

Perceptions of Cooperating Teachers and College Supervisors about the Principles Guiding a Teacher Preparation Program

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Abstract: *Teacher preparation programs can advance the development of education by preparing distinguished graduate teachers who can work in schools, collaborate with colleagues and facilitate students' learning. This paper aims to investigate cooperating teachers' and college supervisors' perceptions of a teacher preparation program in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) pertaining to NCATE's Blue Ribbon design principles for Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning. In this quantitative research, a random sample of 13 college supervisors and 95 cooperating teachers, who were involved in student teaching program, participated in the study and responded to a five-point scale questionnaire. The findings revealed significant differences between the perceptions of cooperating teachers' and college supervisors' towards the aptness of SQU's teacher preparation program in relation to the Blue Ribbon's design principles. Based on these findings, recommendations and further studies are suggested to improve the contemporary status of the teacher education programs.*

Keywords: Accreditation, candidate teachers, college supervisors, NCATE, Livetext

1. Introduction

Teacher education programs are vital in contemporary societies as they build the foundations of development (Alhwti, 2007), by educating and producing well-qualified teachers (AACTE, 2010). Indeed, a "highly qualified teacher" is one of the goals that the No Child Left Behind Act pursues whilst supplying every classroom with the best teachers for every student (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Thus, in order to prepare effective teachers for 21st century classrooms, teacher education requires urgent change (NCATE, 2010).

It is argued that high-quality preparation programs are entirely based on school practice (AACTE, 2010), where candidates commence teaching school students, practicing various strategies, and applying knowledge in advance (NCATE, 2010). A central feature underlying this concept is integrating school-based practice (i.e. clinical partnership) by involving university faculty, administrators and teachers, similar to the medical profession (Garrido, 2012; NCATE, 2010).

1.1 Teacher preparation programs

A growing body of literature on teacher preparation programs (Al Ganbousy, Al Harthi & Kazem, 2012; Linkenhoker, 2012; Amer and Ismail, 2014; Hogan, 2011), asserts that cooperating teachers and college supervisors play a critical role in the effectiveness of any teacher preparation program (Whitford & Villaume, 2014). However, the importance of teacher preparation programs, as perceived by National Council for Teacher Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), is positively related to high levels of training among cooperating teachers, as they spend more time with the candidate teachers (AACTE, 2010; Hogan, 2011) and that the evaluation of the cooperating teachers is imperative

during student teaching (Hogan, 2011; Lawley, Moore & Smajic, 2014). Hence, teacher preparation programs assign school teachers to assess the performance of candidates. Hogan (2011) highlighted the importance of cooperating teachers' perceptions in teacher preparation programs. Yet, teachers can still add further voice to the current teacher preparation literature and offer the anticipated future teachers roles and responsibilities.

Cooperating teachers are not the only people who play a significant role in evaluation. College supervisors also offer broad experience to candidates and evaluate their performance during student teaching (Amer and Ismail, 2014). Their experiences provide candidates with rich environment for relating the theoretical content knowledge they study at the university with the reality of schools. In indicating the role of teacher preparation, this study outlines the historical significance of teacher preparation programs within the overall stakeholders' position in establishing robust relationship with the higher education institutions in the country.

1.2 Teacher Education Programs in Oman

Historically, in Oman, the nation-wide educational reform that the Ministry of Education underwent in 1998, and which changed the general education system to the basic education system, emerged from parents, educators and the private sector (Al-Hammami, 1999). Indeed, the teacher education program is the groundwork that prepares candidates to work effectively in the Omani schools. The Ministry of Education has created a robust partnership with Sultan Qaboos University's College of Education (CoE) teaching programs. According to the World Bank Summary report about education in Oman, it is apparent that the Ministry of Education seeks to maintain the effectiveness of its education through offering programs at SQU for teachers. For instance,

the Ministry of Education has attempted to establish a management training program to improve leadership in collaboration with SQU which “provides initial teacher education, as well as preparation for school leaders and supervisors” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 128). Thus, the role that SQU plays in such partnerships is dynamic, since it is the only state university in Oman (Al Musawi & Abdelraheem, 2004; Al-Issa & Al Bulushi, 2010).

