fact do the general school observation, because their mentors did not take the training instructions seriously. This phase was left out by some in favor of the more specialist observation; yet the latter was more unsatisfactory. Some student teachers indicated that their mentors and tutors ignored both the observation phases, general and specialist. A trainee reported that:

> *"My mentor sent me to teaching practice from the beginning of school-based work, without doing the observation stage"*

This trainee was typical in indicating that her mentor ignored the general observation for the school and the specialist classroom observation. She did not observe her mentor on the school's activities in the first two weeks of school-based work of ITT. Fifteen student teachers reported that

one of the main weaknesses of the school-based work was the lack of observation lessons; they were never asked to assess critically in schools in terms of teachers' performance, pupils aspects or the general ethos in school and the way in which it is demonstrated.

The interview findings showed that there was a contradiction between mentors' and tutors' views about the specialist classroom observation. The majority of mentors (15 of 24) claimed that the variety of lessons spent by student teachers in the specialist classroom observation stage was adequate and that the student teachers were given the opportunity to observe their mentors before they moved to the teaching practice stage. One of the mentors commented:

> *"The student teachers had good opportunity to observe their mentors, and to gain some of their experiences in teaching"*

However, it is expected that the mentors would say that, because they are responsible for organising the observation lessons. The majority of tutors supported the student teachers' responses about the specialist observation stage. Eight of eleven tutors claimed that the variety of lessons observed by student teachers during their placement was inadequate. It is surprising that some of the tutors (4 of 11) also reported that the classroom observation stage was totally ignored by mentors and tutors. One of the tutors said that:

> *"The observation stages for both the school and the classroom should be planned and conducted by the mentors in co-operation with tutors, but unfortunately it is mostly ignored by both of them and the tutors do not follow the mentors implementations of the observation"*

This comment explains and supports the student teachers respondents who were dissatisfied with the time spent on the observation stages. This tutor summarised the two main issues related to the observation stage, the lack of organisation and planning for the observation lessons and the lack of mentors and tutors committed to the implementation of the training plans. There is a lack of structure and direction to the observation, as if the students were to absorb all that they see without the critical analysis that should be central. Many of the mentors shared the view about a lack of thorough briefing and expressed their reservations about the universities' planning and critical engagement in general. One of the mentors commented on the organisation of the observation stages in a way which is typical. She said:

> *"There is not any real written plan or organisation from the University about the observation stages and the activities that the*

> *student teachers should observe during the observation stages"*

This mentor indicated that the student teachers spend two weeks observing without any plan or guidance from their tutors or mentors. This might be attributed to the fact that there are no instructions from the University to show the mentors how to organise and analyse observation lessons for the student teachers.

The planning for the observation phases as well the teaching practice phase are supposed to be a shared responsibility between mentors and tutors in co-operation with the headteachers. Mentors have to:

> *"Develop a written realistic plan about what and how they are going to proceed in their work with the students. This plan should be discussed with the headteacher, the University supervisor" (Yarmouk University, 1996, p 5)*

Hagger et al (1995) supported this view and emphasised that in order to ensure that student teachers make effective use of their school-placement the mentors should plan carefully even before the student teachers starts practice teaching, write a realistic plane for the observation lessons by mentors with collaboration with the tutors and should be realistic in their expectations of their student teachers. Some mentors complained about the lack of meetings and communication between them and tutors before or during the observation period. Five mentors emphasised that they had only known they would be mentors when the student teachers arrived, so it was too late for them to plan for the observation lessons. One of the mentors said that:

> *"I was informed that I had been selected by the headteacher as a mentor when the student teachers arrived, and the headteacher introduced her to me in the classroom, and she said that this trainee will be your mentee for the whole school term, and it was the first time for me to be a mentor"*

This response emphasises the lack of communications and meeting between the training staff in schools and universities, and it was one of the main weaknesses reported by mentors and headteachers (see Section 2 The Partnership). This mentors' view was supported by the student teachers' responses in the open-ended questions. The findings of the open-ended questions showed that the tutors do not themselves observe or guide student teachers during their observation stage. Some student teachers reported that the tutors mostly ignored the observation stages and send them to the partner schools without any plans for the activities that they should observe. The

student teachers reported that the supervisory visits start after the first week and some student teachers might receive the first visit from their tutors at the end of second week or in the third week of school based work at partner schools. One trainee reported that:

