School Mentors and Iranian EFL Student Teachers' Expectations during Practicum Experiences

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Abstract

Teacher education is a very challenging and an interesting process, which has different stages and components. Mentorship is a crucial element in all teacher education stages, because student teachers' professional identity and their future performance in real classrooms to a large degree, depend on the mentors' feedbacks and supportive behavior during practicum phase. The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the quality of support and feedback provided on part of Iranian mentors during the practicum experience. The focus of the study was on the needs and expectations of Iranian EFL student teachers from their school mentors' feedback and supportive decisions in the chaotic practicum period. The participants of the study were 18 Iranian EFL student teachers from a teacher-training center in Esfahan, Iran. To collect data, both qualitative and quantitative tools were used. Considering the quality of mentor feedback and supportive behavior, a high degree of satisfaction was reported among the cases, meeting their wants and expectations in a very substantial manner. As a result, the main strong points of mentors' feedback behaviors refer to supportive, affective and confident domains in mentees while the weak points emphasized the need for more details regarding feedback as well as more supportive behaviors. The findings of the study revealed some hidden gaps between the quality of mentors' feedback and the mentees needs, wants and expectations during the practicum stage.

Key Words: mentors; Iranian EFL students/teachers; feedback; expectations

1. Introduction

One of the most crucial components of teacher training programs refers to procedures of preparing prospect teachers (Farrell, 2003). Due to real life experiences of practice teaching, many experts have emphasized practicum stage (Slick, 1998). In many experts' views, student teacher practicum plays an integral part in developing field-based experiences and cognitive maturation of future teacher education systems or to simply put it, practice teaching (Borg, 2006; Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Darling Hammond, 2006; Farrell, 2008; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Johnson, 1999), and is a vital need for teacher education procedure (Gareis & Grant, 2014). Although the elements of practice teaching are learning to teach through direct and indirect observations and reflecting on experiences of teaching practices, the role of mentors as connectors and cooperators between theory and practice in the professional development of prospective teachers cannot be ignored (Butler & Cuenca, 2012, Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2011). Mentoring and coaching have witnessed a dramatic rise in different parts of the world since 1980s (Tomlinson *et al.,* 2010; Wang & Odell, 2002). It is believed that mentors' reflections play an essential and effective role in shaping the framework of cognitive and professional development of novice teachers' practice in real life situations, though the procedures and strategies of different mentors remain a challenging and variable issue (Hobson *et al.*, 2009a). Mentoring is a mutual and interactional process that involves complex personal exchanges based on different needs, wants and situations of mentors and mentees (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992), so, the main responsibility of mentors is to shape the mentees' teaching manifestation through a personal and dialogical communication (Dynak, 1997).

According to experts (Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009; Howe, 2006; Hudson, Beutel, & Hudson, 2009; Martin, Andrews & Gilbert, 2009), experienced and well-trained mentors can effectively and appropriately guide the stream of practice teaching of beginning teachers in such a way that they (novice teachers) feel the least stress at the beginning of first year experience. By presenting a high quality of mentoring on the part of mentors, the prospective teachers can gain valuable experiences and become full-fledged instructors systematically. In fact, problem solving technique, practicing complexities and challenges of real classroom settings are the main achievements of practicum phases (Le Maistre & Paré, 2010).

Teaching is a complex and multi-dimensional issue especially for novice teacher with little tangible experience. Strengthening the professional requirements, forming a constructive rapport between mentors and mentees and building a foundation for effective mentoring and coaching, the expectations, needs and wants of inexperienced teachers in the course of practice teaching must be recognized and valued on the part of all stakeholders, especially mentors. The present study is an attempt to highlight

the importance of mentors' supportive viewpoints on professional qualification, cognitive development and expectations of Iranian EFL student teachers. Informed by the above-mention concern, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are Iranian EFL student teacherssatisfied with their school mentors? To what extent do they believe that expert teachers' mentoring and feedback meet their needs and expectations and adequately prepares them for EFL teaching?
2. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of their school mentors' feedback?
3. What areas or aspects of the mentoring relationship or experience could be improved?

