

Attitudes of TEFL Student Teachers at QOU towards the Implementation of Practicum*

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***Received: 23/12/2012 , Accepted: 4/2/2013.**

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ملخص:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تقصي اتجاهات الطلبة المعلمين في تخصص أساليب تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية نحو تطبيق مقرر التربية العملية في جامعة القدس المفتوحة، إضافة على التعرف على أهم المعوقات الضاغطة التي واجهتهم في أثناء مرحلة التطبيق العملي في المدارس. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، استخدم الباحث استبانة تكونت من ٤٥ فقرة وُزعت على ٢١ طالباً وطالبة بعد إنهائهم متطلبات التربية العملية. أظهرت النتائج أن اتجاهات الطلبة المعلمين نحو تطبيق التربية العملية في جامعة القدس المفتوحة كانت ايجابية على المجالات كلها ما عدا المجال الرابع الذي يتعلق بالمعلم المتعاون. كما أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروقات ذات دلالة احصائية في اتجاهات الطلبة تعزى لمتغيرات العمر والحالة الاجتماعية والمعدل التراكمي في الجامعة. وفيما يتعلق بالصعوبات التي واجهها الطلبة المعلمين في أثناء تطبيق التربية العملية، كشفت الدراسة أن أهم الصعوبات الضاغطة تمثلت في عدم قدرة الطلبة على المواءمة بين متطلبات التربية العملية، وبين ودراسة المساقات التي سجلها الطالب في ذلك الفصل، ووجود فجوة بين ما تعلمه الطالب في الجامعة، وبين ما يمارس داخل المدرسة، وأخيراً عدم تقديم المدرسة المتعاونة التسهيلات اللازمة للطلبة المعلمين.

كلمات مفتاحية: الاتجاهات، الطالب المعلم، التربية العملية، تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، جامعة القدس المفتوحة.

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the practicum course at Al-Quds Open University (QOU) in addition to exploring the most stressful obstacles faced by student teachers while trying the practicum experience. To achieve this purpose, a 45-item questionnaire was administered on 21 student teachers after accomplishing the practicum. Results revealed that the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU were positive on all domains except the fourth one. Moreover, results revealed no significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU due to age, marital status and accumulative average at university. With regard to the obstacles faced by student teachers, the results indicated that the most stressful obstacles were students' inability to cope with practicum duties and studying for courses at university, the gap between what learned at university and what was being practiced at school, and the cooperative school didn't provide the necessary facilities for student teachers.

Key words: Attitudes, student teacher, practicum, TEFL, QOU.

Introduction and Theoretical Background:

As education plays a major role in the development of nations, countries everywhere are increasingly giving predominant importance to education development. One important means for education development is through creating competent teachers who believe in their crucial roles to build the coming generations. Tuli (2009) indicated that teachers clearly play an important role in shaping the future of individuals as well as of entire generations. In order for teachers to play their expected roles in this changing and challenging world, teachers should be provided with a range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and relevant educational experiences that enable them to cope up with the challenges of this century and work in this new context. To this end, universities are expected to prepare teachers who can meet the needs and realities of today's classroom, and who know their subject matter and methods of teaching to high standard. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) maintained that school learning will not improve markedly unless we give teachers the opportunity and the support they need to advance their craft by increasing the effectiveness of the methods they use.

Accordingly, the College of Education at Al-Quds Open University (QOU), like most universities in Palestine, believes in the importance of providing the student teachers with the up-to-date theoretical knowledge and practical performance to prepare them for practicing teaching at school and improving teaching in general. The college has been sending fourth-year students to different elementary schools and assigning a named academic staff (university practicum supervisor) to a group of student teachers placed at particular school to enable each student teacher to achieve levels of competence, experience and knowledge that will qualify him/her for the teaching profession and the practical realities of the classroom. To achieve this aim, a course entitled practical education (practicum) has been designed to include the best optimal practices that can be given in one course.

Practicum at QOU:

Practicum is considered an essential strategy for preparing would-be-teachers to be competent teachers. It works as a pre-service teacher education program. This might be because a student teacher has to learn about teaching and about how to teach. Such practical education was given the name "teacher education" that aims to help student teachers in their development from

student teachers to qualified teachers and to encourage change in their earlier views of teaching (Talvitie et al.,2000).

Tuli (2009) maintained that practicum requires the would- be- teachers to spend a significant portion of their pre-service program in schools, observing teachers, classrooms, the school environment and practicing teaching specific subject related to their field of study with the intention to integrate campus experience with school based practicum experience in a meaningful way. Hence, the success of practical education greatly depends on four factors: the branch of (QOU), the faculty member, the cooperative teacher and the cooperating schoolmaster. All of them cooperate to prepare student teachers for professional classroom teaching. Whereas cooperating teachers focus on actual classroom activities, university supervisors are actively involved in both classroom and academic settings (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; McNamara, 1995).

The practicum course at QOU aims to provide an opportunity for the student teachers to apply the most important concepts, principles and educational theories in real teaching situations at school. Such real applications are hoped to provide the student teachers with good opportunities to acquire the required educational competencies they need to be competent. To achieve such objectives, student teachers spend six weeks (120 hours) at a nearby school where they practice a variety of roles under the supervision of a cooperative teacher and a university practicum supervisor. Thus, this course consists of three main stages:

1-Observation Stage: at this stage, the student teacher is expected to spend one week (20 hours) at the cooperative school where he is given the chance and the required support to observe different in-class and outside practices and activities such as: observing disciplinary procedures, school management, staff relations and meetings, ordering and ranking students, attending educational meetings. The aim of this stage is to become acquainted with school life in general. Wallace (1991) maintained that observation does not simply mean watching classes. The trainee should have a practical experience in which he/she responds to a number of tasks relating to various important aspects of school life(p.83).