> *"The first supervision visit was too late and it came after the observation stages, so we did not discuss the observations with any one"*

This example indicates that this student teacher did not benefit from the observation stage although this is one of the main strategies used in teacher training courses. McInyre et al (1994) suggested that tutors must realise that school based practice is regarded as a subject, and as such, it requires a specific way of teaching which is agreed on and carried out by all. The mentors and trainees need a tutor who can support them and induce change where necessary. The question still remains. Why did the tutors and mentors ignore the observation stage? Some tutors explained that because they have a large load of trainees, they could not manage to visit all trainees who were distributed in different schools within one week. One of the tutors commented:

> *"I have 36 trainees and they are distributed in 14 schools, in addition to teaching some courses. It is impossible to cover all of them within one week"*

What is assumed from this response of course is any indication that the observation stage could be prepared for. There are all kinds of matters that take place in school and classroom that are worthy of critical discussions as well as observation, but this does not appear to enter tutors' minds. This attempts to justify why tutors did not follow the trainees during the observation stage. It is a contention that the greater importance attached to this stage is that the students are seen to be carrying out their obligations, rather than any thought being given to what they are actually learning. It reduces the role of the tutor to the instrumental conforming of carrying out visits, rather than engaging in high quality educational dialogues. And what about the mentors? Did they also ignore observation lessons because they were not really participating effectively in ITT? It could be because they have no clear idea about the training plan, or because they were not encouraged to watch the trainees or critically analyse their performance, or it may be due to the fact that the mentors were not capable of analyzing and interpreting the activities observed. It was interesting that four mentors indicated that cutting down the observation phase was preferred, often by the mentees themselves. One of the mentors said:

> *"My mentee asked me from the second day to practise teaching, and I agreed to encourage him"*

Some mentors indicated that observation should be continuous process across the whole training period. They did not place any distinction on the first weeks of the observation. One of the mentors explained why some mentors cut down the observation stage. She said that:

> *"My mentee continues her observation lessons during the partial teaching practice and the full-time teaching practice. We do not cut down the observation lessons, but we compound them with the teaching practice phase"*

This mentor indicated that she did not ignore the observation phase, but she says it was part of the whole school experience. Whereas both of the student teachers and tutors were of the view that the mentors were not serious in implementing the observation stage, they suggested that the mentors must still teach during the observation stage, thus enabling student teachers to watch them and learn from their experience. A personal example of the observation procedures can be given to illustrate this further. I was in conversation with one of student teachers about his mentor and the feedback after the observation lessons. The student teacher indicated that the mentors avoided these discussions and sometimes they do not accept the student teachers' questions about their presentations. He said:

> *"My mentor did not accept the discussions after the observation lessons, when I asked her about some issues related to her presentation. I try to link it with my background at the university, she told me it is very difficult to join the teaching with the theory"*

This suggests that student teachers often do not benefit from their observation and the mentors often do not give their student teachers the chance to discuss with them their comments about what has been observed. Mentors want student teachers to copy them and their teaching strategies. Student teachers also raised another theme related to mentors. The majority felt that the mentors did not encourage them to link their theory to teaching practice. This might be attributed to the fact that the mentors do not have the theoretical knowledge of the student teachers and do not know how to link theory to practice. The mentors try to convince the student teachers that their theoretical knowledge cannot be applied inside the classroom. This may be caused by the mentors' lack of knowledge about conducting and analysing observation lessons. Rae (1997) indicated that the observer must be trained and prepared for the observation so they know exactly what is required from the observation. This task is a university responsibility which has the authority in ITT and the expertise to train the mentors. The next chapter will explore these questions related to the mentors, but the indications are here

already that there is a lack of real thought to the nature and purpose of observation which reflects both in the lack of critical scrutiny of actual teaching and the lack of thought given to the significant of the theoretical underpinning of the early stages of ITT.