With the introduction of the student teaching programs at SQU, the course starts during school times and works with the selected partnered schools to assign a group of candidate teachers under the supervision of a cooperating teacher and a college supervisor. During this course, both SQU’s college supervisors and cooperating teachers from the Ministry of Education work and assess candidates’ classroom performance. Additionally, they provide appropriate feedback to help candidates attain content knowledge as well as the conceptual framework competencies to facilitate students’ learning at school. As a requirement, the LiveText program, an online management system, has been adopted to facilitate the assessment and evaluation process in student teaching and to strengthen the relationship between the cooperating teachers in the Ministry of Education and SQU’s College of Education.

After the teacher preparation program at SQU has been criticized and considered insufficient due to several factors such as university tutors’ insufficient experience, skills and knowledge in school teaching (Al-Issa, 2005; Al-Issa & Al Bulushi, 2010), the need to evaluate Oman’s only state university programs increased. In addition, other factors were cited, including that the training programs failed to prepare competent teachers who were found lacking skills in teaching methods and techniques (Al-Issa & Al Bulushi, 2010). Omani novice teachers need to develop their pedagogical skills and the teaching practice they had during the initial teacher education was limited (Al-Issa & Al Bulushi, 2012). Mostly, the theoretical focus in the teacher education program overrode the practical one (MoE, 2012; Al-Issa & Al Bulushi, 2010; Al Ganbousy, Al Harthi & Kazem 2012). It is postulated that candidates lack experience, have limited knowledge of the subject matter and that they follow the textbook because they feel secure in this condition, or they utilize what they have previously learnt as pupils in their own schools (Al-Issa, 2009). Therefore, the call to change teacher education and to revise it is one of the main challenges that SQU’s College of Education confronts.

Recently, SQU’s College of Education has undergone the first academic accreditation of its teacher education programs and this is gradually being publicized. The College of Education programs were reviewed and some of them were recognized by their specialized program associations, such as the science education, English language education, and early childhood education programs. Regarding teacher education student teaching, the Field Experience and Student Teaching unit (FEST) collaborated with the cooperating teachers to effect adjustments in field experience and the partnership between the college and the partnered schools. Such meetings not only built a good rapport with the cooperating teachers

but advanced the progress and accreditation stage between both teacher education and the Ministry of Education.

Despite the extensive feedback that SQU’s college supervisors and cooperating teachers exchange, there is still a need to indicate whether the student teaching program is ready for change by acknowledging the extent to which the teacher preparation program’s basic design is compatible with the ten design principles as released by NCATE’s Blue Ribbon panel. However, implementing an American-based accreditation system remains a question for SQU despite assumptions that were made in the U.S that educational institutions communicate similar goals, values and language (Lane-Kelso, Gunn & Al Washahi, 2014). The next section provides an overview of what an American- based system entails to improve teacher education programs through the realisation of its standards in the various operations of colleges seeking accreditation.

1.3 Accreditation and teacher education programs

NCATE accredits institutions and provides value to programs and schools in meeting key standards that were predominantly set to evaluate the extent to which programs or schools prepare highly qualified teachers who are able to fulfill their roles and potential in the field of teaching (Brown, 2009). The NCATE set the standards and used research to indicate the importance of teacher preparation programs. Education programs produce well- prepared graduates who meet the needs of students and satisfy the goal that every child should receive a good education and that children deserve highly qualified teachers in order to help raise their level of achievement (NCATE, 2014; Al Barwani, Al-Ani & Amzat, 2012). According to Singh & Stoloff (2008), it has been found that there is a strong correlation between teacher quality and student achievement. Brown (2009) asserts that one of the premises that NCATE holds is that student achievement is strengthened by adequate teacher training. This means that the role that teacher education programs play in preparing well-qualified teachers will affect the students’ performance in their schools.

NCATE accredited many educational organisations by achieving four important goals. The first is about creating principles for knowledge and skills. Then, comes the review and evaluation of all components of teacher education programs. The third indicates giving guidance to education programs and the fourth demands the sharing information with all stakeholders in education about accreditation (Brown, 2009).

Some institutes easily meet the NCATE standards and become accredited. There are about 614 accredited institutions in the U.S (Butler, 2006), while others fail to meet the standards (Wesley-Nero, 2007). The role that NCATE serves in the field of teacher preparation was criticized although the standards are universal to all schools of education. When the standards are used to evaluate programs, a college unit’s image and reputation become enhanced (Hendricks, 2010) while the process itself in accrediting the programs is to verify competence (Brown,

2009). However, one of the criticisms about the NCATE is that different contexts of schools are treated equally and that the same standards are used for all schools despite differences in language, culture, and background (Brown, 2009). On the other hand, Hendricks (2010) noted that NCATE has no effect on teachers' teaching methods, although, it has enhanced communication among education faculty members and improves assessment of candidate performance.