According to Pekkanli (2011), the practicum phase is the manifestation of learning based field experience that is a must as well as a need for beginning student teachers. The main concern of this study is to highlight the issue of mentor roles in providing supportive feedbacks during the practicum stage. Regarding the importance of mentoring effect in the process of teacher education programs, the focus of the present paper is to consider the role of mentors' feedbacks and supportive tone in preparing prospective teachers. Since practice teaching forms a fundamental and basic component of every teacher preparation curriculum, the main purpose of the present study is to highlight the issue of EFL student teachers professional development under the guidance of mentors in the context of Iran.

2. Literature Review

Practice teaching provides real situations for prospective teachers to practice what they theorize and observe the practical aspect of teaching in order to confirm the realities, challenges and limitations of their career (Phairee, Sanitchon, Suphanangthong, Graham, Prompruang, De Groot & Hopkins, 2008).

According to Doppen (2007), teacher training has a great contribution to changing teacher beliefs and attitudes in the process of teaching and learning activities and can arm prospective teachers to applied strategies and techniques to manage the critical moments they may face in future classrooms. Ostorga (2006) put it in another way by saying that teacher education is a procedure for developing critical thinking art in prospective teachers. Edwards, Carr and Siegel (2006) pointed out that prospective teachers must be exposed to intensive and systematic preparation activities to empower them to overcome effectively and appropriately with different needs, wants and situations of diverse learners in particular and all stakeholders in general. When asked about training programs and experiences, teacher candidates express high degree of satisfaction with the preparation in subject matter, technology literacy and development of learner- centered setting (Bratlien & McGuire,

2002). In addition, the less training and mentoring is provided for novice teachers, the more dissatisfied they will be and the more difficulties they will face in performing their teaching responsibilities, particularly if they are supposed to deal with learners with specific needs and circumstances (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Since teacher preparation is a very crucial stage in formation of teacher professional development, identifying the influential components such as training and mentoring in forming competent and adept teachers is a very demanding and arduous job.

2.1 What is Mentoring?

According to Nalumansi (2011), Mentoring is a dynamic as well as dialogical procedure by which experienced mentors (coaches) convey their skills, experiences and expertise in a specific area to less experienced and novice persons through different strategies such as explaining of details, displaying a skill and providing corrective as well as supportive feedback by observing the work of mentees directly. Based on Collins, Brown and Holum (1991), traditional teacher training models include demonstration of proper ways of performing a tasks through providing a model, scaffolding process, giving direct feedbacks on the part of mentors. A participant in Shim and Roth's (2008) study reflected on the mentoring experience in the following words:

One of the things I learned as I explored that field, and I am convinced is still very true, is that very often experts in whatever field it may be are quite unable to explain how they do their job, what it is exactly that they know, and what we learned in expert engineering systems over the years is that somebody has to be an outside observer watching that person do whatever it is that they're so good at and interrupting if necessary or at the end a particular period of activity say, "Alright, you did this, why? Why did you do it that way instead of some other way?" In working together, an expert observer, an interviewer, and a true expert can very frequently capture what neither one of them can do alone. (p.18)

2.1 Mentoring: Make Peace between Theory and Practice

Teaching practice is the process that prospective teachers make connection between theory and practice and face with classroom realities and limitations (Ximena & Méndez, 2008). However, as Mai and Baldauf (2010) argued, what student teachers mastered as theoretical foundation in teacher training centers may be in sharp conflict with what they really see and face in the very context of classrooms. Gan (2013) suggests putting theories into classroom realities and requirements is a challenging and informing activity during the practicum experience that can be really shocking and baffling. Regarding connection between theory and practice, there have been hot discussions among the experts of the field of teacher education and mentoring, especially in the case of ESL/EFL contexts (Cheng et al., 2010; Farrell, 1998; Wallace, 1996). In

order to improve the quality of teacher education programmes and bridge the gap between theory and practice, Cheng et al. (2010) suggested that "teacher educators help student teachers identify the gap between teaching and theory, and continually facilitate them in connecting their learnt theory and practice''(p. 102).