Furthermore some student teachers emphasized in the open-ended question that one of the weaknesses of the school-based work was that the trainees spent the whole period of the observation and teaching practice with one mentor. They suggested that implementing the classroom observation stage in different classes would give the student teachers a broader experience in teaching-learning processes. The student teachers do not have the opportunity to vary their experience with different teachers and classes. One trainee reported that:

> *"The training should be in different classes that gives us the opportunity to watch more experienced teachers and to experience and gain more information about the syllabus and textbooks of primary stages"*

The model that the students received was like the old fashioned notion of following the action and example of a particular role-model, accepting and initiating all that was seen. This is a far cry from the ability to compare and contrast, let alone the expertise that would arise from sharing pedagogical ideas. One of the tutors suggested discussing the observation lesson before and after with both student teachers and mentors. He stated that:

> *"There should be a discussion before and after the observation lessons, and selecting specific teaching skills to show student teachers how to deal with it"*

This tutor suggested using a competence approach to mentoring which emphasised selecting specific skills for each lesson. This suggestion could be implemented with the co-operation of both tutors and mentors in organising the observation. Another tutor suggested that:

> *"Selecting some of the good mentors during the observation period, and distributing the student teachers in small groups to spend the observation lessons with them"*

It is easier for tutors to attend the observation lessons with student teachers in small groups and the tutors could choose the nearest schools for the universities. This would remove the necessity of tutors visiting each student teacher and give student teachers the opportunity to observe different mentors and have deeper feedback about the observation lessons.

One of the tutor's suggestions emphasised the importance of varying the teaching experience for student teachers by moving student teachers during the school-based work period. She said:

> *"Our student teachers spend all of their school-based work with the same mentors and we do not select mentors, therefore some student teachers might be lucky by training with good mentors but the majority do not have this chance, so we should swap them to give them equal opportunities in training"*

This suggestion could be implemented with student teachers in the same school, and would give student teachers more opportunities to observe and train with different mentors and in different classes.

Overall, the findings of the questionnaire and interviews concerning observation showed that the number and the quality of the specialist observation lessons was perceived as inadequate for the participants, particularly the student teachers. A major weakness of the observation stage was that there is no organisation or analysis of the observed lessons, and some student teachers do not even do the observation lessons.

The Findings Related to the Teaching Practice

Teaching practice is the main stage of school-based work. Bourk (2001) maintains that practice teaching is the single most powerful intervention in a teacher's professional preparation. In this stage the student teachers practise real teaching inside the classroom. It aims to enhance the student teachers' professional knowledge and teaching competence, and to give them the opportunity to try their own ways and knowledge in teaching in the reality of the classroom.

The following sections show the participants' perceptions of the teaching practice stage and the length of the school-based work. Table 2 shows the student teachers' responses about the training lessons they spent on teaching practice at partner schools.

Table 2:Student Teachers' Responses Related to Teaching Practice

Item	Agree		Disagree	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**
The variety of lessons I taught during training was adequate	67	46%	79	54%

F: Frequencies of the sample. % The percentages of the frequencies.

The findings of the questionnaire in Table 2 show that more than half (54%) of the student teachers were dissatisfied with the variety of lessons

they taught on teaching practice inside the classroom. But the question raised from these responses is whether the sense of inadequacy came because of the insufficient number of lessons they taught or the lack quality surrounding these experiences? The results of the interviews revealed different explanations for the student teachers' responses surrounding their experiences in teaching practice.

The outcomes of the interviews show that the majority of tutors and mentors (9 of 11 and 17 of 24) were happy with the length of the teaching practice stage. The remainder of mentors and tutors who were happy with the length of school-based work shared the same opinion that the length of the teaching practice phase (12 weeks) in comparison with the observation (2 weeks) phase is more adequate. It gives student teachers the opportunity to vary their teaching sessions as well giving them the opportunity to practice different lessons.

