

## Supervising lecturers' support for pre-service teacher education students during teaching practice in Fiji

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This article reports on a University of the South Pacific (USP) study of supervising lecturers (SLs) and pre-service teacher education students' (PSTs) experiences and reflections on their involvement in the practice teaching component in the degree program for secondary school teachers. Two sets of rich data have emerged from this study. Firstly, there are critical reflections from PSTs themselves about teaching and learning; professional development opportunities; and what seemed lacking in terms of continuous nurturing, care, concern, and constant supervision by the SLs, in comparison to the same provided by their associate teachers (ATs) in their practice teaching schools. The relationship between PSTs and SLs appeared weak right from the initial stages of teaching practice, in contrast to what PSTs shared with their ATs. Statements have emerged from PSTs that the relationship between SL and ATs was not as powerful and effective as it should have been. Critical reflection upon our practices as teacher educators and the voices of PSTs are particularly valuable as we seek to reshape a teaching degree at USP and also help to shape teacher education across the South Pacific region.

### Introduction

Growing marketisation of education and the globalisation of standards have made the quality of teacher education a major and often controversial topic. Researchers like Graybeal (2017) and Kaur (2013) have stated that the theoretical discourses learned in teacher education programs often clash with the realities and experiences of teaching in the classroom. Teaching practice is one of the most significant field experiences in preparing quality teachers and guideline implementation (Kearney, 2023; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2018), hence, it needs to be well-planned to assist in reducing any distress that PSTs may go through (Purchase, 2017). Research also supported the philosophy and fundamental new development of *Associate Teachers* (ATs) into exceptionally talented, imaginative, and innovative educators who will support practice teaching by PSTs (Griffiths et al., 2020; Koşar, 2022).

Supervision by lecturers is an essential and crucial component of teaching practice (Lindstrom, Lofstrom & Londen, 2022; Wainman, 2011; Hunn, 2009;). Supervising lecturers (SLs) provide PSTs with guidance and constructive feedback to increase knowledge and confidence in teaching (Baeten & Simons, 2016; Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). Qualities like friendliness, willingness to work together, impartiality, room for interaction, and support for PSTs attaining teaching self-efficacy are essential for SLs. Opinions of PST experiences may be negatively impacted by a lack of intimate mentorship relationships, institutional (faculty) support, and dedication to student professional development (Nikoceviq-Kurti & Saqipi, 2022). In addition, the SL needs to boost the morale of PSTs and take an interest when they are struggling either personally or professionally (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). It has been observed that while SLs are

expected to share their knowledge and skills with PSTs to help them acquire confidence and competency, this is not always forthcoming. There is often inconsistency in the way assessment and feedback are provided to PSTs. The quantity of feedback provided often varied with supervisors and some provided little feedback compared to others. Some SLs hold limited supervisory consultations and spend little time observing a PST's work (Molitor, 2014).

Further research on supervisors reveals that “not all supervisors are effective, not all supervisors are experts, and not all supervisors have powerful effects on students” (Hattie, 2009, p. 108). The case study of Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) stated that PSTs expected their SL to observe them on a more regular basis and give ‘guidance and feedback’, which did not often occur. Studies have also revealed that PSTs prefer to be actively involved in post-observation discussions (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017; Tang & Chow, 2007). These researchers further claimed that PSTs’ expectation of thorough feedback and support from their SL was often not met immediately after their lesson observations.

A study by Roland (2010) explored strategies that would strengthen the relationship between PSTs and their SL. The author recommended that PSTs should be visited regularly, and teaching reports made more frequently to gauge the extent of their progress and to address concerns that arose between visits. Additional research conducted by Hunn (2009) also revealed that some SLs did not spend enough time observing PSTs’ work and provided little feedback in comparison to their counterparts, the ATs. Researchers have urged SLs to provide generous and timely feedback, preferring the period immediately after the lesson observed, as an integral component of formative assessment, and on a continual and regular basis (Graybeal, 2017; Baeten & Simons, 2016; Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). Studies also revealed that PSTs’ teaching reports threatened them and created conditions where some PSTs paid more attention to pleasing their supervisors than to learning (Farrell, 2007).