From the perspective of college teachers, Hendricks (2010) investigated the perceptions of faculty members in meeting NCATE's standards and the effects of implementing the accreditation process on their teaching. Using interviews, informal conversations, observation protocol and reflection, Hendricks sought to deeply explore the effects of meeting NCATE standards. The study revealed that educators indicated lack of knowledge about NCATE's standards before joining the process of accreditation at the college although the study was conducted in the U.S. According to faculty teachers' quotes during interviews, they indicated that a lot of work and large amount of energy consumption lead to frustration. The study shows that teacher educators' knowledge about NCATE standards was limited before joining accreditation possibly because only institutions undergoing accreditation may be interested to know about these standards. NCATE needs to disseminate its standards nationally and internationally not to publicize it as an accrediting body as much as encouraging teacher education institutions to abide by a specific set of standards to improve the quality of their outcomes. This would somehow influence how faculty members perceive and interact with the accreditation operations in their unit while embarking on the accreditation in the first place.

To improve teacher education, the NCATE appointed a panel that involved members from higher education, state departments, critics of teacher education, teacher leaders and presidents from teacher unions to evaluate the status of teacher education programs (Linkenhoker, 2012; NCATE, 2010). The NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning released a report after gauging that the status of clinical preparation was poorly defined and insufficiently supported. The report, was named "Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers" (NCATE, 2010; Garrido, 2012). The panel worked for ten months to find out what could fill in the gap between the way teachers are prepared and school demands. On the basis of their deliberations, they drew up ten design principles for clinically based programs in order to change the teacher education (NCATE, 2010).

Redesigning teacher education from the NCATE's perspective is based on the fact that teaching is a profession of practice, like medicine. In order to achieve higher teaching quality, there is a need to learn from medical education (NCATE, 2010). Darling-Hammond & Sykes (2003) indicate that the teaching profession requires a level of care commensurate with that already obtained by medical manpower programmes. The federal government offers

funding to plan and monitor increased diversity in medical education.

Medical programs, specifically nursing programs, select students using a variety of admission criteria such as grade point average, pre-admission tests and Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) (Crouch, 2015). Likewise, one of the Blue Ribbon's recommendations includes the need to increase rigor and diversity for admission to teacher preparation programs by balancing grade-point average (GPA) requirements. Accordingly, the NCATE suggested a GPA requirement for admission to the clinical preparation program (NCATE, 2010). Establishing a relationship between teaching programs and medical programs bring insights into the way that teacher education programs could change in terms of laboratory experiences, fully deep-rooted clinical learning and course work.

Clinical preparation prepares students from the beginning to enter the field where they have to do their teaching practice. First year students come to university life developing their identity, adapting to a different environment, learning how to learn and redefining their view of learning. In addition, first year students need more explicit instruction than other students and they need to be provided with learning strategies to help them rapidly develop the habits of mature learners (Mellon, 2002). This means that the first year is critical to students. If they are to become teachers, then it is better to start from the very beginning and immerse them into the field. They start forming their first impressions about their core subject and develop their teaching skills from the first year. Therefore, redesigning teacher programs to prepare candidates from the beginning is vital. It should be based on a well-established preparation program.

The Blue Ribbon design principles formulate a basic foundation for every program to construct a clinically-based effective preparation program. The next section elaborates how each design principle is raised by the Blue Ribbon Report.

1.4 The Blue Ribbon Design Principles

Literature on the Blue Ribbon design principles was limited to investigation of a particular design such as clinical partnerships (Garrido, 2012; Whitford & Villaume, 2014). It is postulated that understanding one principle such as partnership will bring understanding of other principles. As Garrido (2012) puts it "If we can discover what is fundamentally involved in advancing and sustaining one clinical teacher preparation partnership, we might better understand how to successfully navigate and implement this transformation system-wide." (P. 14). This contradicts what is actually in the Blue Ribbon's Report since they indicated the importance of all the ten principles. If we are to assiduously focus on a particular principle, then the issue is whether the other nine principles take part of the transformation of teacher education into a clinical-based model. Thus, the studies by Garrido (2012) and Whitford & Villaume (2014) perhaps lack evidence to indicate that examining only one particular principle such as partnership can lead to a domino-effect change that, as acknowledged by

the Blue Ribbon, could turn a teacher education program upside down.