Nine of tutors and mentors who disagreed with the existing length and quality of the school experience expressed some reservations about the training curriculum and indicated that the organisation of the training lessons during the school-based work in general and the teaching practice in particular was inadequate. One of the tutors explained that because the number of training lessons per week is between 12-15 lessons and the real load for the primary teachers is between 24-28 lessons per week, within this number the student teachers cannot practise teaching all subjects. This view was supported by some of the mentors who indicated that the current length of school-based work did not enable student teachers to teach all the subjects for the first four grades in the primary stage. Some mentors claimed that student teachers need to train in all primary subjects, but because of the period of time spent in school and the way in which the school based work is organised this cannot be achieved in many cases. One of the mentors argued that:

> *"The student teachers during the current period do not practise teaching for all subjects; only the Arabic language and mathematics, and when they are teachers they will be required to teach all subjects"*

This mentor indicated that student teachers are not trained to teach all subjects. Most train in the Arabic language and mathematics or science. The student teachers choose Arabic Language and mathematics because they are the main subjects in the primary stage. Those subjects have more lessons per week in the students weekly lesson plan. Arabic has 9 lessons (32%) and mathematics 5 lessons (17%) per week in study plan for the primary stage (see Table: 2.1). These subjects are mostly taught in the morning and this

encourages student teachers to include them in their training plan. One of tutors argued that:

> *"I did not consider our student teachers spend enough time in practice teaching. Some subjects they do not know about them and how they can teach them"*

Four of 11 tutors suggested that the length of the school-based work should be increased to between 6-8 months. One of the tutors said that:

> *"The training period should be increased to one year (the fourth Year of BA). The observation stages (the general school observation stage and the specialist classroom observation) and part-time practice teaching should be in the first term (2-3 days per a week), and the second term for the last stage (full-time teaching practice)"*

The implementation of this suggestion would be difficult with the current number of credit hours allowed for the school-based work of ITT in the undergraduate degree (See Table: 2-4). Another obstacle is that the observation lessons in schools demand that the student teachers are freed from theoretical modules. It is impossible to increase the length of the school-based work of ITT to one year without increasing the number of credit hours for ITT, on diminishing the amount of time devoted to the theoretical input, something the Universities do not seem inclined to do.

Mentors and tutors who disagreed with the current length of school-based work suggested extending the current training period and increasing the time of school-based work. One of the tutors said:

> *" Extending the training period to six months at least; two months for observation and part-time teaching practice, and four months for the full-time teaching practice"*

The tutors and mentors argued that the student teachers could not reach an acceptable level of competence in the time available. One mentor said:

> *"I suggested extending the training period to the last year of BA in order to give student teachers opportunity to get more experience in the primary syllabus and teaching skills"*

The interviewees' responses indicated that the student teachers did not fully complete their training by the end of school year. One of the tutors reported that the student teachers do not spend the whole training term in schools and he said:

> *"If we take in account that the student teachers leave the partner schools before the end of school year in order to finish their final exams at the university, so that the real period of training course is less than one semester"*

This comment indicated that the student teachers do not attend for the full term at partner schools. There are therefore many activities in schools which student teachers miss. However, this finding is not so surprising in itself as those student teachers were not freed from their training. One of the tutors said:

> *" It is difficult for student teachers to manage and cope with the school as well as the university at the same time"*

This problem was reported as one of the major problems that faced trainees during their placement at schools by all of the participants. This is borne outin some of the suggestions for increasing school-based work of ITT in the undergraduate students' plan. One of the mentors recommended that:

> *"Teaching experience at partner schools should be given more time in the student teachers' educational plan, and extended to a six month full-time training course"*

A few tutors (4 of 11) indicated that the current length of school-based work of ITT is adequate, but the way in which the universities use this time to train and deliver the school-based work is inadequate. Mentors and tutors are required to have plans about their work with student teachers and they should collaborate in writing these plans. The Universities emphasised that in the mentors and tutors duties.

The training plans should show the procedures and methods which the mentors and tutors will use during the school-based work and specify the main activities that student teachers should undertake in the school-based work. The findings of the interviews indicated that both the mentors and tutors who are responsible for school-based work and training student teachers do not have any plans for the observation and teaching practice stage. One of the tutors said:

> *"Mentors and tutors should approve a written plan about their working with student teachers, but some tutors met the mentors after the training term started and their meeting should have been at the beginning of school-based work"*

Another tutor blamed the mentors who do not follow the training plan, and he said:

"I think the current period of training course is adequate, but it needs the mentors to follow the training instructions"

Conclusion

Those tutors who believe that the current period is adequate point out that the mentors do not have a real commitment to the training procedures. Even if they were, in themselves theoretically valuable they are not put into practice.

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