2.3 The Role Mentoring in Teacher Education

As a complementary stage, many experts have highlighted the constructive stance of mentoring in teacher education process. Considering different elements in shaping the professional development of student teachers, the communication and mutual relationships between mentors and mentees are among the most crucial factors (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Delaney, 2012; Fletcher & Mullen, 2012; Hobson et al., 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014; Myers & Anderson, 2012; Rakicioglu-Soylemez & Eroz-Tuga, 2014; Wang & Odell, 2002; Weasmer & Woods, 2003). Mentoring can be discussed from different perspectives. According to Aspfors and Fransson (2015), depending on the context, purpose, student teacher needs and requirements of institutions, mentoring can be carried out differently. The role of time, intensity of teacher education programs, theoretical procedures and budget factors can influence the quality and quantity of mentoring activities. Regarding empirical findings from different studies, Kemmis et al. (2014) proposes three types of mentoring features: supervision, support and collaborative self-development. Through a mutual rapport and interaction, both mentors and mentees must share a common ground and found their classroom perceptions and experiences to ascertain the barriers and challenges as quickly as possible, and analyze the situation appropriately and provide the most effective solutions. Mentoring is more than just guiding, supervising and providing verbal feedback to prospective teachers. Through mentoring personal attributes as well as professional personality of both mentors and mentees, communicate with each other. During the practicum experience, mentors provide supportive feedback through modeling, dialogue and gestures to guide the student teachers in the right path of gaining useful knowledge, skills and competencies (Ximena & Méndez, 2008).

2.4 Mentor Feedback

Prospective teachers make their future trend according to mentors' critical as well as supportive feedbacks. According to experts (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Gatbonton, 1999; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wright, 2010), providing feedback is an integral part of mentoring process in shaping novice teachers' educational behaviours as well as encouraging them toward dynamic and ongoing progress in changing incorrect and unconstructive perceptions of learners and environment.

The provision of emotional, professional and constructive support is considered of great importance on the part of mentees toward forming good teaching habits (Scott & Compton, 1996; Riggs & Sandlin, 2002). Anderson and Shannon (1988) emphasize that the main responsibility of mentors is to provide support, nurture critical thinking skills, cultivate the seeds of inquiry and challenge the mentees to gain appropriate knowledge and skills. As Pekkanli (2011) puts it, providing a constructive, challenging and supportive feedback is obligatory for profession maturation of novice teachers, otherwise they will feel frustrated and will lose their self- confidence to make sound decisions at the beginning of their job. Mentors' support assists mentees to make the transition from "student to practicing professional" (Upson, Koballa, & Gerber, 2002, p. 4).

2.5 Previous Studies

According to Arnold-Rogers et al.'s (2008) study, mentoring can bring beneficial results for both mentors and mentees. If performed well, the practicum experience can create collegial and mutual development among prospective teachers and their mentors and provide constructive rapport to develop among all stakeholders. Regarding this, all probable problems can be tackled with cooperation and dialogical understanding of both groups. Similarly, Zientek (2007) argued that, new teachers' perception of the effectiveness of teacher training and preparation programs can be enhanced through meticulous and comprehensive mentoring. In Mebane and Galassi's (2001) study including 66 participants, opportunities to share opinions and information, learning new strategies, receiving informing feedbacks and working in collaborative atmosphere were reported as the main advantages of mentoring process. According to Numrich (1996), the most frequently reported problems of student teachers of practicum experiences were managing time, dealing with students with diverse needs, providing clear instructions and assessing students' progress.