Further studies by Kamali et al. (2017) have noted that teaching practice is the most stressful component for PSTs primarily because it is their first formal attempt at teaching in the real context. It is vital, therefore, to take heed of their views on the importance of supervisor support in their training development (Marable & Raimondi, 2007); the impact of mentoring style on PSTs’ teaching and learning (Schmidt, 2008); and their perceptions about teaching practice and supervision (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Researchers have also stated that SLs need to develop “the ability to link their expertise to their practices and the practices of their student teachers” (Swennen, Lunnenberg & Korthagen, 2008, p. 541). Teaching practice allows for the supervisors to identify and work on their shortcomings. Feedback from PSTs reveals that supervisor evaluation is usually overlooked (Emery, 2014), hence, this study, examines the feedback from PSTs to find their SLs’ support during teaching practice.

## Supervision of pre-service teacher education students

Supervision of PST's classroom teaching is an integral part of teaching practice (Apolot, Otaala, Kamanyire & Komakech, 2018). The primary purpose of supervision is to assist and guide PSTs to improve and upgrade their teaching skills and build confidence. SLs play a pivotal role in making teaching reports on the competencies of PSTs in classroom teaching and management skills. These reports are critical as they not only define a score, but also notify them of their teaching strengths and weaknesses. Research has shown that teaching practice significantly aided the professional growth and development of PSTs (Koşar, 2022).

The main purpose of supervision is for PSTs' pedagogical development to form their correct mental disposition, process management, relational aspects, and improve teaching skills (Lindstrom, et al, 2022).

Although supervisors established the rules and had the final say on whether the students met program standards, they were viewed as benevolent authority figures who took time to understand both the student teacher and the classroom context (Fayne, 2007, p. 62).

Fayne further stated that "the key to success was to know when to be prescriptive, interpretive, and supportive... Once this rapport is established, students will not challenge the supervisor's ability to evaluate them fairly and will not be disappointed with the feedback they receive" (Fayne, 2007, p. 66). Studies also reveal that report-based supervision can have a negative effect on PSTs and can create fear (Purchase, 2018). While teaching reports are essential feedback, SLs must have the expertise to clinically observe and make accurate reports. It has been noted that while SLs have important responsibilities in the development and enhancement of PSTs, there may exist a lack of support to assist them (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013; Wainman, 2011; Petrarca, 2010).

## Supervising lecturers

SLs have a fundamental role in teaching, mentoring, and observation of PSTs' work (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). Researchers stress PSTs' need for support from their SL and, as a result, emphasis should be given to the importance of intensive supervision and reporting that is not measuring, but is nurturing (Lindstrom et al., 2022; Fayne, 2007). According to Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011), SLs 'wear multiple hats' and their dual responsibility towards work at the university and supervision of PSTs can be quite demanding. Their work plans should be coordinated in a manner that no one's work is compromised. Hastings (2008) argued that a supervisor also needs support because one often,

... finds herself having to address both personal and professional demands of her 'charge' while navigating her way through the complex and often competing discourses that make up the work of a supervisor (Hastings, 2008, p. 508).

SLs are the crucial link that connects mentor schools to teacher education providers. They are expected to do this by collaborating with school staff in a manner that would promote

a healthy partnership between the two. Accurate and relevant information on PSTs' progress in their teaching competencies is obtained through observation of their teaching lessons, without which ample coaching and mentoring may not happen (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi & Bajwa, 2010). What is most significant in this process is the interaction between PSTs and their SL. The SL, through a two-way dialogue and coaching, can have a profound impact on students acquiring and refining teaching skills. "Research has highlighted the potential implication of any gap between what students expect from their teacher educators and what they experience in schools" (Crisp et al. 2009, p. 14).

The case study by Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) discussed the irregularities and time limitations of the visits of SLs and revealed that more frequent visits and more opportunities made available for PSTs to interact with their supervisors would provide a more successful learning opportunity. SLs, therefore, need to collaborate more closely with ATs, and visit mentor schools more often (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013; Wainman, 2011; Petrarca, 2010). A study conducted on a group of SLs and ATs by Kosnik and Beck (2009) revealed that while SLs were expected to visit mentor schools more often, their visits were irregular, they did not liaise with ATs and met PSTs as often as required, knowing very well that effective and repeated supervision resulted in the acquisition of greater competencies. Other researchers have voiced the same concern and believe that PSTs' professional support needs to be consistent to provide better opportunities to gain experience and improve.

