

Exploring Teacher Educators' Feedback Strategies in Practicum: A Case Study of Pre-Service Teacher Development

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Abstract

The study explored how teacher educators observe pre-service teachers' classroom practice and give feedback, after the lesson, during practicum. It attempted in identifying the strategies they follow in giving feedback along with the challenges they encounter in doing so. This study was conducted after a teaching practicum in a Sri Lankan National College of Education, using an exploratory case study approach, with 05 teacher educators and 12 pre-service teachers, which was a purposive sample. The teacher educators were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule about how they played a supervisory role, following certain feedback strategies, giving feedback to pre-service teachers during the practicum. Pre-service teachers (12) were involved in a Focus group discussion, to gather more data and for triangulation purposes about the kind of feedback they got. Supervisors' written feedback, feedback on mark sheets were collected as documentary evidence. The researcher tried out conducting pre-observational and post-observational conferences, using a feedback framework in giving feedback to pre-service teachers. The findings of the study revealed teacher educators in this study used traditional feedback strategies, which are different to one another and also, they do not tend to follow any updated information about giving effective feedback. The also revealed them encountering several issues and challenges in giving feedback. The researcher's feedback strategy yielded very good results and it was formulated into a new feedback framework, getting the influence from several feedback models. The literature provided several feedback strategies that can be applied and try out. The study highlights the importance of teacher educators exposing themselves to practical feedback strategies and experimenting with them to find out suitable feedback strategies in shaping-up pre-service teachers' professional growth. Implications for the teacher education programs and future research studies were mentioned, while emphasizing the necessity of providing updated guidance for teacher educators in making them efficient supervisors providing effective feedback to make professional teachers with advanced pedagogical skills.

Keywords: Teacher educators, feedback strategies, practicum, pre-service teacher development

Introduction

Feedback in teacher education is a crucial as well as the most important component, which plays a pivotal role in shaping pre-service teachers' professional growth and development (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Especially at the teaching practicum, the growth of pre-service teachers' pedagogical knowledge and instructional capability depend mostly on the feedback they get from teacher educators. Effective feedback enhanced and develop pre-service teachers' understanding of teaching practices, improve their instructional skills and foster reflective practice (Shute, 2008).

Feedback is essentially important in developing pre-service teachers' professionalism. In the Sri Lankan teacher education context, the practicum is a critical stage where pre-service teachers apply their gained theoretical knowledge during their in-class training to real classroom settings, under the guidance of teacher educators. However, a limited number of research studies exist on how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback to pre-service teachers, during the practicum.



Rationale

The importance of feedback in teacher education cannot be understated. Feedback strategies used by teacher educators can significantly impact pre-service teachers' learning and development (Hattie, 2009). Despite its importance, feedback is often criticized for being ineffective or inadequately provided (Boud & Molloy, 2013). In Sri Lankan context, though teacher educators play a vital role in guiding pre-service teachers during practicum, little is known about the feedback strategies they employ and the challenges they encounter in doing so. This study addresses this gap by exploring how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback to pre-service teachers during the practicum in a National College of Education in Sri Lanka.

Context & Objectives

The study was conducted in a Sri Lankan National College of Education, involving 10 teacher educators and 20 pre-service teachers from 02 different courses of study. The 10 teacher educators include 02 researchers of this collaborative case study.

These are the objectives:

1. Investigate how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback to pre-service teachers' during practicum.
2. Identify the type of feedback strategies used by teacher educators (Informed mainly by literature).
3. Identify the challenges encountered by teacher educators in giving feedback to pre-service teachers.

The researchers developed a feedback framework (detailed given later) blending elements from models like Pendleton, GROW, and research Sandwich, focusing on pre-observation and post observation discussions. This framework aimed to promote collaborative feedback, reflection, and clarity on action points for improvement.

Additional point:

Feedback framework trial. The researchers' trial of a feedback framework (Pre-observation & Post observation discussion) informs objectives 1 & 2 providing insights into effective feedback strategies.

Literature Review

Feedback is a crucial component of effective learning and teaching (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In teacher education, feedback plays a pivotal role in shaping pre-service teachers' professional growth and development (Shute, 2008). Research highlights that effective feedback can enhance learners' understanding, improve performance, and foster reflective practice (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). For instance, Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasized that feedback focusing on specific tasks, processes, and self-regulation can significantly impact on learning outcomes.