Despite its recognized importance and prevalence in ESL/EFL teacher education programmes, reviews of literature on second or foreign language teaching and learning by Freeman and Johnson (1996), Freeman (2002), and Chiang (2008) indicate that research concerning the teaching practicum experience of student teachers in second language teacher education programmes is lacking. This paper reports on a study in Esfahan, Iran that examines eighteen prospective Iranian EFL student teachers' practicum experiences, expectations and needs of support on part of their mentors.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 18 (10 males and 8 females) EFL student teachers from a teacher education center, Esfahan, Iran. Their age range was around 25. They were supposed to teach English at junior high school in the

near future. As we know, student teachers are required to participate in school-based field experience programs. This practicum program provides many opportunities for student teachers to directly observe classes in junior high schools and to practice teaching experience under the aegis and support of a school mentors.

3.2 Instruments, Data Collection and Procedure

To collect data, the researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Specifically, a questionnaire that contained both quantitative and qualitative questions, as well as semi-structured interviews were used. To gather detailed information about what Iranian EFL student teachers actually expect from their school mentors in terms of feedback, the participants completed a questionnaire especially designed by Pekkanli (2011), which consisted of 22 closed-ended statements about diverse aspects of mentor feedback. Using Cronbach Formula, The reliability of the questionnaire was .874 that is an acceptable value. In the quantitative section, respondents were asked to express their degree of agreement with the statements on a Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was administered to student teachers in June 2016, and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. There was no pressure on participants to complete the questionnaire and they completed it voluntarily.

In addition, the participants were required to answer two open-ended questions that were not originally included in the questionnaire by Pekkanli (2011) and consisted of: ***What are the main strengths and weaknesses of your school mentor's feedback.* And** *what aspects of your mentoring experience could be improved?* In this way, respondents were encouraged to make suggestions on how to improve the quality of the feedback and relationship with their school mentors. According to Dörnyei (2003), as qualitative data collection tools, open-ended questions can provide deep understanding of participants and demonstrate the diversity and exploratory nature of responses. The method used to analyse participants' responses and comments was theory-based content analysis, which is a widely used qualitative research technique (Cohen et al., 2007; Flick, 2009). To determine the widespread likes and dislikes of the participants, we referred to the high frequency responses of participants concerning different attributes of their mentors' feedback and suggestions to improve the future programs. Though setting a cut-off point is an arbitrary in essence, to code the obtained data, the minimum frequency of responses was considered at least five occurrences. The logic behind setting a cut-off scale (point) was that, though limited, five occurrences was sufficient to meet the least requirements of methodological demands in content. The responses were classified in groups at a reasonable level and paved the way for forming general themes out of those classifications. Generally speaking, this is a triangulation process of data gathering, because some of the participants took

part in semi-structured interviews to confirm the data gathered through two sources (questionnaire and open-ended questions). The participants were invited to reveal their insides regarding their mentors' attributes. They talked about their mentors' feedback, their own needs and expectations from their mentors in an EFL context. They also provided some suggestion for improvement the quality of future mentoring experiences. As Cohen et al. (2007) state, interviews provide rich sources of detailed information that cannot be gathered easily and provide complementary tools to enrich the quality of pertinent data. Data from semi-structured interviews were also transcribed and analyzed by means of content analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

Using SPSS Software, the findings were analyzed. Statistical analysis of the quantitative data was run using SPSS Software version 21. The calculated percentages of participating student teachers' responses are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages of Respondents Selecting Each Alternative