According to the NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel report (2010), the very first principle is based on student learning. It emphasizes that the teacher preparation program must prepare candidates who can enhance, advance and serve P-12 student learning and knowledge.

The second principle states "clinical preparation is integrated throughout every facet of teacher education in a dynamic way". This principle refers to the same state pursued by medical programs in educating their candidates through laboratory experiences and clinical practices (NCATE, 2010). A similar approach for teacher preparation programs involves teachers in laboratory based experiences and school-embedded practice while working with an effective practitioner, other trainers and the clinical faculty.

The third principle focuses on the candidate's progress and outcome data. In addition, the third principle emphasizes the use of assessments, both formative and summative, and observed classroom visits by the cooperating teacher and faculty. It also pays attention to data about the preparation programs. Recently, assessment data have been obtained through the use of special software programs such as LiveText, an accreditation management system (Zhadko, 2011). Lumpkin (2012) also touches on the importance of LiveText and as an innovation it attracts higher education institutions because it facilitates students' learning by creating their own e-portfolios and aids student assessment. The fourth design principle focuses on the qualities of the teachers produced in the preparation programs. It states "programs prepare teachers who are expert in content and how to teach it and are also innovators, collaborators and problem solvers". Teachers should also possess the ability to work in challenging environments and design their instructions according to differentiated students learning needs.

Design principle five emphasizes that candidates learn in an interactive professional community. Candidate teachers need opportunities for continuous feedback and practice in a collaborative culture. In medical programs, for instance, student nurses work concurrently, and interactively, with the staff nurses, doctors, patients and patients' families. Medical studies report that being responsive to families is one of the high demands at the work place (Collette, 2014).

The sixth design principle articulates "clinical educators and coaches are rigorously selected and prepared and drawn from both higher education and the P-12 sector". The trainers, as described in this principle, must be effective practitioners. They should be specially qualified and assigned to serve candidates and be their role model during their clinical practice.

The seventh principle is aimed at designing specific sites for embedded clinical preparation with all facilities and financial support. Candidates should be involved in intensive experiences in well-structured, staffed, and financed schools to support both their learning and student achievement.

The next principle states that "Technology applications foster high-impact preparation". Teacher preparation programs should take place in an interactive learning community where different types of technological tools are utilized during candidates' preparation.

The challenging design principle, the ninth, reflects systematic gathering and use of data and the establishment of a powerful Research & Development (R&D) agenda. Despite the importance that research has in the field of teacher education, it is still new to the field (Grossman & McDonald, 2008), and it is rarely observed by school teachers. According to Grossman & McDonald (2008), researchers in the field of teacher education and teaching need to develop common instruments to conduct research such as observation protocols of teaching. However, school teachers' overloaded work schedules reduce their desire to study issues or practice their research skills at school. Regarding research and development agenda, the ninth design principle for preparation programs requires that candidates should possess research skills to which their daily practice contributes while conducting studies, action research and sharing results with the teacher preparation faculties and practitioners.

The last design principle for preparation programs entails strategic partnership. It states, "Strategic partnerships are imperative for powerful clinical preparation". All sectors including schools, teacher education programs, and governments should work together. All parties should share balanced jobs with each other and raise their needs in the work force. Garrido (2012) noted that collaboration is one of the methods to enhance strategic partnership.

Integrating all the design principles as guiding principles for designing teacher preparation programs will help units to maintain and design effective teacher preparation program. Although NCATE and TAEC merged into one accrediting body as CAEP since 2013 (NCATE, 2010-2014; Whitford & Villaume, 2014), SQU started the process in 2012 with NCATE then. In addition, evaluation studies carried out by Al Ganbousy, Al Harthi & Kazem (2012) and Al Sharei (2009), were conducted on the Omani context did not examine specific design principles regarding the SQU's teacher preparation programs. However, NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel's design principles formed the basic elements for evaluating whether education program meets the basics of SQU's teacher program.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Questions

This study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does the teacher education program at SQU abide by the ten design principles for preparing teachers as perceived by college supervisors?
- 2) Is there any statistically significant difference between the ten design principles as perceived by both college supervisors and cooperating teachers?