2-Participation stage: Here the student teacher spends two weeks (40 hours) in practicing educational tasks and activities inside and outside

classroom. For example, he/she is advised to participate at school committees and their activities, write and conduct lesson planning, prepare worksheets, take class attendance and the like. Such participation can be performed independently or with the help of the cooperative teacher. At the beginning of this stage, the university practicum supervisor visits the student to give guidelines and orientation that can help the student improve the educational practices and to cooperate in school activities.

3-Actual practice: This is the most important stage as it forms the real practices of teaching because at this final stage, student teachers are to be familiar with the multiple tasks of a classroom teacher. Wallace (1991) named this stage "the teaching practice) and defined it as the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve her/his professional practice in the context of a real classroom, usually under some form of guidance or supervision (p.121). This teaching practice forms one part of a wider term called "school experience" which refers to the total experience of working in a school when the trainees have been allocated to a particular school as part of their professional development (p.121). At this stage which lasts for three weeks (60 hours), the student teacher is given the opportunity to practice teaching in real teaching situations where he/she plans, writes behavioral objectives, teaches, uses different methods of teaching, uses different types of audio-visual aids, evaluates, and gives feedback. During this stage, the faculty member visits the student teacher for the second time in order to evaluate and assess his/her performance in class. This visit is given 40 % of the total grade.

For the practical education to succeed, the cooperating schoolmaster and the cooperating teacher should support the student teacher and enable him/her to reap the benefits of this course. Both of them play major roles in this practicum course. The cooperating teacher, as stated in QOU Guide of Practicum is responsible for helping the student teacher to acquire the best educational practices in the field of teaching and learning, enhancing the student's- teacher positive attitudes towards teaching as a craft, assisting the student teacher in overcoming any expected problem, familiarizing the student teacher with the different procedures and tasks such as the school record and the textbooks, providing student teacher with guidance and support to promote his/her performance with regard to class management, lesson planning, class interaction, active learning techniques and preparing and using audiovisual aids.

The New Policy of Practicum:

The College of Education at QOU, like most universities in the country, has been sending fourth-year students to different elementary schools by assigning a named academic staff member (university practicum supervisor) to a group of student teachers placed at a particular school to enable each student teacher to achieve levels of competence, experience and knowledge that will qualify him/her for entry into the teaching profession and prepare him/her for the practical realities of the classroom. In the past, supervising English major students at QOU used to be conducted by supervisors whose major was not English. Those supervisors used to have MA or PhD in education with no background in English language and its specifications. In the first semester of the academic year 2012/2013, the College of Education started a new policy of practicum supervision in which student teachers are to be supervised by a specialist whose education must be related to the specialization of the students. Therefore, students who study Methodology of Teaching English have to be supervised by a faculty member who has MA or Ph.D in English Methodology and Instruction. In this regard, Talvitie et al. (2000) stated if the supervisor does not give support and provide the student teacher with opportunities to explore dilemmas and contradictions, when the student begins to question the existing structure of his or her classroom he or she may withdraw from the search rather than take further risks. Johnston et al. (1996) maintained that collaboration enabled experienced associate teachers to share the knowledge they had about teaching and learning with student teachers. Collaboration enabled associate teachers to facilitate student teachers' learning because it provided a non-threatening context in which they developed a more collegial professional relationship.

Based on the aforementioned background, the present study investigated attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the practicum at QOU in addition to exploring the most stressful obstacles faced by the students while practicing the teaching experience at the cooperative school.

Statement of the Problem:

Before the academic year 2012/2013, supervising English major students at QOU used to be conducted by supervisors whose major was not English. Those supervisors used to have either MA or PhD in education with no background in English language and its specifications. Such approach of

supervision deprived student teachers who major in English of the chance to know their phonological, structural and even spelling mistakes when teaching at schools. This was because the supervisors used to focus on certain aspects of the teaching practice such as self-confidence, presence, general style, ability to establish rapport, voice-audibility physical appearance, body language, methods of teaching, the use of audio-visual aids, preparation, lesson planning, verity of activities, timing, clarity and specification of objectives, suitability of materials and methods, class management and presentation. Unfortunately, in most cases, university practicum supervisors didn't pay attention to specific aspects of English such as correctness of structure and vocabulary, correctness and adequacy of pronunciation, fluency, sensitivity to pupils' level of language, questioning, awareness and correction of errors. Under this situation, the student teachers couldn't reap the full benefits of the practicum course. Moreover, the researcher noticed that there have been few studies investigating attitudes of EFL student teachers and their problems while practicing at cooperating schools. This study, accordingly, fills this gap by investigating the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU in addition to exploring the most stressful obstacles faced by student teachers while trying the practicum.

Research Questions:

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of practicum at QOU?
2. What are the most stressful obstacles faced by student teachers during the practicum?
3. Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes due to age, accumulative average and marital status?

Significance of the study:

The latest new policy of practicum at QOU in the academic year 2012/2013 necessitates that student teachers must be supervised by specialists whose education must be related to the specialization of the student. For example, students who study Methods of Teaching English have to be supervised by a faculty member who has MA or Ph.D in English Methodology and Instruction. Thus, there is a need to investigate the attitudes of the student

teachers who were subjected to this new policy towards the new plan of the practicum course which classified students according to their specializations. Their attitudes are important because they are supposed to benefit from this new plan in order for them to improve and shoulder the responsibility for their own development. Furthermore, the results of the study are hoped to provide the field of teacher preparation and practicum course with new perspectives and ideas that can improve the school based practicum experience. Moreover, the study aims to forward practical implications and recommendations that help to improve the practicum program so that the student teachers can have fulfilling and satisfying practicum experience. The results will also be added to the existing body of literature related to practicum.