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Statement 1. My mentor respects and is tolerant of the individual differences of the teacher trainees.					
00.00%	00.00%	5.56.00%	16.66%	77.78%	100.00%
Statement 2. My mentor acknowledges and works through conflicts openly with me.					
00.00%	5.56%	11.11%	27.78%	55.55%	100.00%
Statement 3. My teacher works for consensus on decisions with me.					
00.00%	11.11%	5.56%	16.66%	66.67%	100.00 %
Statement 4. My mentor shares openly my personal feelings and opinions about the teaching situation.					
00.00%	5.56%	00.00%	38.88%	55.56%	100.00%
Statement 5. My mentor trusts, supports and has genuine concern for my development.					
5.56%	11.11%	5.56%	27.77%	50.00%	100.00%
Statement 6. My mentor checks for my comprehension of the verbal messages.					
5.56%	16.67%	11.11%	22.22%	44.44%	100.00%
Statement 7. The tone of voice of my mentor makes me feel inferior.					
66.66%	16.67%	5.56%	11.11%	00.00%	100.00 %
Statement 8. My mentor evaluates the effectiveness of the task and processes that I perform.					
11.11%	5.56%	16.66%	11.11%	55.56%	100.00%
Statement 9. My mentor assists me in developing my personal skills in planning.					
00.00%	5.56%	11.11%	27.77%	55.56%	100.00 %
Statement 10. When giving me feedback my teacher first praises me.					
00.00%	5.56%	11.11%	5.56%	77.77%	100.00 %
Statement 11. I can overcome, on my own, the unexpected difficulties that arise in the classroom.					
5.56%	11.11%	5.56%	16.66%	61.11%	100.00%
Statement 12. My mentor encourages my usage of various classroom tools and materials.					
5.56%	5.56%	11.11%	5.56%	72.21%	100.00
Statement 13. Before giving feedback my mentor asks me to self-assess first.					

00.00%	00.00%	22.22%	16.66%	61.12%	100.00 %
Statement 14. When giving me feedback my mentor criticizes my teaching.					
77.78%	11.11%	00.00%	11.11%	00.00%	100.00%
Statement 15. When there is conflict between the students and myself, my mentor handles the situation.					
5.56%	5.56%	00.00%	5.56%	83.32%	100.00 %
Statement 16. My mentor limits what s/he is covering when giving feedback.					
11.11%	16.66%	5.56%	11.11%	55.56%	100.00 %
Statement 17. My mentor concentrates on what I can change for the better in the teaching practice.					
5.56%	11.11%	00.00%	16.66%	66.67%	100.00 %
Statement 18. My mentor develops my awareness of the tools and material which can be used in the activities.					
5.56%	5.56%	11.11%	11.11%	66.66%	100.00 %
Statement 19. When giving feedback my mentor comments on specific behaviors and achievements.					
5.56%	5.56%	00.00%	11.11%	77.77%	100.00 %
Statement 20. When giving feedback my mentor gives me general comments.					
11.11%	11.11%	11.11%	11.11%	55.56%	100.00%
Statement 21. While I am getting feedback from my mentor, I feel accused of my teaching practice.					
77.77%	5.56%	00.00%	11.11%	5.56%	100.00 %
Statement 22. While giving feedback my mentor gives me time to think and respond.					
00.00%	5.56%	00.00%	11.11%	83.33%	100.00%

As demonstrated in Table 1, the participants' responses with percentages of students teachers selecting each option is displayed. For a better understanding, the obtained data are clearly illustrated on a bar graph (Figure 1) which shows the rate of agreement and disagreement with each statement.
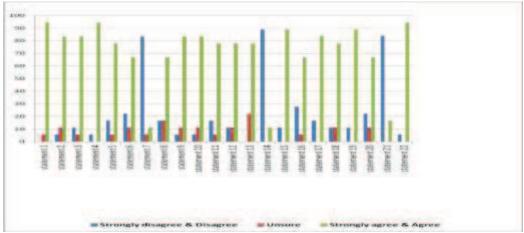

Figure 1. Iranian EFL Student teachers' needs and expectations from their school mentors' feedback.

5. Conclusions and Implications

For sake of space limitation, only those statements with very high level of consensus above 75% ('strongly agree' and 'agree') have been considered. Before arguing about the details and findings of the present study, it should be mentioned that provision of feedback by school mentors is an accepted and highly appreciated value among all stakeholders, especially student teachers. Approximately, all the participants (namely, 94.44%) emphasized the necessity and significance of showing respectful and supportive attitude towards novice teachers' diversities (statement 1).