2.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study is all cooperating teachers and college supervisors who were involved in student teaching from the partnered schools. A random sample of male and female cooperating teachers and college supervisors completed a questionnaire. Regarding gender, there were 68 female and 27 male teachers from both private and public schools. The number of female candidates was 74 and male candidates was 30, however, the number of male and female cooperating teachers varied according to the number of candidates they had to supervise from SQU's College of Education. The cooperating teachers were from government and private schools. A number of 19 different partnered private and public schools chosen to implement the student teaching program and selected for specific reasons. First of all, the partnered schools are modern, equipped with supportive instructional technology, teaching materials, have expert teachers in their fields, and have previous experience of receiving candidates from SQU's College of Education. Schools in that year also served diverse types of communities ranging from low to high socioeconomic status communities. Amer & Ismail (2014) stated that regarding the SQU student teaching program's institution selection, any partnered school or institution should provide a clear, comprehensive and diversified training opportunity for the candidates and that when it fails to maintain the effectiveness of its service, it will be discarded from the list of the institutions for internship programs.

2.3 Cooperating Teachers

The cooperating teachers came from both private and public schools. Table 1 shows the number of teachers from both sectors.

Table 1: Distribution of Cooperating Teachers at both Private and Public Partnered Schools

| School category | Number of cooperating teachers |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Public | 77 |
| Private | 18 |
| Total | 95 |

In the current Omani educational system, schools are divided into three different educational levels called cycle one, cycle two and post basic. Cycle one involves students from grade one to grade four and cycle two involves students from grade five to grade ten. The last school division involves students from grade eleven and grade twelve. In this study, most of the cooperating teachers taught cycle two classes (n=62) and at the same time they were assigned by their schools to teach more than one class either from preschool education, cycle one or post basic. Moreover, the cooperating teachers supervised candidates from different specialisations. See Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Cooperating Teachers by their Specialisation

| Specialisation | Number of teachers |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Early childhood education | 13 |
| English | 32 |
| Arabic | 5 |
| Physical Education | 10 |
| Arts | 8 |
| Technology | 15 |
| Islamic Studies | 9 |
| Math & science | 3 |
| Total | 95 |

The cooperating teachers are well qualified as FEST employs a set of criteria for selecting them and validates them through the cooperating teachers CVs and each school's principal's recommendation. Out of the 95 teachers, 70 hold Bachelors Degrees from different universities such as SQU, Ajman University, and Dubai Islamic College. Only 5 teachers hold a Master's degree. Some 17 teachers hold general high school certificates and 3 teachers did not indicate their qualification.

Regarding the teaching experience, among the cooperating teachers (n=31) were those who have been teaching from 6-10 years. The least teaching experience was represented by 14 cooperating teachers who have been teaching from 1-5 years.

Most of the cooperating teachers (n=56) were aged between 30-39 years, and the smallest age group was those who were above 50 (n=5).

2.4 College Supervisors

The second group of participants was college supervisors (n=13), 8 males and 5 females. Six of them hold PhD and 7 hold Master degree. Regarding clinical supervision experience at SQU, 4 college supervisors have been supervising from 1-5 years, the other 4 supervised from 6-10 years and the remaining 4 have been practicing candidates' supervision for more than 16 years. Only 1 supervisor has been teaching for 11-15 years.

Some college supervisors had rich experience as school teachers before they entered the field of student teaching. Some 8 college supervisors had teaching experience at schools, and 5 college supervisors did not have any teaching experience at schools at all.

2.5 Research Instruments

In order to develop the research instruments, the researchers developed two five-point scale questionnaires consisting of 37 items classified under the 10 design principles for clinical preparation as introduced by the NCATE's Blue Ribbon panel. According to Cozby (2005), the main benefits of questionnaires are that they are less costly and allow the participants to remain anonymous. Other benefits of questionnaires are that they can be administered to a large group of participants. Therefore, results are more generalizable to the population.

The 37 statements were extracted from the principles and amended according to the student teaching status and the candidates' performance during the student teaching course at SQU's College of Education. In addition, related literature was considered to modify and extract the statements under each theme.

2.6 Cooperating teachers' questionnaire

The first questionnaire was designed to invite cooperating teachers to indicate their perceptions regarding the current teacher preparation program's aptness in terms of the ten principles. The researchers designed the questionnaire for the teachers to understand the terms used in the statements by providing them with the terms' definitions such as candidates, college supervisors, cooperating teachers and students.

The questionnaire was divided into two main parts. Part (A) considered cooperating teachers' information to indicate the following: gender, specialisation, age, years of teaching experience, classes taught in this year, qualification, university graduated from, name of the school and type of school (pre-school, cycle one, cycle two or post basic).