ATs' close bonds with SLs can ensure that when and if things go wrong with PSTs, there is immediate help available. Hunn (2009) argued that sometimes the problems faced by students cannot wait for the irregularity of SL visits and, as such, it is essential that supervision is taken seriously. Comprehensive supervision and professional support will enable students to develop knowledge and competence, assume responsibility for their practice, and intensify quality performance (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). Effective supervision requires supervisors to have the necessary skills and knowledge to support students during their trying period of becoming a reflective practitioner. This journey is easier if SLs and ATs meet regularly and discuss the necessary experience, knowledge, and skills required to better assist PSTs.

There is also great concern about strengthening the ties between SLs and ATs for the benefit of PSTs. Some studies indicate that the bond between teacher educators and ATs may be weak (Graybeal, 2017; Hunn, 2009; Kosnik & Beck, 2009;). In a study conducted in Ireland by Kelly and Tannehill (2012) to examine the mentoring experiences of PSTs during teaching practice found that there appeared to be little interaction between SLs and ATs, and in some situations, neither took the initiative to promote any communication concerning the teaching of PSTs. On the other hand, a collaborative relationship between PSTs and their ATs could be more intense, mainly because both interacted with each other daily. A trusting relationship between PSTs, ATs and SLs needs to be established before actual mentoring takes place.

The feedback by ATs often focused on overall classroom management and planning, whereas SLs feedback was often on the pros and cons of the lesson observed. While SLs

are expected to have a thorough discussion with PSTs regarding their overall teaching skills, this usually does not happen. Hunn (2009) emphasised that both ATs and SLs are important in the growth and progress of PSTs. Studies by Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) and Murphy (2010) also suggested that SLs need to be knowledgeable and well-versed with the work of supervision, because if not well-conversant they often may rely on their memories as student teachers to perform this role (Graybeal, 2017; Hunn, 2009).

Johnson and Napper-Owen's case study (2011) further examined the role perceptions of PSTs in a seven-week teaching practice period, highlighting that SLs were more domineering during their meetings with ATs because they were assumed to be the most experienced. The 2012 report by McKinsey (cited in Jayaram, Moffit & Scott, 2012) affirmed that in-person, on-site coaching was the most effective way to deliver advice on classroom practice and that coaching should be the core of any professional development program. It is, therefore, important to establish intensive and constructive communication between SLs and ATs regarding the teaching and learning development of PSTs.

In addition, frequent meeting is another way to build rapport and enhance trust between PSTs and their SLs (Graybeal, 2017; Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). The SL serves as a liaison officer between mentor schools and teacher educators. They need to collaborate with ATs in a manner that would enhance the partnership between the two and further initiate discussions concerning student progress. The connection between the two will more likely ensure that the needs of students are addressed. Though researchers acknowledge the critical supervisory work of ATs, they all suggested additional support from SLs for a more successful teaching experience (Kosnik & Beck, 2009).

## Method

This research was conducted during 2018-2020 to investigate SL support for PSTs during teaching practice. It complements another School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education study into teaching competencies PSTs had acquired and enhanced during teaching practice (Prakash, 2021). Table 1 outlines the positioning of practice teaching in The University of the South Pacific's teacher education program.

Table 1: Teacher education program for PSTs at The University of the South Pacific

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Generic and introductory courses to be taken by PSTs.	Subject specifics. Teaching skill courses. Teaching practice (3-week duration).	Subject specifics. Teaching skill courses. Teaching practice (3- week duration).	Subject specifics. Teaching skill courses. Teaching practice (11- week duration).

## Design

In-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide were conducted to gain the participants' opinions, perceptions, and thoughts on a particular topic, in this case SL

support for PSTs during teaching practice. Insights are displayed in the PSTs thoughts, feelings, and actions that reflect greater autonomy, self-determination, and competence in their learning (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Of the 40 PSTs on teaching practice in the vicinity of USP, 20 were randomly selected for the interview. Seven SLs were responsible for these students and five of them volunteered to be interviewed. The participants' views were recorded, transcribed, and analysed.