Definition of Terms:

- Attitude: A familiar word that is used to express one's way of thinking, feeling or behaving. It is a preparation of readiness which influences persons to act in a certain way (Singh , 2003).
- Student-teacher: A college student, who is studying to be a teacher and, as part of training, teaches in a classroom under the supervision of an experienced, certified teacher called cooperating teacher.
- University Practicum Supervisor: an experienced person in an educational institution who trains and counsels students (<http://oxforddictionaries.com>). Synonyms for university practicum supervisor include: mentor, advisor, counselor, guide, instructor, tutor, academic supervisor, practicum supervisor. Wallace (1991) maintained that a supervisor is anyone who has, as a substantial element in her or his professional remit, the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in a given educational situation (p.107).
- Practicum course: a course designed to be studied by QOU students in their fourth year for the purpose of preparing teachers. The student teachers taking this course spend six weeks (120 hours) at a nearby school where they practice variety of roles under the supervision of a cooperative teacher and a university practicum supervisor.

Limitations of the study:

The study was limited to the attitudes of TFL fourth-year students who

took practicum at QOU in Nablus Branch in the first semester of the academic year 2012/2013. Therefore, the results will be limited to the instrument used in this study with this particular group of TEFL students at QOU and may not be generalized to other different groups.

Literature Review

For the purpose of convenience, this heading will be divided into two major sections. The first one presents studies that dealt with the practicum in the field of teaching English, while the second presents studies that dealt with the practicum of teaching different subjects .

Studies that Investigated EFL Practicum:

Nguyen and Baldauf Jr. (2010) investigated the affect of peer mentoring on participants' professional practice in terms of the instructional domain. The study was conducted within a six-week practicum for pre-service EFL teachers at the College of Foreign Languages in Vietnam National University. Participants consisted of an intact treatment group of 32 and a control group of 33 EFL teacher trainees. Results indicated that the participants in the peer mentoring program made significant improvements in their scores for instructional practice. The results also indicated that formal peer mentoring can assist EFL pre-service teachers to develop their instructional practice during a period of practicum study.

Ferrier-Kerr (2009) aimed to identify principles which appeared to be important to the development of the professional relationship between associate teachers and student teachers during the final block practicum, and secondly to identify specific strategies associate teachers employed to support and enhance the professional development of their student teachers. The results showed that the main collaborative strategies that the participants employed were team planning, teaching and modeling by the associate teacher, conversation, the use of reflective journals and the associate teacher acting as a critical friend. The study showed that when the associate teacher took on the role of a critical friend the student teacher was more able to develop greater understanding of effective teaching and learning.

Tuli (2009) examined the pre-service teachers' perspectives of practicum experience as a tool of learning to teach. Data were collected through interviews from twenty four participants. The findings indicated that the participants perceived practicum as an important tool of learning to teach because it promoted

the development of teaching experience and prepared them for the real world of work. The analysis revealed that theory practice connection, competency and confidence development and socialization as a successful experience of the practicum program and inadequate budget, assessment centered experience, inadequate support and secondary school student misbehavior as the most stressful experience of student teacher practicum experience.

Rajuan (2008) investigated the mentoring relationship from the perspectives of student teachers during their participation in a practicum program of a teacher college in Israel. The study focused on four perspectives: (1) the initial perceptions of the role of the cooperating teacher, (2) the kinds of knowledge and skills they perceive to learn from observations of their cooperating teachers' classroom practice, (3) their perceptions of these reported learning situations as triggers of support and challenge to the development of the teaching self and (4) the ways in which matched and mismatched perceptions with their cooperating teachers influence their experience of learning. Results indicated that student teachers reported both support and challenge to their perceptions of learning to teach in the full range of the teaching orientation categories. In addition, student teachers perceived support not only of a personal nature, but of a cognitive nature as well, in their reports of academic, technical and practical learning situations. Student teachers reported concern with a variety of critical issues that they were confronted with in the classroom that were incongruent with what they observed in the behavior of their cooperating teachers. The student teachers of this group displayed mixed patterns of learning from a wide range of knowledge and skills that both supported and challenged their perceptions of learning to teach.

Nair (2008) conducted a study to examine the roles of university based supervisors and school based co-operating teachers in the University of Brunei Darussalam in addition to examining what and how students learn on teaching practice. Five pre-service ESL student teachers attached to secondary schools were asked to complete weekly journals in which they described and reflected upon significant episodes in their teaching experience. Data were also gathered through discussion with these students, based on their journals and on the observations of their teaching; and from materials in their teaching practice files, for example lesson plans and evaluations. The

findings suggested that student teachers need more support as they critically examine their own practice.

Farrell (2007) carried out a case study of how a 4th-year English language preservice teacher in Singapore failed her practicum and was thus required to take a re-practicum with a supervisor. This reflective practice contributed to positive changes in her attitudes and practices coming from discussions which the researcher audio-recorded (and later transcribed) and from her regular journal writing. The results showed that a process of writing and discussion with the supervisor offered insights that both the preservice teacher and the supervisor can use to track and reflect on growth in the prospective teachers' understandings of what it means to teach.

Daloglu (2006) explored how English language teachers who were involved in teaching practice as mentor teachers benefited from mentoring. More specifically, the study focused on their perceived personal and professional gains from this experience. The researcher interviewed 15 English language teachers who had participated in a 10-hour mentor-training program and had mentored student-teachers for at least two semesters in the Practice Teaching course offered to Middle East Technical University students. Results indicated that all of the fifteen mentor-teachers developed professionally and/or personally through being a mentor and nearly all of the mentors interviewed said that they had developed professionally because they wanted to display the image of an 'ideal teacher'. Furthermore, all the mentor-teachers that were interviewed reported that they improved their teaching skills and knowledge through interacting with student-teachers, a finding that highlighted the value of mentoring in the process of professional development. The results also suggested that the mentor-teachers felt a commitment both towards the student-teachers and towards the other mentor-teachers in the school.