Additionally, most of the Iranian FL student teachers (specifically, 94.44%) confirmed this fact that mentors were sensitive and receptive to their personal emotions, feeling and opinions in the phase of practicum experience (statement 4). Moreover, the majority of participants accepted that mentors helped them in tackling barriers and conflicts with open arms (83.33% ,statement 2) and cooperated for agreement on making sound decisions (83.33%, statement 3). Prospective teachers verified very eagerly this fact that mentors not only appreciated the employment of different tools and materials (77.77%, statement 12) but also raised their awareness regarding these tools and materials (77.77%, statement 18),which highlights the significance and high stance of classroom materials and tools for student teachers.

Mentoring is a complicated job that emphasizes feelings, emotions and educational aspect because 77.77% of participants confirmed that their trainers provided assurance, endorsement and substantive regard for pedagogical development. This confirms the fact that, mentors' attributes such as personal, professional and humanistic aspects are greatly appreciated (statement 5). Novice teachers in line with Wan and Odell (2002) and Gan's (2013) studies that discussed the emotional and psychological tensions and uncertainties experience this confirmation when facing with barriers and unpredicted challenges within real school milieu. The respondents' dispositions for supportive role of mentors corroborate the idea of experts (Ackley & Gall, 1992; Galbraith & Cohen 1995; Ganser, 1996; Peterson & Williams, 1998) where they argue that the mentor's personal attributes (including interpersonal skills) can influence the mentee's development as a teacher and has a bearing on the effectiveness of the mentoring offered.

Similarly, about 66.66% of participants referred to the significance of the attempts made on part of mentors ensuring that their messages (verbal or non-verbal) were vividly appreciated by their trainees (statement 6). The participant also confirmed that their mentors provided them with general comments during the feedbacks procedures (83.33%, statement 9), which highlights the importance of providing lengthy and detailed information on part of mentors. In line with this argument, the majority of respondents corroborated this fact that school mentors gave them enough opportunities to contemplate and regurgitate during the process of feedback (94.44 %, statement 22). An interesting point to be mentioned here is the low level of

uncertainty (unsure) reported among prospective teachers. Out of 22 statements, only 2 statements elicited over 15% unsure alternatives, that means student teacher exactly, know what their needs, wants and expectation are. In the same vein, 22.22% of participants were uncertain whether their trainers wanted them to self -assess before providing feedback (statement 13).

The remaining items provide much information pertinent to goal-setting, execution stage and classroom procedures, which can be influenced by supportive, conducive and constructive feedbacks and reflections of school mentors: For example, statement 9 highlights nurturing personal competencies through mentors' support and help (receiving assistance for developing personal skills in planning, 83.33%). Statement 17 emphasizes the progression (attention to what can be improved in the teaching performance, 83.33%). Statement 8 appraise the situation of practice teaching (evaluating the effectiveness of the tasks performed, 66.67%). Statement 15 propagandizes harmony between mentees and mentors (handling those situations in which there is a conflict between mentees and students, 88.88%). Statement 11 (mentees' personal conviction of being able to overcome the unexpected difficulties that may arise in the classroom, 77.77%), tries to highlight mentees' autonomy to be able to handle critical moments and unpredicted challenges. Statement 10 attempts to bold the mentees' abilities and achievements and then provide recommendations and feedback (praising first mentees before providing feedback, 83.33%), and statement 19 values consultation between mentors and mentees to consolidate the logic of reasoning and develop a logical rapport (commenting with mentees on specific behaviours and achievements, 88.88%). These findings confirm the realty that, mentors are required to be amicable, encouraging and synergic (Hudson et al., 2008).

Regarding the quality of feedback process, only three items elicited very low level of consensus among the participants. Interestingly, only 11.11% of respondents confirmed that the language used by their trainers might include derogatory tone and make them feel inferior (statement 7), which confirms this fact , at least for this sampling, those mentors used supportive and cooperative tone rather that cultivating feelings of inferiority among their clients. Only 11.11% of participants confirmed that their school trainers complained about their teaching practice (statement 14) and felt dissatisfied with their performances during practicum experience (statement 21).