The data for this study were collected in three phases.

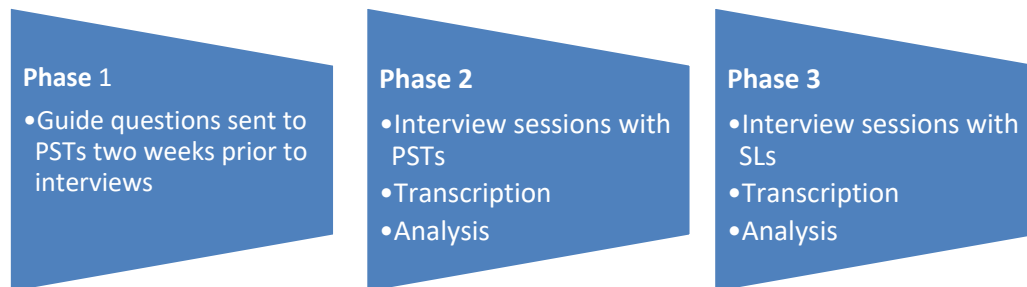


Figure 1: Three-phase data collection

## Participants

For the purpose of discussing responses, the 20 PST participants were code named PST 1, PST 2, ... PST 20. The five SL participants were code named SL A, SL B, ... SL E.

## Results and discussion

### Findings and discussion: Interviews with SLs

#### *a. What preparation was done before you took up the role of the supervisor?*

All SLs confirmed that there was no formal workshop conducted regarding their supervisory roles. It was assumed that being in the profession of teacher education they would know what to do. It was the first experience for one of them, and he discussed with his colleagues on what to do.

#### *b. When and how many times were PSTs visited for observation?*

The requirement per PST was two visits and more if the student needed additional support. SLs mentioned that no student required additional guidance, so no extra visits were made. Some PSTs did quite well, hence, SLs did not see the need for a second visit. Regarding when the PSTs were visited, SLs said that their availability was matched with that of students and then dates and times were fixed. In some cases, appointments had to be cancelled by SLs due to urgent matters. Some PSTs were visited quite late into their teaching practice duration which was disappointing both for SLs and PSTs.

*c. Were there any pre and post-meetings with PSTs to discuss their teaching observations?*

Most SLs were able to allocate time with PSTs for pre and post-lesson observation discussion. During pre-discussion, supervisors had a quick look at students' lesson plans and guided them on any editing. SLs found it easier to allow students to identify their strengths and weaknesses post-discussion. PSTs often recognised issues that their SL had already highlighted. After PSTs read their written reports the SLs highlighted students' strengths. One SL noted:

I reinforced in areas she did pretty well, e.g., questioning – she did ask good questions ... but didn't explain the chart thoroughly ... she needs to interrogate students more because her presentation was based on this chart ... She could have asked probing questions to make them think more on what they had done and what they could do ... even things like taking names. They need to know the names of students ... it is about teaching human beings with feelings... students should make a strategic effort to learn names ... it is important (SL A).

Another SL approached post-discussion using a different strategy: group discussion with all PSTs observed on that one day in the same school. This SL felt that a general discussion with all PSTs would cover a lot of common issues and then personal issues could be discussed on an individual basis. He said:

I gathered all students together and gave them their reports ... I asked them if they were comfortable with me discussing their reports together ... they agreed because I said that if I talk about a weakness of any student ... others will learn from it ... I talked on common issues and then I picked on specific comments and advised them on how to improve, e.g., 'you were encouraging chorus answering, that will make the smart ones active and the weaker ones more passive, so you need to call out names'... then I explained why they received that mark (SL B).

One SL, who was the only one who had done a second round of observation for two of his PSTs, also talked about how the same PST could be inconsistent in teaching during the second observation after a lapse of some weeks. It was presumed that, after a thorough post-discussion of the first observation, students would enhance their teaching skills and do better in the next round. However, sometimes this did not happen. This SL commented on why:

I had two students teaching in one school. Student 'A' did well in her teaching in the first observation ... but didn't interrogate well. But she interrogated well in the second lesson observation ... questioning was done very well. For student 'B' there was no improvement ... even on the points I had told him to improve on ... Student 'B' ... didn't address the issues I spoke about in my first observation ... and to me this was disappointing ... What was the use of my visit if the student did not take my comments seriously (SL C).