Roberts (2006) explored the personal experience of 22 student-teachers on a one-year secondary Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course at a University in England. The study focused on their development as they perceived it at a point in their course at which they knew that they had qualified for accreditation as state school teachers of Modern Languages. Longitudinal data were elicited by means of reflective writing and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed changes in their practical teaching skills, or their knowledge

of students and the curriculum. Changes in classroom management skills, self evaluation, observation, feedback, reflection and personal target setting were mentioned by all participants over a period of 30 weeks.

Gürbüz (2006) investigated university-based supervisors', school-based mentors' and student-teachers' perceptions of pre-service English language teachers' strong and weak areas of language teaching practice in a Turkish context. An open-ended questionnaire consisting two items was distributed to the three groups. These items were: what are pre-service teachers' weaknesses with regard to teaching English during practicum, and what are pre-service teachers' strengths with regard to teaching English during practicum?

The results indicated that student-teachers were aware of their strengths in materials preparation, motivation and enthusiasm, creating a relaxed and a pleasant classroom atmosphere, and establishing good rapport with students).

Wang and Odell's (2003) investigated how pre-service teachers learn to teach writing in reform-minded ways. Although the study was based on the data from only two pre-service teachers and two mentors, it revealed that these pre-service teachers' movement toward the reform-minded ways of teaching that mentors model did not occur because of the conflict between pre-service teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching and that of their mentors.

Ilyushina (1997) carried out a study to investigate the needs of practicing teachers and their evaluation and satisfaction with INSET training provision in St. Petersburg in Russia as viewed by them and by their trainers and how relevant is such training perceived to be by the recipients and their trainers. 96 teachers practicing in secondary schools in St. Petersburg took part in the survey. Two other groups of subjects were eight practicing teacher trainers and three administrators, who were all involved in decision taking. Results indicated that gaining practical ideas as a result of INSET was the first choice of teachers. Furthermore, more than half of teachers in both groups expressed their readiness to try out ideas and techniques presented in a training classroom. The majority indicated a ratio of theory to practice in the range of 30:70 to 50:50. The majority believed that training is a shared attempt by both trainer and trainee and observed teaching was reported to be an essential part of the course by all the trainers.

Rouamba (1998) aimed to examine how student-teachers transfer performance skills from the training institute to the workplace and investigate

the problems that arose in this process .The participants were two student teachers who had undergone two and a half months' intensive teaching practice supervised by the College of Educational Sciences in Burkino Faso, West Africa. The instruments for data collection consisted of seven-point rating scale instrument and interview sessions conducted after each observed lesson. One of the participants faced slight difficulties with two skills: eliciting pupils' responses and varying activities. The two participants improved their performance in four key skills: gaining and retaining attention, motivating pupils, giving instructions and lesson planning. The second participant showed low performance and a small tendency toward increase in skill application especially in terms of eliciting pupils' responses, lesson planning, varying activities and distributing questions. One of the participants seemed determined, high-principled, extrovert while the other was introverted and rather unmotivated to the extent that his teaching behavior seemed to contradict many of the principles and models presented during his training.

Studies that investigated the Practicum in other fields:

Bafakih (2012) investigated the organization problems of practicum according to cooperative school, practicum organization, and academic supervisor. To achieve the study objectives, a questionnaire was applied on a sample of (109) students, from specializations (Mathematics, Arabic language, Biology, Chemistry). The results revealed that the students faced highly and moderately problems related to the performance of the three domains.

Ghanim (2012) investigated the attitudes of UNRWA student teachers towards the new whole-class period teaching phase newly introduced in the faculty's practicum. The study examined the effect of students' gender, distance of the cooperative school from students' residence, students' accumulative average at university, and the students' grade in the practicum course on the student's attitudes. The results showed that student teachers have positive attitudes towards the implementation of the new program which was reflected in most of the questionnaire items amongst the four domains. Results also revealed that the study variables influenced students' attitudes.

Al-Khaza'lah (2011) examined the role of practical education supervisors in achieving educational communication skills for student teachers in the faculties of education at Zarka Private University and Al-Bayt University. The study revealed that the role of practical education supervisors was rated average in achieving educational communication skills for student teachers

from the subjects' points' of view .The study showed no differences in the participants' points of view regarding the supervisors' roles in achieving educational skills in terms of sex variable.

Hamdan (2011) investigated the malpractices that impede the teaching performance of student teachers at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports at AL-Aqsa University. The researcher used a 58- item questionnaire and 100 fourth level student teachers to obtain the results of the study. The results showed that the rate of the seven dimensions of malpractices were as follows: cognitive mal presentation, visual mal-presentation, mal-presentation and lesson management, mal-presentation call and exercises, mal –presentation follow- up, mistakes during the lesson, mal-presentation of ending lesson, mal-presentation andpersonal mistakes of teaching.

Fares (2011) aimed at identifying the educational supervision status in the practical education training at the Department of Physical Education at Al- Aqsa University in Gaza. The results showed that Educational supervisors do care to provide teacher students with the proper planning skills while emphasizing the importance of practical education and respects the points of view of the teachers and the hosting schools headmasters and takes into account the principle of flexibility in supervision. The results showed weakness on the basics of good teaching and also showed that educational supervisors do not have scheduled periodical meetings with their student teachers for discussing the positive and negative aspects of the lessons. The results also emphasized that educational supervisors pay no attention to the observation phase and they do not discuss the observations they recorded within the lesson with their students.