Feedback models like Pendleton (Pendleton, Schofield, & Tate, 1984) emphasized the importance of structured feedback discussions, focusing on what was done well and areas for improvement. This model promotes a collaborative approach to feedback, encouraging the learner to reflect on their performance. Similarly, the GROW model (Whitmore, 2002) highlights the role of questioning in promoting self-reflection and goal setting, encouraging learners to identify areas for improvement and develop strategies for growth. Empirical studies underscore the impact of feedback strategies on pre-service teachers' learning. For instance, feedback focusing on specific teaching skills and encouraging self-reflection can enhance pre-service teachers' instructional practices (Bringham & Drew, 1999). Black and William's (1998) work on formative assessment also highlights the importance of feedback in improving teaching and learning process. But they specifically spoke of students in schools and not mainly of student teachers.

Research suggests that involving peers in feedback process can promote collaborative learning and reflection (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sooriyampola, 2025). Peer feedback can provide additional perspectives and support for pre-service teachers' development. Effective feedback strategies include pre-observation discussions, focused feedback on action points, and encouraging self-reflection (Shute, 2008).

However, feedback is often criticized for being ineffective or inadequately provided (Boud & Molloy, 2013). In the context of teacher education practicum, feedback from supervisors is critical for pre-service teachers' development. There is a

Table 1: A table connecting objectives, data collection tools and analysis.

objectives	Data collection tools	Analysis
Investigate how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback to pre-service teachers during the practicum.	-Semi structured interviews with the teacher educators (10) - Focus group discussion with pre-service teachers (20) - Documentary evidence (Supervisors' written feedback, comment on marksheets)	- Thematic analysis: coding themes related to observation and feedback strategies.
Identify the type of feedback strategies used by teacher educators.	-Semi structured interviews with teacher educators (10) -Focus group discussion with pre-service teachers (20) -Documentary evidence (As informed in literature, supervisors' feedback written and what is given in mark sheets -Researchers' trial of feedback framework	Content analysis: categorizing feedback strategies used by teacher educators -Mapping
Identify the challenges encountered by teacher educators in giving feedback to pre-service teachers.	-Semi structured interviews with teacher educators (10) -Focus group discussion with pre-service teachers (20)	Thematic analysis: coding themes related to challenges in giving feedback

need for teacher educators to adopt to effective feedback strategies tailored to pre-service teachers' needs.

Given above, the importance of feedback, this study explores how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback to pre-service teachers during practicum in Sri Lankan National College of Education. The researchers implemented a feedback framework blending elements from models like Pendleton, GROW and feedback sandwich.

Pre-observation conference of lesson plan, classifying doubts, highlighting action points.

Post observation conferences- Observed teacher reflects on the lesson, peer observer comments, supervisor feedback focusses on action points and future improvements.

This framework aims to promote collaborative feedback, reflection and clarity on action points for improvements, addressing the need for effective feedback strategies in teacher education.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory case study approach (Yin, 2014), to investigate how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback

to pre-service teachers, during the practicum in a Sri Lankan National College of Education.

Research Design

The case study approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of feedback practices in a real-life context (Yin, 2014). The study focused on a single case: A National College of Education in Sri Lanka.

Participants

There were 10 teacher educators, as supervisors and out of them, 02 were the researchers who carried out this study. The teacher educators and their Block teaching practicum student teachers (02 from each), belong to two different study courses: English as a Second Language and Primary. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, ensuring they had experience with the practicum and feedback process.

Data collection tool

Semi-structured interviews- Were conducted separately with 05 teacher educators from the English and Primary courses. They were interviewed

to explore their approaches to observing lessons and providing feedback.

Focus group discussions- Conducted with 20 pre-service teachers to gather their perspectives on feedback received during practicum.

Documentary evidence- supervisors written feedback and feedback on mark sheets were collected to analyze feedback strategies used.

Procedure

(Teacher educators were interviewed about their feedback strategies and challenges.

Pre-service teachers participated in a focus group discussion on their experience with feedback.

Documentary evidence was collected.

The researchers trialed a feedback framework (pre-observation and post-observation conferences with pre-service teachers.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes related to feedback strategies and challenges (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data from interviews, focus group discussions and documents were coded and categorized to address the research objectives.

Investigate how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback.

Identify feedback strategies used by teacher educators.

Identify challenges encountered by teacher educators in giving feedback.

Trustworthiness

Credibility- Triangulation of data from multiple sources (Interviews, focus groups and documents)

Transferability- Thick description of context and findings.