On the other hand, another SL talked about PSTs' lack of preparation and lack of the use of technology in lessons taught. This SL observed three PSTs in two different schools and her comments were:

The two students I assessed ... we sat under a tree to discuss their reports. I talked about teaching in an urban school ... and not using ICT ... this was not done! The children know a lot these days and teachers should be very innovative. I was very disappointed with them. They used textbooks only ... even their charts were full of notes ... Students must be innovative. The third student in another school was a bit ok ... she had some good charts ... but again no use of ICT ... most of my discussion with them was about how they could incorporate ICT in teaching (SL D).

The final SL revealed that he was happy with PSTs' work, but because one student was not able to finish all his planned work, he was disappointed. He said:

I was happy with the way he taught ... lesson plan was good, but he took a lot of time in discussion ... that is where he lost time ... his lesson was incomplete. He was feeling bad, so I guided him into what steps to take ... especially when one goes overboard with time ... otherwise it was good teaching (SL E).

SLs play a crucial role in influencing the development of PSTs by providing them with both guidance and feedback to increase their knowledge and confidence.

### **Findings and discussion: Interviews with PSTs**

Selected students were interviewed on their views regarding the role of their SL. The following questions were asked:

*a. How did your SL assist you to become better equipped to meet the challenges of teaching?*

While PSTs had this preconceived expectation that their SL would be warm, friendly, supportive, and provide constructive support, they revealed that teaching practice was not flawless. Supervision did disrupt SLs' daily routines. One of the comments on an SL about cancelling a lesson observation appointment was:

My supervisor said that I should have made sure my observation was not cancelled ... he said he had his own workload ... he can't be running after me all the time... "next time make sure this does not happen" ... and he went away, very angry! (PST 1).

PSTs stated that they were expecting timely feedback from their SLs. While most SLs gave timely reports, some sent reports after a few weeks or only on request. Studies have also disclosed that constructive instant feedback and critical analysis of student teaching are very important (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013; Wainman, 2011; Petrarca, 2010; Hunn, 2009; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Some PSTs said:

I didn't get a report from my SL after my class was observed. He rushed back to take his lecture at uni. I received my report after two weeks! (PST 2).

My SL observed my lesson and went away. I was taken aback as there was no verbal or written discussion. My colleagues received their reports from their SL... I waited for three weeks and then wrote to him ... but no response ... so I wrote to my course coordinator and through her I managed to get written feedback! (PST 3).



This study disclosed the complex nature of SLs' work and a need to understand and support their supervisory roles. Most researchers endorsed that while SLs played a very important role in the nurture and growth of PSTs' teaching competencies, there was little backing and other provisions available to support them in this role (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013; Wainman, 2011; Hunn, 2009). Information sessions or workshops for SLs through various means were options that should be made readily available for such appraisals. Researchers also reveal that there is a lack of support and training provided to SLs to assist them in their critical role as supervisors (Kearney, 2023; Kamali et al., 2017; Hunn, 2009; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). PSTs had anticipated that their teacher educators and SLs would have made their transition into mentor schools smooth, but often they were left to fend for themselves. Students believed that lecturers should be better briefed on their supervisory roles. PSTs eagerly waited for their SLs to meet their ATs and discuss their work. They said:

I wanted my SL to meet my ATs... but this never happened. Both appeared very busy. I wanted to arrange a meeting, but my SL said that she didn't have time to wait for my AT's availability (PST 4).

Initially I was disappointed because in the first visit my SL did not chat with me but straight away took me to my class ... I was frightened as I did not know the lecturer so well ... it was a daunting experience! (PST 5).

While some of my colleagues were assessed I kept waiting for my turn ... my SL came in week 7. I was quite dismayed ... I thought he had forgotten about me (PST 6).

