

A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN TEACHING PRACTICE SUPERVISION IN TWO PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This comparative study attempts to investigate the teaching practice supervision to obtain information on how it is carried out in two prominent universities in Malaysia, University of Malaya (UM) Kuala Lumpur and Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI) Tanjung Malim, Perak. This is important especially for (UPSI) supervisors as it is professionally beneficial to them. Moreover, some will probably be against the idea of treating trainee teachers as 'equals' as they may be very conservative and traditional in their outlook. Based on the study, a new instrument will be proposed to encourage supervisors and trainee teachers to collaborate. Firstly, trainee teachers doing Bachelor of Education (TESL) are required to do teaching practice during their final semester. Secondly, during this teaching practice, each trainee teacher will be assigned a supervising lecturer from the university. Finally, the supervisor's role is very crucial in helping and guiding, managing and coordinating the trainee teachers' learning during teaching practice. However, the process of classroom observation practice in (UPSI) has some shortcomings. Therefore, the implementation of the new instrument that is proposed lays a very good firm foundation for both trainee teachers and supervisors to understand the principles of collaboration and cooperation in teacher training and development. We strongly believe that the key principle is our sincere and genuine intention in helping trainee teachers to develop and achieve progress in a truly developmental way.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom observation generally form a part of teacher training programme, whether initial or in-service training. These observations are generally based on the assumption that teachers should put into practice what they have learnt on their course, and the supervisor's role is to judge whether what has been taught has in fact been carried out properly.

Classroom observations have, however, always presented problems to teachers and supervisors and generally cause considerable stress and upset on part of the teacher. Implicit in the approach are various assumptions: that we actually define what is 'good' and 'bad' teaching behavior; that

teaching pedagogy is something that can be both taught and learnt; that observers can tell what is 'good' and 'bad' in a classroom according to some prescribed checklist, and that telling teachers what they are doing, 'right' and 'wrong', will in fact lead to better classroom teaching. Even if one believes that doing well will lead to better teaching; one must ask whether this is in fact the best way of achieving better teaching and whether individual teachers can and should teach in different ways, in different classroom situations.

Kennedy (1993) argues that the supervisor's role is more of a neutral arbiter whose contribution has nothing to do with judgment or evaluation. Williams (1989) says that classroom visits should instead provide an opportunity for teachers to develop their own judgments of what goes on in their classrooms, should sharpen their awareness of what their students are doing and the interactions that take place in their classroom, and heighten their ability to evaluate their own teaching practices. In other words, these visits should as far as possible be developmental rather than judgmental.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The researcher has been involved in the supervision of teaching practice for Sultan Idris University of Education Bachelor of Education (TESL) undergraduates for almost ten years. The teaching practice is carried out in the eighth semester. The aim is to expose students to common school practices and culture. The teaching practice will also provide students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills acquired during lectures in a supportive classroom context. It also seeks to introduce students to their wider role as fully participating members of a school community. Experience gained during this period will enable students to prepare themselves for their teaching career.

During teaching practice, each student will be assigned a mentor teacher to be his guide in school; and a supervising lecturer (supervisor) from the university. Teaching in schools and regular observations will be made. The supervisor will submit two observations as the basis for assessment based on the assessment instrument that has been established.

From the researchers' personal experiences supervising the trainee teachers and discussions with supervisors on clinical supervision, most of them do not carry out the stages and the principles of this approach. They are not really sure about what and how clinical supervision should be carried out because they are not given sufficient guidance and practical experience in using this approach.

Most of the supervisors make observations merely to meet the minimum requirement of the teaching practice programme and this is insufficient. Some weaker teacher trainees may need more guidance and assistance but they are unable to do so because of lectures, tutorials, research, and administrative work in the university and furthermore supervisors are permitted to make

only two visits throughout the 14 weeks duration of teaching practice. The supervisors have very limited time to implement the principles of clinical supervision which require pre and post discussions of not only the lesson concerned but also problems which the trainee teachers may have faced in other lesson taught. More often, the supervisors do not give trainee teachers enough time to discuss in depth the problems related to classroom teaching. It is sometimes clear that the supervisor observes a lesson and disappears a few days or weeks leaving the trainee teachers to cope on their own. This type of relationship between the trainee teachers and supervisors is not healthy because most of the Bachelor of Education (TESL) students are inexperienced in teaching. Being novice teachers, it is crucial for them to get sufficient help and guidance from the supervisors. The mutual trust and respect between them and the supervisor are important for their personal development.