Dependability- Clear documentation of research process.

Ethical consideration

Informed consent was obtained from participants.

Confidentiality of participants was maintained.

Limitations

The study focused on a single case, limiting generalizability. Findings are context specific.

Findings

The study explored how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback on pre-service teachers during the practicum in a Sri Lankan National College of Education. The findings are presented based on the research objectives. The supervisors' feedback was sometimes specific, but mainly general on lesson plans and classroom practice.

Feedback strategies used by teacher educators

This was mainly quite traditional. Only the supervisor was talking and the pre-service teacher was just a passive listener. Few had peer observers, but they just gave very general comments.

Post lesson feedback- Feedback was often given after the lesson, focusing on strengths and areas to develop. Details on how they need to address the action points were rarely discussed.

Limited peer observation discussions- Few supervisors had discussed with pre-service teachers before the lesson on what to do - Answering questions student teachers have on lesson planning and teaching content. Many supervisors checked their lesson plans, what they are going to take up the next spell.

Challenges encountered by teacher educators

Time constraints- Supervisors complained not having enough time to give individual, detailed feedback, due to heavy work load. Too many student teachers to observe and evaluate. Immediate feedback after the lesson cannot be given due heavy timetable, classes falling in one after the other. No proper place to have post observation discussions in the schools.

Varying pre-service teacher needs- Pre-service teachers' needs are diverse and varied. Their levels are different. Some student teachers are not ready to accept the feedback seriously.

Balancing guidance and autonomy- Supervisors struggle with how much guidance to give while supporting pre-service teachers to maintain their autonomy. Some student teachers practically asking for complete lesson guidance.

Pre-service teachers' perspectives

Expected feedback- Pre-service teachers value specific, actionable feedback. They also expect immediate and detailed feedback.

Desire for complete guidance- Some student teachers are weak in creativity, so they expect everything from the supervisor. Student teachers practically expect the supervisors to 'think' for them.

Researchers' feedback framework trial

This involved both pre and post observation discussions.

Promoted collaboration- Pre-service teachers appreciated greatly, making connections with the earlier block teaching spells, reading supervisor comments given during the previous spell, looking for action points to be addressed for their continuous professional development. Peer observation checklist, peer observers giving critical comments were highly valued.

Focused feedback- Post observation feedback focusing on identified action points, how well they were being addressed, what else can be done in future lessons gave them a clear focus.

Encourage reflection- The feedback framework encouraged supervisors to use some questions in the reflective tool to discuss, which helped student teachers to reflect on their teaching.

Documentary evidence

Written feedback- Supervisors' feedback varied in length, content, specificity and focus.

Mark sheets- Mostly quite general remarks, except for few which were quite specific.

Findings suggest, the feedback used by the supervisors were quite varied and mostly general. They had quite a lot of challenges in providing effective feedback. The trial of the structured feedback framework showed greatly beneficial results. It was found to be quite effective.

Discussion

The study explored how teacher educators observe lessons and provide feedback to pre-service teachers during the practicum in Sri Lankan National College of Education. Findings revealed that teacher educators used traditional feedback strategies, differing from one another, and faced several challenges in giving feedback.

The feedback strategies used by teacher educators were mostly general and varied, aligning with findings that feedback is often ineffective when not specific or focused (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Pre-service teachers valued feedback that was specific, actionable, and focused on improvement, consistent with literature on effective feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

The study's feedback framework, blending elements from models like Pendleton and GROW, promoted collaborative feedback and reflection. Pre-observation discussions helped clarify action points, and post observation feedback focused on these points, encouraging self-reflection. This approach yielded with positive results, suggesting that structured feedback frameworks can enhance feedback effectiveness (Shute, 2008).

Challenges faced by teacher educators included time constraints, varying pre-service teacher needs, and balancing guidance with encouraging autonomy. These challenges highlight the need for teacher educators to develop skills in providing effective feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

The findings underscore the importance of training for teacher educators in effective feedback strategies, aligning with literature emphasizing feedback skills development for educators (Hattie, 2009). Involving peers in feedback processes promoted collaboration, consistent with research on peer feedback benefits (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sooriyampola, 2025).

Implications

Teacher education programs should provide training for supervisors on effective feedback strategies.

Structural feedback framework can enhance feedback effectiveness.

Peer involvement in feedback can promote collaborative learning.

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