Rantisi (2010) evaluated the performance level of class activities of student teachers in relation to some variables such as accumulated average, gender and major. The sample included 60 fourth level students participating in field training (practicum). An observation sheet was designed to observe performance of teaching activities in class. The results revealed no significant differences in performance due to gender, high level of performance of the student teachers, low relation between performance and accumulated average.

Khraishah (2010) investigated the difficulties that encounter the practical education students in the Hashemite University and Al-Isra Private University. A questionnaire of (26) items were divided into five domains: cooperative

school, practical education program, student- teacher, cooperative teacher and the academic supervisor. The results showed that the most important difficulties that encountered the student teacher were: overcrowded classrooms, student-teacher's overload during practical education program, and the cooperative schools being far from the student-teacher residence. The results also revealed that there were statistical significant differences between the means of the difficulties due to the type of the university and was in favor of the private ones. It also showed that there were no statistical significant differences between the means of the difficulties were in favor of gender and specialization.

Hascher et al. (2004) carried out a study in which all student teachers at secondary I level at the University of Bern who had to undertake an internship were asked to participate in learning processes during practicum. At the end of the practicum, student teachers and mentors completed questionnaires on preparing, teaching and post-processing lessons. All student teachers, additionally, rated their professional skills and aspects of personality (attitudes towards pupils, self assuredness and well-being) before and after the practicum. Forty-six student teachers wrote daily semi-structured diaries about essential learning situations during their practicum. Results indicated that in each practicum students improved significantly in preparing, conducting and post-processing lessons. From the perspective of the student teachers, their general teaching skills also improved, and their attitudes toward pupils became more open.

Sabri and Abu –Daqqah (2004) evaluated the reality of practical education at Colleges of Education at the Palestinian Universities in order to diagnose the existing problems and find solutions. The sample consisted of 548 student teachers in the colleges of education in West Bank and Gaza in the academic year of 1997/1998. A questionnaire of six dimensions was used . The result revealed several positives in the training program in addition to some negatives such as the existence of some theoretical courses that have no real application. The most relate courses that benefited students were "General Teaching Methods, Specialized Teaching Methods and Teaching Aids .

Wang and Odell (2002) identified three types of problems that can confront novices when learning to teach within school settings, that is: (1) emotional and psychological stress, (2) lack of support, and (3) conceptual struggles about teaching and learning.

Talvitie et al. (2000) examined the role of university supervisors, cooperating teachers and peer student teachers in the student teachers' development. The source of the data for the study consisted of journals kept by 16 student teachers as part of their practicum. The journals showed that cooperating teachers and university supervisors played a meaningful role in their professional development. The most important factor seemed to be the quality of the dialogue that was maintained during the practicum. Most of the student teachers considered discussion after a lesson and cooperation with their supervising teachers important factors for boosting their sense of professional teaching. Eleven students reported that their supervisors or cooperating teachers had a strong influence on the changes they experienced. Dissatisfaction with cooperating teachers was mostly mentioned in connection with the insufficient amount of time allocated for guiding and attending the students' lessons and being present at the post-lesson assessment. McNamara(1995) found that the cooperating teachers give practical advice about the classroom situation and the content of the curriculum, but the university supervisors answer for all-round professional development and alternatives in the approach to practice .

Ryan et.al (1991)examined the purpose and value of the practicum; the relationship between the practicum and the learning outcomes of a course as a whole; and the structure and placement of the practicum within a course. Findings indicated that whilst the practicum was widely accepted as a valuable and successful component of professional education, it had a number of shortcomings. A number of questions were posed to guide further research into the role of supervision during practicum placements; the kinds of learning goals and outcomes that are best achieved through the practicum; and the impact on student learning of the length and structure of the practicum.

The above –mentioned review of literature indicated different attitudes and beliefs towards the practicum course and its various components. Some of these attitudes were positive (Ghanim,2012; Ferrier-Kerr,2009; Tuli,2009; Hascher et al. ,2004) while other studies showed negative attitudes towards practicum course (Fares ,2011; Nair, 2008; Wang and Odell's ,2003, Ryan et al. ,1991). Moreover, the previous review of literature revealed different forms of obstacles faced by students teacher during the practicum. Some of these obstacles were related to cooperative school, practicum organization , academic supervisor, headmaster, the load of tasks on the student-teacher during the implementation of the practical education program, in a addition

to the existence of some theoretical courses that have no real application. Accordingly, the present study aimed to contribute to the body of literature related to the practicum course by investigating the attitudes of the student teachers towards a new policy of conducting practicum supervision at QOU in addition to exploring the most stressful obstacles that face TEFL student teachers during their practicum. Also the study aimed to examine the effect of age, accumulative average and marital status on the student teachers' attitudes.

Methodology:

To gather data, the researcher used a quantitative research methodology that suited the objectives of this study which aimed to produce descriptive data based on participants' written responses on the questionnaire.

Sample of the study:

The participants of the study were 21 fourth- year EFL student teachers in the final semester of a four year undergraduate education degree in the Faculty of Education at QOU in the academic year 2012/2013. The participants undertook school based practicum course that required them to spend six weeks at different schools and therefore they had a dual identity—being both pre-service teachers and students. Regarding the sample selection, individuals for this study were selected purposively to include one section taught and supervised by the researcher according to the new policy of supervision. The section had 21 student teachers only one of them was male. The participants of the study were distributed according to the independent variables of the study as shown in Table 1.