Part (B) included the study principles that formed the main basic themes of the statements. Under each principle, the researchers modified some items and added others that were found to reflect the current teaching program in terms of partnerships. Other statements were adjusted and moved to serve under the right principle. In every statement, the cooperating teachers had to indicate their agreement or disagreement using a 5-point Likert scale regarding their perceptions about the teacher preparation program's suitability with respect to design principles (see Table 3 for more details about the number of items in the cooperating teachers' questionnaire).

2.7 College supervisors' questionnaire

The second questionnaire was designed to ask college supervisors to indicate their perceptions regarding the student teaching program's status in terms of the NCATE's Blue Ribbon's design principles for clinical preparation. As in the cooperating teachers' questionnaire, there were two main parts of the college supervisors' questionnaire. Part (A) considered general information about the participants such as: gender, current job, total years of supervision experience at SQU, age, qualification, and teaching experience at school. In part (B), the main theme of the study, participants indicated their agreement or disagreement to the statements on a 5-point Likert scale regarding the principles. The researchers modified the statements to indicate the college supervisor role within the student teaching course. The 37 statements were distributed under related design principles (see Table 3 for more details about college supervisors' item numbers).

Table 3: Statement items of both college supervisors and cooperating teachers questionnaires

| No. | Principle | Item number in cooperating teachers questionnaire | Item number in college supervisors questionnaire |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 1 | Student learning is the focus | 1-5 | 1-4 |
| 2 | Student teaching is integrated throughout every facet of teacher education in a dynamic way | 6-9 | 5-8 |
| 3 | A candidate's progress and the elements of a preparation program are continuously judged on the basis of "data" | 10-12 | 9-11 |
| 4 | Programs prepare teachers who are expert in content and how to teach it and who are also innovators, collaborators and problem solvers | 13-18 | 12-17 |
| 5 | Candidates learn in an interactive professional community | 19-22 | 18-21 |
| 6 | Student teaching educators and coaches are rigorously selected, prepared and drawn from both higher education and the p-12 sector | 23-25 | 22-25 |
| 7 | Specific educational sites are designated and funded to support embedded student teaching. | 26-28 | 26-28 |
| 8 | Technology applications foster high-impact preparation | 29-31 | 29-31 |
| 9 | A powerful Research & Development agenda and systematic gathering and use of data supports continuous improvement in teacher education | 32-35 | 32-35 |
| 10 | Strategic partnerships are imperative for powerful student teaching | 36-37 | 36-37 |

2.8 Procedures

The questionnaires were presented to the participants with the reference to the design principles in order to make the statements clear and comprehensive while determining their agreement or disagreement. The scale used with regard to the following options was as follows:

5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=neutral; 2=disagree; and 1=strongly disagree.

The questionnaires (cooperating teachers and college supervisors) were translated into Arabic because they were administered and distributed to participants from different specialisation, for instance, Arabic cooperating teachers. In order to validate the questionnaires, 8 jury members from the Ministry of Education (5 teachers, one school principal, a vice principal and a Department Director) validated the two

questionnaires to check the clarity of items, their appropriateness and add further notes about each statement. On the basis of their suggestions and feedback, modifications were made on some questionnaire items.

For the reliability of the questionnaires, the internal consistency (Coefficient Cronbach's "alpha") of the questionnaires of both college supervisors and cooperating teachers were found to be $\alpha=.863$ and $\alpha=.897$ respectively. These reliability coefficients are considered to be high. After reliability and validity were established, the final version of both questionnaires was created. Before administration, a list of cooperating teachers' and college supervisors' names was obtained to facilitate the administration of the task. The researcher collected 95 cooperating teachers' questionnaires out of 102 with a 93 per cent response return rate. After that, 13 questionnaires were handed to college supervisors and all questionnaires were retrieved for analysis.

3. Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to the emphasis on supervisors' and cooperating teachers' perceptions of the student teaching program exclusive of candidates' perceptions. This was because the questionnaire was distributed during the end of the semester, where no one of the candidates is available at the schools. In addition, the researchers selected specific schools from the Muscat governorate. These were selected to serve as the cooperating schools. This reason was the SQU's College of Education

sent its candidates to do student teaching during this study only in this area.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of college supervisors and cooperating teachers about the current teacher preparation program at the SQU College of Education with respect to the NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel report for clinical preparation. Thus, the design of this study was constructed to collect data from both cooperating teachers and college supervisors regarding SQU's student teaching in light of the principles.