The lack of training is also a major constraint in the past teaching practice arrangements. One of the reasons to why the need for proper training is greatly wanting is because of the lack of experience supervisors. Many of the supervisors especially the new lecturers have not been adequately trained into the training curriculum, and lack experience in observation and supervision duties, which it could be said, are the most delicate and demanding of training. It is therefore little wonder that many tend to rely, as a model for current practice, on their experience of being supervised and observed in their supervision of trainee teachers in what might be termed a default response.

Apart from the prescribed instruments for observation and supervision, there are no other instruments to assist and ensure that supervisors follow through the stages of clinical supervision. This coupled with the absence of monitoring and networking among supervisors, leaves supervision much to the interpretation of individual supervisors. Grades or marks given by the supervisors are unquestionable because there are no mechanisms for external moderation (except in fail or distinction cases). Occasionally, personal clashes and favouritism can affect the assessment.

Finally, the supervisors do not actually provide supportive feedback to the trainee teachers as to what they are expected to do during the post-lesson discussions. This is mainly due to the lack of skills in providing feedback among the new lecturers, or sometimes they prefer to be more directive and emphasize what the trainee teacher should do in his future lessons. This is to cut short the time during post-lesson discussions and the trainee teacher just listens to what is “told”. While this approach has been found effective, the supervisors have to be sensitive to the changing needs of the trainee teachers as they gain more experience and confidence during the teaching practice.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The overall purpose of the study is to obtain information on how teaching practice is carried out at University of Malaya can be a guide for Sultan Idris University of Education supervisors. Specifically, this study attempt to identify:

- the principles that should be embodied in a classroom visit;
- the roles and responsibilities of supervising lecturers during teaching practice

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an ethnographic approach in which two supervising lecturers from Sultan Idris University of Education and two supervising lecturers from University of Malaya are observed during their teaching practice supervision. Each supervising lecturer was observed twice throughout the 14 weeks teaching practice. In addition, interviews were also conducted to obtain information on their roles and responsibilities during teaching practice supervision.

FINDINGS

The responsibilities of the Sultan Idris University of Education teaching practice supervisors include:

- attending briefing by Teaching Practice Unit
- having discussion with trainee teachers on the requirements and their duties
- making two classroom visits and observations
- checking teacher trainee's lesson plan (record book)
- checking all written exercises given by trainee teachers to students
- providing guidance based on clinical supervision
- providing encouragement to trainee teacher for improvement in the quality of teaching
- monitoring trainee teachers' discipline and performance
- completing LM1, LM2 & LM3 forms

The responsibilities of University of Malaya teaching practice supervisors include:

- evaluate trainee teacher's teaching

- advise, guide and provide encouragement to trainee teacher for improvement in the quality of teaching
- identify the strengths and weaknesses of trainee teacher's teaching and provide suggestions for future actions
- completing the assessment forms

As far as the supervision process is concerned, all the four supervisors were using the process of clinical supervision throughout the classroom observations. They are also provided with a form to record the observation. In addition, they also followed closely what is stipulated in the Teaching Practice Handbook. Unlike Sultan Idris University of Education, no mentor teacher was appointed to supervise the trainee teachers. However, the trainee teachers are advised to refer to the teachers in the school if there is any problem.

Due to the presence of the Teaching Practice Assessment Form which is the classroom observation instrument, all the four supervisors used the supervisory approach where the supervisors comments on the trainee teacher's performance and make concrete proposals for change. During the post-lesson stage, it was apparent that the role of the supervisor is the authority and the trainee teacher is the implementer. In other words, the supervisor directs and the trainee teacher implements. Therefore, trainee teachers are force to comply with what the supervisor thinks they should do and this could hinder the progress of the trainee teacher in assuming responsibility for their own teaching and developing their potential talents.

The presence of the Teaching Practice Assessment Form has also resulted in the supervisors to be judgmental rather than developmental to develop the teacher trainee's ability to assess his or her own practices.

POTENTIAL MODIFICATION OF CURRENT PRACTICE

Teaching practice supervision should be conducted to make classroom visits a learning experience where trainee teachers learn to reflect their own lesson and also providing opportunities for them to work together with their supervisors together to solve classroom problems such as lesson planning and preparation, managing students' learning, classroom management and control, assessing and recording students' progress so that trainee teachers can continue to learn after the teaching practice has finished. To this end, the researchers shall propose some alternatives as modifications and they are as follows:

Firstly, the instrument which is currently used in classroom observations (Sultan Idris University of Education and University of Malaya) needs to be modified. This is because the researchers believe it has several limitations which defeats its real purpose to actually help the trainee teacher to improve and learn from classroom experience and teaching.