Table (1)
Sample Distribution According to Independent Variables

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-24	10	47.6
	25-29	5	23.8
	30-34	3	14.3
	35 and over	3	14.3
	Total	21	100
Marital Status	Married	16	76.2
	Single	5	23.8
	Total	21	100

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Accumulative Average	60-64.9	6	28.55
	65-74.9	9	42.90
	75-84.9	6	28.55
	Total	21	100

Instrument:

The Questionnaire:

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher constructed a 45 –item questionnaire .The questionnaire items were developed by using other similar studies and questionnaires in a addition to the researcher's review of literature as well as the researcher's personal experience with school teaching and supervision. Consequently, the questionnaire consisted of three sections: section one sought to obtain general demographic information and therefore included three variables : age, marital status and accumulative average at university. The second section consisted of 45 items distributed over five domains : textbook and theoretical material, academic supervisor, supervisor school visits, cooperating teacher and assessment methods. Items within each domain were measured on a 5-point Lickert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree through to 5 = strongly agree. Those items which were stated negatively, the scale was reversed. The third section consisted of 11 obstacles faced by student teachers during practicum. The student teachers were asked to number 5 stressful obstacles.

Validity of the Questionnaire:

In order to judge its content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a jury of 7 professors at the Faculty of Education and English at QOU and An-Najah University . Following the suggestions from the experts which included simplifying the wording of some items, reducing the number of items through eliminating some duplicated items, the first draft of the questionnaire was revised and the necessary changes were made to have the final version of the questionnaire. For example, the first draft of the questionnaire involved 64 items distributed over 7 domains which made it too long, and upon referees' suggestions both the number of the items and the domains were reduced to be 45 items distributed over five domains (Appendix 1).

Reliability of the Questionnaire:

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated by assessing the internal consistency of the items representing each domain using Cronbach Alpha as shown in Table 2 below.

Table (2)

The Reliability Coefficient of the Questionnaire's Domains

Domain	No. Items	Cronbach Alpha
Textbook and Theoretical Material	5	0.71
Academic Supervisor	11	0.84
Supervisor School Visits	12	0.85
Cooperating Teacher	8	0.77
Assessment methods	9	0.78
Total Degree	45	0.89

Table 2 shows a reliability of 0.89 which is scientifically and educationally accepted.

Variables of the study:

The dependent variable of the study involved the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the new policy of the practicum course at QOU. On the other hand, the study had three independent variables which included: age, accumulative average, marital status. Such variables were chosen because there might be individual differences between the participants due to these variables as age, marital status and accumulative average found to have some effects on the attitudes of participants. Gender was excluded because there was only one male participant in this course.

Data Collection Procedures:

1-Research Context:

This study was conducted after a six-week practicum for fourth year EFL student teachers at QOU. After studying two EFL teaching methodology courses which equipped them with current trends in English language teaching, twenty one student teachers entered their practicum at 17 elementary schools in Nablus city and its surrounding villages. The practicum enabled them to

experience first-hand teaching practices in classroom. These student teachers were expected to find out about the subject they teach (syllabus, requirements and so on) and the school they were placed in with regard to its organization and educational activities. They were also expected to take part in all the teaching and extra-curricular activities, develop positive school relations, observe their mentor's lesson demonstrations, write lesson plans, teach EFL lessons, which are followed by teaching without supervision. Responsibility for mentoring rests with experienced classroom teachers during school practicum experiences in addition to a university practicum supervisor.

2-Procedures:

1. Throughout the six week practicum, the researcher who was the university practicum supervisor visited each student twice and participated in pre- and post- observation meetings with the students, some of which took place in the school, others at university. Other meetings (about 30 meetings) took place at the students' request during the supervisor's office hours at the university.
2. At the end of the teaching practice, as part of the course requirements, students submitted files which included a record of their involvement in school activities beyond their roles as ESL teachers of their assigned classes, lesson plans and their evaluations of those lesson plans.
3. The researcher distributed the questionnaire in a lecture attended by 17 students who were registered in the practicum.
4. The questionnaire was sent to the student teachers one week before the distribution via the academic portal of QOU using students' accounts on the academic portal. This step was done so as to give them the chance to read the items carefully and have their own comments before they come to class.
5. The students were given a brief account of the objectives of this questionnaire and were sent a translated copy (Arabic version) to help them understand the items completely.
6. Those students who didn't come to the lectures were asked to fill in the questionnaire electronically and to send it back via the academic portal of QOU.

3- Data Analysis and Statistical design:

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 13.0, was

used for computing all the descriptive statistics including the means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages, Independent t-test, One Way ANOVA and Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Results and Discussion:

1-Results Related to the First Question *What are the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU?"*

To answer this question, means and standard deviations of each domain were calculated as shown in Table 3. To identify the attitudes, the researcher used the following scale:

1- 2.33: negative attitudes	2.34-3.66: neutral	3.67- 5 : Positive attitudes
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Table (3)

Means and Standard Deviations of Student teacher attitudes According to Domains

No.	Domain	Mean	SD	Estimation
1-	Textbook and Theoretical Material	3.91	0.51	Positive
2-	Academic Supervisor	4.10	0.48	Positive
3-	Supervisor School Visits	3.83	0.39	Positive
4-	Cooperating Teacher	3.41	1.02	Neutral
5-	Assessment methods	3.91	0.23	Positive
	Total Degree	3.83	0.31	Positive

As seen in Table 3, the attitudes of TEFL student teachers towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU were positive on all domains except the fourth domain "The cooperating teacher" which scored 3.41 while the means of the rest domains ranged between 3.83-4.10. This result in particular agrees with Talvitie et al. (2000) whose study found dissatisfaction with cooperating teachers was mostly mentioned in connection with the insufficient amount of time allocated for guiding and attending the students' lessons and being present at the post-lesson assessment. This particular result also agrees with Rajuan (2008) who found that student teachers reported concern with a variety of critical issues that they were confronted with in the classroom that were incongruent with what they observed in the behavior of

their cooperating teachers. Such result might be interpreted by the idea that most cooperating teachers in the present study were overloaded and had their own duties at school which made them so busy and unready to give the student teachers the required support and encouragement they obviously needed. Some of the student teachers mentioned this point during their meetings with the supervisor and during the school visits. However, student teachers stated that cooperating teachers and university supervisors complement each other and they both play a meaningful role in their professional development.