*b. What was the relationship between your AT and SL and how it affected your teaching practice?*

PSTs disclosed that there was little interaction between their SL and ATs. Kelly and Tannehill's (2012) research also revealed little interaction between the two during teaching practice. Students stated that when their SL contacted them to decide on what date and time would be most convenient for their visit, meeting the ATs never seemed part of their plan. Students further stated that the ATs also cared little about SLs visits. When SLs visited schools, they only met PSTs to observe their lessons. In some cases, they discussed the observation report with them, and in other cases they said that they did not have enough time for that. In such cases, they promised to send e-copies of the reports. One PST said:

The ATs were not meeting the SL and vice versa ... our SL did not know what problems we were facing ... we had to keep it to ourselves ... we could not complain to the ATs or the Principal. I felt bad that my SL did not take out time to meet my ATs. We tried to solve our own problems ... or learnt to live with it (PST 2).

After lesson observations completed, PSTs revealed that very rarely did any SL make a return visit to see how they were managing from there on. Studies have revealed that regular visits and frequent 'guidance and feedback' that would strengthen the student-supervisor relationship were often missing (Roland, 2010; Johnson & Napier-Owen, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007).

In addition, PSTs voiced concern that their SL made little effort to discuss their teacher growth and other teacher-related work with ATs. Research studies have also revealed that SLs need to boost the morale of students who are at the novice stage and take interest when they are struggling either personally or professionally (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). On the other hand, the ATs also did not make any concerted effort to communicate with SLs. Students felt that SLs needed to work more closely with their ATs. Researchers like Wainman (2011), Petrarca (2010) and Kosnik and Beck (2009) agreed that this interaction, which was an integral part of constructive supervision, was often lacking. PSTs revealed that their interaction was more with their ATs than SLs, a fact disclosed in Johnson and Napper-Owen's (2011) case study. One PST said:

There was no meeting between my ATs and SL. I think the SL should be in close contact with my ATs. I feel they should have met and discussed my work (PST 7).

The findings of this study further revealed that both the SLs and ATs were not adequately briefed to adapt and accommodate the additional responsibilities of mentoring PSTs. Researchers like Chalies et al. (2012), Wainman, (2011) and Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, (2007) also believed that teacher educators should work towards strengthening the partnership between mentor schools and teacher institutions and that they must make sure that SLs and ATs are thoroughly informed on their roles.

This study also disclosed that school visits by most SLs were limited to one visit per PST and, in most cases, visits were restricted to observation of lessons. Researchers have similarly stated that the importance of intensive supervision and reporting, which is not measuring but nurturing the students' needs, must be paramount (Lindstrom et al., 2022; Fayne, 2007).

PSTs expected their first observation to be in the middle and the second towards the end of teaching practice duration, each followed by a detailed discussion of their performance for improvement. Students felt unfinished with only one observation by their SL. It was quite surprising when some of them said that they were assessed much too early, and a few others said that they were assessed towards the end of teaching practice.

My SL came to observe me in week five ... After that there was no more visit. That was the first and last! (PST 10).

All colleagues were observed except me ... I was finally seen in the second last week of teaching practice ... There was no time for consultation and improvement (PST 14).

My SL visited me in the last week of teaching practice. Others were seen earlier. I relied on my ATs' guidance ... I wish I were observed much earlier (PST 13).

PSTs were disappointed that most of their SLs had minimum interaction with their ATs. The two professionals were expected to have collaborating sessions to discuss students' growth in teaching. Research studies also talk about building a trustful relationship between PSTs, ATs and SLs for better mentoring (Nikoceviq-Kurti & Saqipi, 2022). A regular meeting of the triad was beyond consideration as even the first meeting between

the three rarely happened. PSTs mentioned that there was little effort made to meet from both members of the triad. One of the common responses given was:

The SLs who come to observe us should take out some time to discuss our work with our ATs ... about issues we are facing ... we also want to get a chance to talk with them and hear how we are doing (PST 4).