Since the participants of this study expressed very high level of consensus, it can be interpreted that they (student teachers) were satisfied with the quality of feedback provided by their school coaches. The main reason for this assertion is that, out of 22, 14 items of the present study gained the rate of agreement above 70%, which supports this idea that student teachers were highly satisfied with the feedback provided by their mentors. This confirms that prospective teachers' emotional and professional needs and wants have

been met. These findings are in line with previous research conducted on the quality of mentors' feedback (Hudson, 2012; Hudson et al., 2008).

As mentioned before, the participants of this study were provided with two open-ended questions to elicit more in depth and detailed information about their viewpoints, expectations and perceptions of their mentors' feedback characteristics. The logic behind these opinion- based questions as well as semi-structured interviews was to obtain more insightful and challenging data. Regarding the first question, "***what are the main strengths and weaknesses of your school mentor's feedback***?'' the respondents' interpretations were informative as well as different. They referred to several issues. The main theme of their views was the importance for an amicable, dialogical and friendly rapport between teacher trainers and trainees. For example, one said 'I appreciate an open and friendly relationship with my mentor because it makes me relaxed and self-confident'. In general, the close and comfortable atmosphere was highly valued by the majority of prospective teachers. These statements confirm Aspfors and Fransson's (2015) findings that emphasized the significance of cooperative, positive and encouraging connections between mentors and mentees as being integral for effective teaching and learning.

Different facets of mentoring were highlighted by participants. To give some example, one argued 'I expect my mentors to provide advantageous advice, opinions and feedback'. Another participant added that, 'you know, mentors have valuable experiences and can identify our problems very well and they can rectify the obstacles by providing constructive, informative and ongoing comments'. As it is clear, continuous, dialogic and friendly feedback has been the main concerns of Iranian EFL students teachers during the practicum experiences. These findings are in line with previous counterpart studies on the quality of mentors' feedback (Hudson et al., 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014). The majority of participants corroborated the encouraging and supportive roles of their mentors as crucial factor towards professional maturation. Interestingly, some respondents were frank enough to utter the scarcity of comprehensive and detailed provision of feedback on part of their school mentors. For example, one said' my mentor did not clearly tell me how should I manage the lesson stages, my mentor just sat and looked at me without assessing the trend of teaching process, and I was not sure whether I was doing the right thing or not'. According to Hobson et al., 2009), because of differences among the quality and procedures of mentoring process, some mentors fail to fully understand their mentees. Gan (2013) argues that some mentors are not amicable enough to construct a mutual and meaningful rapport with their trainees. Wang and Odell (2002) also interpret this issue as lack of supportive and conducive mentoring among some mentors. Concerning the above-mentioned issues, some respondents specified that school mentors should be warm and pliable enough in their attitudes and feedback. One

respondent argued 'I would like that my mentor involve me in the process of decision making'. Another went on saying' making me aware of what is taking place, accepting my voices and suggestions are my main expectations from my mentor'. This line of argument is similar to what Aspfors and Fransson (2015) have highlighted about accepting mentees and hearing them to provide the most effective mentoring based on their own expectations. Surprisingly, some participants reported their inclination for teaching alone in classes and appreciated those mentors for allowing them to be alone. This preference is manifested in several comments, such as 'I was allowed to work alone from the very beginning, which was interesting and comfortable for me'. 'My priority is to be alone to show my competencies and be able to manage the unpredicted situations based on my own abilities'. Some of the participants identified mentors' lack of trust as a challenge. They went on saying' my mentor does not feel comfortable, when I am alone in class worrying that bad things may happen to me'. Some student teachers reported that their mentors did not believe in their abilities to overcome the critical moments in the classroom. 'My school coach does not leave the class at all and observes my work on and on that makes me uncertain and nervous'. According to The Beck and Kosnick's (2000), due to unpredictable challenges of classroom settings, some mentors refrain to give freedom and independence to their mentees in the process of practicum. As (Hudson et al., 2008) argues, mentors want to protect their mentees and do not allow them to be alone. In the same vein, some coaches are unwilling to deliver responsibilities to their student teachers.