Secondly, the supervisor must understand her role as a helper or an understander in the fullest sense so that the trainee teacher would gain more trust and confidence in her. This is crucial for the trainee teachers to develop personally and professionally as the supervisor can also be a role model in this teacher training programme.

Moreover, the somewhat negative ‘culture’ where the teacher is always the master or authority that the student must follow or obey should not carry on. The researchers strongly believe that the teachers as well as the students are all learners in the true sense and they can collaborate and share ideas, and thus learn a lot from each other.

Finally, the researchers believe there is a need to train supervisors in improving their skills in giving feedback. Giving and receiving feedback is very important during the teaching practice and the researchers believe that trainee teachers need to be assisted and guided with positive and supportive feedback.

MODIFICATION OF THE PRESENT INSTRUMENT

As mentioned earlier, the instrument which is currently used by Sultan Idris University of Education supervisors need to be modified. The researchers believe that with modification, the instrument can assist both the supervisor and the trainee teacher more effectively in the process of classroom observation. Firstly, by modifying the instrument, it may help to change the style of approach that many supervisors are familiar with. This may also lead to change in relationships between the supervisor and the trainee teacher. Moreover, trainee teacher may have some responsibilities during the observation. This means that both the supervisor and trainee teacher hold responsibilities for the observation particularly the evaluation of trainee teacher’s teaching performance.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE MODIFIED INSTRUMENT

The instrument is divided into four important parts:

- 1) This is for the teaching item to be focused on (to be agreed upon by both partners)
- 2) This column is a space to record important events of the focus
- 3) This is for the description of the events and
- 4) The space is for lists of issues for the observee to work on. (see Figure 1)

Sultan Idris University of Education
Tanjong Malim
Perak Darul Ridzuan

Form:
Date:
Time:

Agreed Focus: (1)

Stages (2)

Description (3)

Issues to work on (4)

.....
.....
.....
.....

Observer
Observee

Figure 1: The modified instrument

There is also a set of questionnaire for the trainee teachers to self-evaluate their teaching (see Figure 2)

<p><u>Pre-lesson</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have you chosen an activity that is interesting and will generate meaningful language use?• What classroom arrangement will you see?• What materials do you need? <p><u>During lesson</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What evidence was there that the students were interested/not interested?• Which of your aims were achieved? <p><u>Post-lesson</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you feel about the lesson you taught?• Did anything happen that you had not planned for or anticipated?• How do you think you would like to develop your teaching in future?
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Figure 2: The self-evaluation form

(Adapted from Williams 1989 & Burke 1997)

There are no grades or marks to indicate that the observation is for assessment on the modified instrument. Furthermore, both the supervisor and the trainee teacher are considered as equals, having agreed upon their own roles or responsibilities in the observation. There are three stages in the classroom observation that the supervisor and the trainee teacher have to go through when using the instrument. The first stage is the pre-observation, the second stage is while or during observation and the final stage is the post-observation.

THE PRE-OBSERVATION STAGE

During this stage the supervisor and the trainee teacher have reached an agreement on what to focus on during the lesson. This stage is very important where the supervisor and also the trainee teacher confirm and are clear about what to do during the observation and post-observation. The trainee teacher is in control and he decides upon what to focus on. This means that he is given a kind of responsibility and provision for his wishes in the observation. The supervisor on the other hand assists him by asking some open-ended questions about why he has chosen the topic and how the classroom observation is going to be conducted.

The trainee teacher will have to go through the items in the assessment form provided by the Sultan Idris University of Education Teaching Practice Unit and select one item. He should choose from the assessment form because the instrument is designed to fulfill the institutional need and it is imposed by Teaching Practice Unit, Sultan Idris University of Education. Therefore this means that the trainee teacher has to choose items within the assessment form. Once he has chosen the item, he informs the supervisor and discusses further details about the item with her.

To illustrate this, let us assume that the trainee teacher has chosen 'presentation'. After further discussion, they both agree on the item and the supervisor writes down the 'agreement' on part (1). She might also look at the lesson plan and the stages of activities in the lesson. The observer should prepare herself very well because she should have an idea of the stages of the lesson and any activities the trainee teacher will be doing.