There were a lot of issues that PSTs needed to resolve, and regular meetings of the triad would have solved them. Students noticed that hardly any SL planned to meet their ATs. It was thought-provoking when they stated that their SL appeared less enthusiastic to meet the ATs than vice versa. PSTs added that some ATs commented on why the SL had not stayed back to meet them after observing lessons. One PST shared his experience of an unexpected meeting between his AT and SL when they accidentally bumped into each other. It was evident that they were acquainted. The student was excited that both had met and would talk about his progress and said:

I thought I was doing exceptionally well in the classes I was teaching ... I wanted my AT to relate this message to my SL ... but when they met my AT didn't mention anything ... they talked about politics ... and then bid goodbye ... no one mentioned me ... it was quite disappointing (PST 15).

The SL and ATs are very important links in the partnership of teacher preparation. It is, thus, important that SLs make frequent visits to schools to meet ATs and brief them about their responsibilities. Researchers like Tang and Chow (2007) and Hunn (2009) have also emphasised the critical role both ATs and SLs play in the growth and progress of students and in providing ongoing guidance, assurance, and feedback to increase their knowledge and confidence. These researchers have also revealed that students' expectations of thorough feedback and support from their supervisors after their lesson observation often appeared to be unmet. One student mentioned:

My SL came once... only to observe my lesson. He didn't discuss anything but my lesson ... he didn't ask me about my relationship with my ATs ... nothing ... After that we didn't meet ... there were a lot of things that I wanted to tell him. My colleagues also had only one visit from this same SL (PST 11).

This seemed a bitter claim, but most PSTs were adamant that there was no follow-up visit by their SL once their reports were made. It appeared that the SLs visited exclusively for observation purposes when the main objective should have been to nurture the student's growth as a teacher. Irregular and limited visits focusing largely on observation reports were also highlighted in the studies of Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) and Kosnik and Beck (2009). A more interactive and supportive approach and an innovative direction are required from SLs. Due to the busy schedules of both SLs and ATs, there need to be more opportunities provided for them to meet and interact both socially and via seminars and workshops to improve the relationship between the two. Teacher educators need to start preparing better-trained SLs in the critical supervisory role of mentoring PSTs during teaching practice.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed some primary issues in teaching practice related to SLs. PSTs indicated that there appeared a lack of clarity, support, collaboration and training provided to SLs to assist them in their critical role as supervisors. While the ATs provided significant professional guidance to PSTs, students revealed that the relationship between SLs and ATs was not so strong, and this hindered constructive supervision. There appeared little coordination between the two regarding the requirements of a comprehensive teaching practice. One of the reasons for this could be the lack of explicitly stated roles and responsibilities of SLs. There was a little uncertainty in the overall assistance provided to PSTs by the SLs. Effective teaching practice needs to have clarity for both the supervisors and students and as such there needs to be continuous feedback and guidance for both. There is a definite need to build a stronger relationship between the SLs and PSTs.

In the triadic relationship of ATs, PSTs and SLs, the three pillars are key people involved in the process of teaching practice. At the broadest level, this study revealed that there appeared an air of unease between these three pillars. While at the teacher education institutions, the bonds between PSTs and their lecturers were healthy, but when into mentor schools, the SLs did not sustain that healthy relationship. There did not appear much collaboration between these two pillars to strengthen this relationship and this study revealed that the SLs made little effort to spend quality time and deliberation with PSTs. On the other hand, the relationship between PSTs and ATs emerged as stronger and functional. Their daily contact grew into a healthy partnership. This intensive, interactive, and collaborative relationship led to successful teaching practices for most PSTs.

The results of this study further disclosed that the appointment of SLs and their expected responsibilities were unclear and needed to be re-examined by the institutions concerned. Unless the SLs are clear about their responsibilities, they will not be able to assist PSTs in achieving maximum benefits. A combined effort by the teacher educators, SLs and ATs would be a good beginning. PSTs stated that SLs did not spend quality time with them. It appeared that their only undertaking was to make observation reports. They often failed to clarify practicum-related issues of PSTs with ATs.

However, there were some PSTs who found their SL to be a provider of great assistance. Differences in expressing views and in mentoring procedures could be issues of conflict for teacher educators. This was expected because the notion that 'one size does not fit all' is universal. It is important to note, though, that the impact of negative mentoring is a rarely addressed issue. Teacher educators need to look more closely into mentoring relationships to provide an encouraging, client-focused service to PSTs. For this reason, it is significantly important that SLs are well trained on their roles and responsibilities in this partnership.

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