An important issue that gained a rather high frequency in participants' statements was the need for self-consciousness-raising toward pragmatic issues. For example, some respondents expressed that, 'I have learned to experience different techniques and procedures to overcome my challenges. Exploiting different tools, media and methods were among the main recommendations of my tutor.' My school mentors explained to me exactly what happen during practice teaching'. Some dissatisfactory opinions were reported among the participants, however. Not being attentive when providing feedback, not being creative and not explaining all the details were the main concerns of the participants. Another issue that was highly appreciated by the majority of student teachers was the personal and pedagogical characteristics of their school mentors. For example, 'I am grateful to her for her trust and tolerance with me'. 'She was very cooperative and lenient during my practicum phase'.

To put it concisely, regarding the main attributes of school mentors, the significance of dialogical, supportive and humanistic relationships were bolded by the majority of prospective-teachers. One said 'believing in my capabilities, encouraging my attempts and appraising my activities logically were among the main features of my trainer'. Other trainees appreciated the mentors' willingness to cooperate, tolerance with challenging situations and

supportive even in critical moments. This line of thought is highlighted nay Hudson (2005), Ligadu (2008) and Kay and Hinds (2009). According to Hudson (2005) and Goodnough et al. (2009), lack of confidence and psychological understanding may have a dramatic effect on the mentoring processes and experiences. Regarding the mentors' constructive, interpersonal and educational competencies, Whitney et al (2002), Ligadu (2008) and Kay and Hinds (2009) have pointed to these attributes as preconditions of the successful mentoring. Regarding the second open-ended question *(what aspects of their mentoring experience/relationship could be improved),* several aspects were highlighted. Generally, the main concern of Iranian EFL student teachers was receiving much help and support from their trainers during practice teaching. 'I really appreciate that mentor who takes into account my feeling, opinions and expectations'. Such orientation confirms the need for receiving high quality and informative feedback from school mentors. 'I am eager to learn all the details and procedures of my practice teaching to be able to expurgate the weakness and improve job effectiveness'. These statements are in harmony with Hudson's (2012) study. As it is evident, open-ended question elicited very insightful data from participants. Based on the obtained data and analysis process, there is a logical harmony between quantitative and qualitative findings. On the one hand quantitative data revealed high degrees of consensus with the quality of feedback presented by school mentors, and on the other hand, qualitative results support the interpretation of quantitative data. In summary, the importance and value of supportive, dynamic, flexible, constructive and dialogical feedback have been highlighted in both qualitative and quantitative data.

   This study was an attempt to investigate how Iranian EFL student teachers actually shape their pedagogic as well as professional development based on their school mentors' feedback during their training sessions. The nature of feedback provided by school trainers was the focus of the present study. Based on the elicited data (quantitative and qualitative), the participants demonstrated a high level of contentment regarding the quality of their mentors' feedback, mentioning their needs, wants and expectation have been met considerably. In order to become competent teachers, the majority of respondents identified the supportive, constructive and affective aspects of their trainers' feedback as strong points, while emphasized the necessity of detailed input, emotional rapport and dynamic provision of feedback as weak points to be improved.

   This study has some limitations. First, the views and opinions of student teachers have been taken into account, while further research is required to investigate the school mentors to reach a comprehensive understanding of the main stakeholders. Second, the main limitation of this study is the number of participants that is too small to allow us to generalize the conclusion to other situations. Third, since teacher mentoring needs and expectations have not

achieved great attention in the context of Iran, so it merits further research. Forth, according to Rakicioglu-Soylemez and Eroz-Tuga (2014), since mentoring activity and provision of feedback are context –sensitive issues, more research will reveal unknown angles of these processes. As Aspfors and Fransson (2015) argue, while mentoring has received substantial investigation, less is known about the prospective teachers' needs and expectations from their mentors. Finally, mentoring and teacher training are complicated issues that need to be investigated in detail to deepen our understanding of the feedback quality in training experiences.

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