4.1 Teacher education program adherence to the ten design principles as perceived by college supervisors

In order to answer the first research question, college supervisors' responses were analyzed, thus, means, standard deviations were computed as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: Means, standard deviations and t-values for the college supervisors regarding all the 10 principles

| # | Principles | M | SD | t | p |
|----|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Student learning is the focus | 3.88 | .30 | -1.48 | .165 |
| 2 | Student teaching is integrated throughout every facet of teacher education in a dynamic way | 4.10 | .56 | .62 | .550 |
| 3 | A candidate's progress and the elements of a preparation program are continuously judged on the basis of "data" | 4.31 | .50 | 2.22 | .046 |
| 4 | Programs prepare teachers who are expert in content and how to teach it and who are also innovators, collaborators and problem solvers | 3.90 | .32 | -1.15 | .275 |
| 5 | Candidates learn in an interactive professional community | 3.77 | .50 | -1.65 | .125 |
| 6 | Student teaching educators and coaches are rigorously selected, prepared and drawn from both higher education and the p-12 sector | 3.85 | .68 | -.82 | .427 |
| 7 | Specific educational sites are designated and funded to support embedded student teaching. | 3.87 | .99 | -.47 | .648 |
| 8 | Technology applications foster high-impact preparation | 3.67 | .62 | -1.93 | .078 |
| 9 | A powerful Research & Development agenda and systematic gathering and use of data supports continuous improvement in teacher education | 3.25 | .54 | -5.01 | <.001 |
| 10 | Strategic partnerships are imperative for powerful student teaching | 3.77 | 1.13 | -.74 | .475 |
| | Total | 3.84 | | | |

Note: n=13, the mean difference is significant at 0.05

From Table 4, the results revealed that the college supervisors primarily agreed that the current teacher preparation program abides by the NCATE's Blue Ribbon designs in all principles and they particularly revealed higher satisfaction with principle #3 and principle #2 with the mean values of (4.31) and (4.10) respectively. This means that college supervisors agree with the fact that the teacher preparation program at SQU's College of Education assesses students' performance and they are evaluated regularly on the basis of field data. The higher satisfaction in principle #2 (i.e. Student teaching is integrated throughout every facet of teacher education in a dynamic way) could be attributed to

the fact that the candidates experienced this integration in several courses in the program, for instance, methods of teaching courses, psychology courses and instructional technology courses. The integration is also manifested when the skills that candidates learn in some courses are effectively employed in student teaching, such as on the instructional technology course, the classroom management course, and some content area courses.

As shown in Table 4, a significant difference was found for principle #3 (i.e. a candidate's progress and the elements of a preparation program are continuously judged on the basis of

“data”) with the mean (4.31) and the *p*-value (0.046). This means that regarding principle #3, college supervisors agree that the teacher preparation program provides sufficient evaluation and feedback to the candidate teachers and they are assessed based on field data. The significance is in favor of teachers who believe that candidates’ progress is judged on the basis of data. This could be related to the fact that teachers’ continuous exposure to the system allows them to understand how data is used to continuously improve the education program. LiveText, which has been recently used by college supervisors to assess all aspects related to the candidates as a part of accreditation process, is used to present data to supervisors. They can use it to judge the effectiveness of candidates’ performance as well as the whole teacher preparation program in general. This result is in alignment with the study carried out by Amer & Ismail (2014), who indicated that the SQU internship program is well-established in the view of college supervisors.

As shown in Table 4, college supervisors expressed lower agreement about principle #9 (i.e. A powerful Research & Development agenda and systematic gathering and use of data supports continuous improvement in teacher education) with the mean of 3.25 and *p*-value (<0.001). That investigated the extent to which candidates conduct action research, share results or use such results to improve their own teaching. From table 4, it shows that college supervisors expressed less satisfaction with research and data usage at schools to improve teacher education. This could be attributed to candidates’ ineffective time management in schools. They spend their time preparing, planning, assessing

and supervising school administrative work without using action research with these activities to improve their practice. Although the college administration and the FEST unit stress the importance of carrying out action research in schools, college supervisors do not regard conducting action research in student teaching as a priority for pre-service teachers’ data-driven professional improvement.

Generally, the grand mean value of the all principles as perceived by college supervisors is 3.84, which means that the college supervisors agree that the teacher preparation program has the potentials to change according to the accreditation conditions and to become more prepared to strengthen clinical preparation with regard to the ten design principles.