With regard to the total degree of all domains, the results revealed positive attitudes as the mean was 3.83. This result agrees with Ghanim (2012) and Ferrier-Kerr (2009) who found that student teachers have positive attitudes towards the implementation of the whole-class period teaching phase especially when the associate teacher took on the role of a critical friend. This result can be explained by saying that the student teachers will be more able to develop greater understanding of effective teaching and learning when they receive support and encouragement from those who are involved in the practicum. Moreover, these positive attitudes might be interpreted by saying that student teachers were able to show radical changes in their practical teaching skills, their knowledge of students the curriculum, classroom management skills, self evaluation, observation, feedback, reflection and personal target setting as stated by Roberts (2006) and Gürbüz (2006) who found that student-teachers were aware of their strengths in materials preparation, motivation and enthusiasm, creating a relaxed and a pleasant classroom atmosphere, and establishing good rapport with students..

This result also agrees with Tuli (2009) who found that the participants perceived practicum as an important tool of learning to teach because it promoted the development of teaching experience and prepared them for the real world of work. The result also agrees with Hascher et al. (2004) who found that student teachers attitudes toward pupils became more open and their self-esteem and subjective well-being increased. These positive attitudes might be interpreted through Nguyen and Baldauf Jr. (2010) who found that formal peer mentoring can assist EFL pre-service teachers to develop their instructional practice during a period of practicum study and automatically will lead to positive attitudes towards the practicum and its components. Such finding indicates that mentor-teachers and cooperating teachers should feel a commitment both towards the student-teachers as mentioned by Daloglu (2006).

On the other hand, this result seems to disagree with Fares (2011) whose results showed negative attitudes and weaknesses on the basics of good teaching and supervision especially when the practicum supervisors do not have scheduled periodical meetings with their student teachers for discussing the positive and negative aspects of the lessons. This disagreement might be explained by what Fares (2011) found when the results of his study showed that practicum supervisors do not care for building good human relations with their teacher students and do not inform them about the time of their visits and that the supervisors pay no attention to the observation phase. The result also disagrees with Wang and Odell's (2003) who found that pre-service teachers' movement toward the reform-minded ways of teaching that mentors model did not occur because of the conflict between pre-service teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching and that of their mentors. The result seems to disagree with Ryan et al. (1999) who found that whilst the practicum was widely accepted as a valuable and successful component of professional education, it has shortcomings.

2-Results to the Second Question: *What are the most stressful obstacles faced by student teachers during the practicum?* To answer this question, the researcher tallied the answers of the respondents on the last section of the questionnaire (Section 3). The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4 which shows the most stressful obstacles faced by student teachers during the practicum categorized in an ascending order.

Table (4)

Frequencies of the Most Stressful Obstacles faced by Student Teachers

No.	Obstacles	Frequency
1-	I was unable to cope with the practicum duties and studying for my courses at university.	18
2-	There was a gap between what we learned at university and what is being practiced at school.	14
3-	The cooperative school didn't provide me with the necessary facilities to improve my skills.	12

No.	Obstacles	Frequency
4-	The duration for practicum was insufficient (not long enough).	10
5-	I have been seen as a refugee from the classroom and the school as well.	8

Table 4 reveals that the most stressful obstacle was "I was unable to cope with the practicum duties and studying for my courses at university" which scored 18 frequencies while the second obstacle was " There was a gap between what we learned at university and what is being practiced at school" which scored 14 frequencies. The third, the fourth and the fifth obstacles were" The cooperative school didn't provide me with the necessary facilities to improve my skills", " The duration for practicum was insufficient (not long enough)" and "I have been seen as a refugee from the classroom and the school as well" which scored 12, 10 and 8 frequencies respectively. This result partially agrees with that of Bafakih (2012) whose study found that students faced highly and moderately problems related to the performance of the three domains :cooperative school, practicum organization , and academic supervisor as the cooperative school and practicum organizations were found to be common obstacles. The result also partially agrees with Fares (2011) whose results revealed that one of the obstacles faced by the student teachers was that the headmaster did not allocate a suitable and comfortable place for them when the educational supervisor paid them a visit so as to ease the task of the educational supervisor and the students. This result seems to partially agree with Khraishah (2010) who found the load of tasks on the student-teacher during the implementation of the practical education programme to be one of the most important obstacles faced by student teachers. At the same time, Khraishah (2010) found that the cooperative schools were far from the student-teacher residence" to be one important obstacle while it wasn't in this study. This result also agrees with Sabri and Abu –Daqqah (2004) whose study revealed some negatives such as the existence of some theoretical courses that have no real application. The researcher believes that these obstacles as a whole indicate that student teachers still need more support as they critically examine their own practice which agrees with Nair (2008).

On the other hand, this result seems to disagree with Tuli (2009) who found that inadequate budget, assessment centered experience, inadequate

support and secondary school student misbehavior as the most stressful experience of student teacher practicum experience. The result also seems to disagree with Wang and Odell (2002) and Ilyushina (1997) who found that the conflict between pre-service teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching and that of their mentors was a major problem in the practicum. The result also disagrees with Hamdan (2011) who found completely different malpractices or obstacle that impede the teaching performance of student teachers at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports at AL-Aqsa University. Such result indicates that student teachers need to learn how to relate theory to practice so as to improve their teaching skills especially when teaching behaviors seem to contradict many of the principles and models presented during studying theoretical courses as found by Rouamba (1998).

3-Results to the Third Question: Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes due to age, accumulative average and marital status?