DURING OBSERVATION STAGE

This is the important stage where the supervisor writes a description of the events in the lesson. She sits at the back of the class in a strategic position where she faces the trainee teacher as he

teaches, in order to enable her to listen to what he says. Her position enables her to see the facial expressions of the students too, to see for instance whether they understand what the trainee teacher has instructed them to do. She can also move flexibly without disturbing the students while the lesson is going on. It is also important for her to observe behaviours but she must not interpret. And, she also remembers that the student's behaviours are as important to observe as the teacher's.

THE POST-OBSERVATION STAGE

A discussion after the observation is vital for both the supervisor and the trainee teacher. It enables both of them to reflect and evaluate to see how the (previously agreed focused item) has been met and to set new targets for future lessons. This stage emphasizes the importance of responding and sending 'messages' between two people; the supervisor and the trainee teacher. The 'messages' or feedback from their discussion is an effective means of driving the trainee teacher to develop his teaching competence. According to Shaw, the quality of feedback is the single most important factor in improving trainee teacher's teaching performance (1992:112). Therefore, the supervisor and trainee teacher must agree upon their roles during this stage so that 'quality feedback' will be achieved. The researchers agree with Edge (192b:63) when he proposes the role of the supervisor as the 'Understander' and that of the trainee teacher as the 'Speaker' which is vital at this stage. Both of them will go through five stages in their interaction: eliciting, reflecting, focusing, goal-setting and planning.

CONCLUSION

A good and healthy relationship between a supervisor and trainee teachers will definitely lead to mutual trust and respect which the researchers believe are vital ingredients for success and effectiveness of teacher training and development. The researchers believe during teaching practice, trainee teachers are vulnerable and they are in varying states of nervousness: it is extremely important that supervisors provide them with support and encouragement that they desperately need to boost their confidence. It is easier said than done, and often many supervisors may not have realized the critical conditions the trainee teachers are under.

Nevertheless, the researchers managed to design a simple instrument which may be able to perhaps change the way supervisors 'work' with trainee teachers during teaching practice. The present instrument that supervisors use definitely conforms to what the Teaching Practice Unit Sultan Idris University of Education, wants. However, from the researchers' point of view, the instrument is appropriate and suitable to use at a later stage of the trainee teachers' teaching practice to evaluate and provide summative assessment of their teaching performance. As such, the researchers believe classroom observations by supervisors should not be limited to only two but depending on the needs of individual trainee teacher. Meanwhile the modified instrument can be used from the beginning and throughout the teaching practice to assist trainee teachers

develop their teaching skills at their own pace. The researchers sincerely hope that the modified instrument will serve a two-pronged instrument which could firstly help reduce the fear and anxiety among trainee teachers during their teaching practice because of its non-evaluative nature. Secondly, the supervisors may realize their 'new roles' as being less directive and non-judgmental and indirectly change their attitude towards the trainee teachers. It is not easy to change the supervisors' attitude but the researchers are positive the modified instrument may act as a catalyst in achieving this big change.

The researchers also believe teachers in particular should instill a caring quality among students at the earliest possible stage as possible to ensure a next generation of caring people. This caring attitude should begin in educational institution like Sultan Idris University of Education where supervisors can instill this positive human quality among the trainee teachers. Supervisors should show that they are genuinely care and respect trainee teachers as individuals and this provides a conducive and effective atmosphere in teaching and learning. The trainee teacher will perhaps emerge as caring teachers after they graduated from the university.

Apart from that, the researchers have experienced and learned that good interpersonal skills are very important in his role as a teacher trainer. Supervisors have to acquire these skills to provide positive and supportive feedback to the trainee teachers throughout their study in the university and in particular during their teaching practice. The researchers strongly agree with Wajnryb when she admits that the most difficult aspect of her job as a TESOL trainer is the feedback interaction (1994:24). However difficult and complicated the task is, the researchers believe supervisors have to take the responsibility and justify their actions by showing their sincere intention of giving effective help.

In addition, supervisors and trainee teachers should work collaboratively to learn from each other. The researchers agree with Edge when he describes that "self-development needs people: colleagues and students" (1992a:3). It is evidently true that when supervisors collaborate, they will be able to understand their own experiences and opinions. This is very important for both the trainee teachers and supervisors to develop personally and professionally.

Finally, although the researchers see the 'new instrument' as being the most appropriate for improving supervisors' observation skills, it is not the definitive way. The researchers strongly believe there are many other skills which need to be considered too in carrying out roles as effective supervisors to help produce 'future' teachers in Malaysia who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as able to contribute to the betterment of the society and the nation at large.

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