4.2 Ten design principles as perceived by both college supervisors and cooperating teachers

Table 5 below shows the results for research question two (i.e. is there any statistically significant difference between the ten design principles as perceived by both college supervisors and cooperating teachers?). Thus, means, standard deviations and level of significance are depicted in the table. The table shows the role of the person either supervisor or teacher. (n) refers to number of both college supervisors and cooperating teachers. A number of 13 teachers out of 95 selected to calculate the *t*-value compared with 13 college supervisors since the two groups are not equal in their number.

Table 5: Means, standard deviations and the t-values of principles as perceived by both cooperating teachers and college supervisors

| Principals | Role | n | M | SD | T | p |
|---|------------|----|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Student learning is the focus | Supervisor | 13 | 3.88 | .30 | .27 | .791 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 3.83 | .54 | | |
| 2. Student teaching is integrated throughout every facet of teacher education in a dynamic way | Supervisor | 13 | 4.10 | .56 | 1.13 | .270 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.35 | .56 | | |
| 3. A candidate’s progress and the elements of a preparation program are continuously judged on the basis of “data” | Supervisor | 13 | 4.31 | .50 | 2.23 | .036 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.69 | .37 | | |
| 4. Programs prepare teachers who are expert in content and how to teach it and who are also innovators, collaborators and problem solvers | Supervisor | 13 | 3.90 | .32 | 2.13 | .045 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.23 | .46 | | |
| 5. Candidates learn in an interactive professional community | Supervisor | 13 | 3.77 | .50 | 1.98 | .059 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.15 | .48 | | |
| 6. Student teaching educators and coaches are rigorously selected, prepared and drawn from both higher education and the p-12 sector | Supervisor | 13 | 3.85 | .68 | .92 | .367 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.13 | .88 | | |
| 7. Specific educational sites are designated and funded to support embedded student teaching | Supervisor | 13 | 3.87 | .99 | 1.03 | .314 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.21 | .62 | | |
| 8. Technology applications foster high-impact preparation | Supervisor | 13 | 3.67 | .62 | 3.06 | .005 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.44 | .66 | | |
| 9. A powerful Research & Development agenda and systematic gathering and use of data supports continuous improvement in teacher education | Supervisor | 13 | 3.25 | .54 | 2.60 | .016 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 3.88 | .68 | | |
| 10. Strategic partnerships are imperative for powerful student teaching | Supervisor | 13 | 3.77 | 1.13 | .67 | .510 |
| | Teacher | 13 | 4.00 | .50 | | |
| Total | | | 4.01 | | | |

*Note: mean difference is significant at 0.05

As seen in Table 5, the total means of all principles is 4.01 for both college supervisors and cooperating teachers. This means that, generally, both agree that the education teacher program abides by the ten principles in all aspects.

Results in Table 5 revealed that there are statistically significant differences in the perceptions of both participant groups with regard to the ten design principles. The principles (# 3, #4, #8, #9) revealed significant differences

with the t -values (2.23, 2.13, 3.06, 2.60) and the p -values of (0.036, 0.045, 0.005, 0.016) respectively. These differences were found to be in favor of the cooperating teachers. They have a more positive perception towards the aptness of the current SQU's College of Education teacher preparation program with ten design principles as formed by the NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel than college supervisors. This could be attributed to the fact that cooperating teachers spend more time with the candidates and recognize how the new structure of the student teaching program, as reflected in the ten Blue Ribbon principles, provides the schools with well-qualified candidates who can teach students and help improve their performance.

From the above results, it is clear that college supervisors and candidate teachers have positive perceptions towards SQU's college of Education abundance by the principles.

5. Recommendations

This study revealed several recommendations for further future research and Ministry of Education. First of all, further longitudinal and experimental studies are required to investigate the effectiveness of a school-based preparation program in Oman. Second, further structured selection of practitioners is preferred from higher education and p-12 schoolteachers. Moreover, the study recommends that both cooperating teachers and college supervisors should work together to guide candidate teachers so as to conduct action research. One reason is to measure learning impact through pre and posttests for instance.

Regarding Ministry of Education, it is recommended that teachers, policy makers, and parents should work together along with the college of education at SQU for further improvements based on the ten design principles.

6. Conclusion

All in all, considering the ten design principles as a foundation to teacher programs allows college supervisors and cooperating teachers see the importance of collaboration between the two groups of college supervisors and school teachers. Generally, SQU's College of Education teacher preparation programs offer a well-established student teaching program as revealed by college supervisors and cooperating teachers' perception. Since the study was conducted during academic accreditation process, recently, the college was accredited by the CAEP for the next seven years.

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