This question will be divided into three minor questions according to the independent variables.

A- Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes due to age? To answer this question, One-Way ANOVA was used and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table (5)
Results of One-Way ANOVA for the Attitudes of Student Teachers according to Age

Domain	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F-value	Sig.
1-	Between groups	1.44	3	0.48	2.07	0.14
	Within groups	3.95	17	0.23		
	Total	5.40	20			
2-	Between groups	0.94	3	0.31	1.39	0.27
	Within groups	3.83	17	0.22		
	Total	4.78	20			

Domain	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F-value	Sig.
3-	Between groups	0.31	3	0.10	0.65	0.59
	Within groups	2.75	17	0.16		
	Total	3.07	20			
4-	Between groups	1.44	3	0.48	0.42	0.74
	Within groups	19.37	17	1.14		
	Total	20.82	20			
5-	Between groups	0.31	3	0.10	2.16	0.12
	Within groups	0.83	17	0.04		
	Total	1.15	20			
Total Degree	Between groups	0.28	3	0.09	0.94	0.44
	Within groups	1.69	17	0.10		
	Total	1.97	20			

**Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$*

Table 4 shows no statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU due to age on all domains and on the total degree as well. Significance values were over 0.05 as they ranged between 0.14 – 0.74. This result indicates that the age variable did not affect the attitudes of student teachers. Again such result might be explained by the fact that all student teachers, regardless of their age, studied the same courses and passed through the same stages during the practicum although some of them (about 29%) were over 30 years old. Moreover, all students showed a great deal of enthusiasm to practice teaching at school so as to improve their teaching skills and this , the researcher believes, will be the ultimate output of student teachers journey at university.

B- Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes due to accumulative average? To answer this question, One-Way ANOVA was used and the results of this test are shown in Table 5.

Table (6)
Results of One-Way ANOVA for the Attitudes of Student Teachers
According to Accumulative Average

Domain	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F-value	Sig.
1-	Between groups	0.77	2	0.38	1.49	0.25
	Within groups	4.63	18	0.25		
	Total	5.40	20			
2-	Between groups	1.19	2	0.59	2.98	0.07
	Within groups	3.59	18	0.20		
	Total	4.78	20			
3-	Between groups	0.09	2	0.04	0.29	0.74
	Within groups	2.97	18	0.16		
	Total	3.07	20			
4-	Between groups	1.61	2	0.80	0.75	0.48
	Within groups	19.20	18	1.06		
	Total	20.82	20			
5-	Between groups	0.00	2	0.00	0.002	0.99
	Within groups	1.15	18	0.06		
	Total	1.15	20			
Total Degree	Between groups	0.22	2	0.11	1.14	0.34
	Within groups	1.75	18	0.09		
	Total	1.97	20			

**Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$*

Table 4 shows no statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU due to the accumulative average on all domains and on the total degree as well. Significance values were over 0.05 as they ranged between 0.07 – 0.99. This result disagrees with Ghanim (2012) who found that the student's accumulative average at university had its influence on the students' attitudes. The result, on the other hand, partially agrees with Rantisi (2010) who found low correlation between performance and accumulated average. The teacher believes that all students regardless of their accumulative grades were so ambitious and strongly motivated to improve their teaching skills because all of the them aim to be teachers and the vacancies are so limited;

therefore they need to compete to be more competent.

C- Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes due to marital status? To answer the question, t-test for independent samples was used and the results are shown in Table 7.

Table (7)
Results of the Independent t-test on the Differences between the Attitudes of Student teachers due to marital status

Domain	Marital Status	No.	Mean	SD	T-value	Sig.
1-	Married	16	3.98	0.55	1.16	0.25
	Single	5	3.68	0.33		
2-	Married	16	4.06	0.51	-0.66	0.51
	Single	5	4.23	0.40		
3-	Married	16	3.80	0.43	-0.61	0.54
	Single	5	3.93	0.13		
4-	Married	16	3.40	0.93	-0.08	0.93
	Single	5	3.45	1.39		
5-	Married	16	3.95	0.25	1.45	0.16
	Single	5	3.77	0.15		
Total Degree	Married	16	3.84	0.33	0.17	0.86
	Single	5	3.81	0.28		

***Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$**

Table 7 shows no statistically significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ between student teacher's attitudes towards the implementation of the practicum course at QOU due to marital status on all domains and on the total degree as well. Significance values were over 0.05 as they ranged between 0.16 – 0.93. Such result indicated the single and married student teachers both had positive attitudes towards the implementation of practicum. However, it seems

surprising to have such a result as we know that married student teachers who were the majority (16) usually have more responsibilities at home in addition to their duties as students and as would-be –teachers. This might be interpreted by the idea that all of them were so motivated to practice teaching at school so as to build their self-confidence and improve their teaching skills after studying for about 4-5 years.

Recommendations:

1. The researcher suggests the following recommendations that might serve as guidelines for improving the implementation of the practicum at QOU:
2. The researcher recommends that university practicum supervisors should encourage cooperating teachers to help student teachers to make the connection between current theoretical knowledge and school practices and to help them improve their teaching practices.
3. Student teachers should be encouraged to report on their perceptions of learning and teaching at schools with an emphasis on the proposed concepts in pedagogical journals. Such reports would increase awareness among student teachers of their ongoing learning processes.
4. Student teachers should be helped and advised to cope with the difficulty of coping with their practicum duties and studying their courses.
5. The researcher also recommends other researchers to carry out more studies to investigate the attitudes of the cooperating teachers and the principals towards the student teachers and their performance in the cooperative schools.
6. It is also recommended that the decision –makers at QOU should work better to make use of online support site via QOU academic portal to help student teachers to communicate continuously with the university practicum supervisor.

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