

From Teacher Preparation to Classroom Practice: Perceptions of Novice Emirati Teachers

Martina Dickson*, Lilly Tennant, Keith Kennetz, Julie Riddlebarger and Patricia Stringer

Emirates College for Advanced Education, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Email Addresses: martina_dickson@hotmail.com, ltennant@ecae.ac.ae, kkennetz@ecae.ac.ae, julieriddlebarger@yahoo.com, gpstring@ihug.co.nz

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Abstract: The teacher-training college where this research took place prepares Emirati primary school teachers to teach the subjects of English, Mathematics and Science through the medium of English. The college courses taught have been aligned to the ‘New School Model’ developed by the Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC) as part of the overall education reform. The current group of graduates is unique in that most English Medium Teachers in the past have been recruited from overseas to teach these subjects. They were also the first graduates to have been specifically trained to teach these subjects in English throughout their entire course of study. Therefore, it is critically important to review the effectiveness of their college preparation. This study explores their journey in their first year as novice teachers, looking at the ways in which they found their teacher preparation useful and relevant, and the ways in which they felt it was lacking. Findings from survey and interview data identify the areas where the novice teachers suggest how preparation can be improved, and give suggestions for ways in which the gap between theory in college and practice in school can be narrowed to become more effective.

Keywords: Novice Teachers, United Arab Emirates, Teacher Preparation, College, Classroom Practice

INTRODUCTION AND RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in 2013

Education in the UAE has undertaken radical reform over the past seven years in response to calls to modernise a system fraught with challenges such as a repetitive, redundant curricula emphasising rote-learning (Macpherson, Kachelhoffer and El Nemr, 2007, Davidson, 2010), poorly trained teachers (Barber et al, 2007, Ridge, 2010) favouring styles which were “teacher dominated, heavily transmitted teaching styles which were commonplace in schools” (Shaw, Badri and Hukul, 1995, p.12). A new set of standards adapted from the Australian New South Wales curriculum were implemented. In 2009, Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC) began to employ thousands of English medium teachers from countries such as U.S.A., Canada, U.K., Australia and New Zealand who would teach the subjects of maths, English and science using the medium of English in Cycle 1 schools implementing ADEC’s ‘New School Model (NSM)’ system. These teachers are known in the UAE as English Medium Teachers (EMTs).

Teacher-training colleges in the U.A.E. needed to align their courses to prepare teachers to fit this model and cope with its pedagogical demands. The particular teacher-training college where this research took place is unique in being the only institution (at the time of writing) dedicated solely to the preparation of Emirati EMTs. As Emiratization continues, there will be a growing number of Emirati EMTs in the education system, therefore, their thoughts and experiences are critical to document and explore. ADEC’s ambitious targets set out in their 10 Year Strategic Plan (2009-2018) included Abu Dhabi public school students performing above international average and that all school age children would have access to quality schools. The chosen vehicle for this success is the NSM, some of the key elements of which were the “standardization of curriculum, pedagogy, resources and support across all ADEC school types” and that students are encouraged to “develop critical thinking skills, and cultural and national identity through the

consistent use of rigorous learning outcomes and pedagogy” (ADEC New School Model Documentation, 2009, p.2). Teacher-training colleges are therefore under pressure to ensure effective teacher preparation for these EMTs to be able to help meet these goals.

The Effectiveness of Teacher Preparation

Though there are differing views as to the usefulness and relevance of teacher education programs to eventual teaching practice, a study by Hammond et al. (2009) found that pre-service training remained a strong influence, particularly where strategies were modelled by college tutors. Furlong et al. (2000) conclude similarly that most students regarded the theory they had learned in their courses as significant to their practice. By contrast, only 27% of graduates of Bachelor of Education degrees in Nova Scotia, Canada reported that their Bachelor of Education course had prepared them very well for teaching (Nova Scotia Report, 2011). Engelmann (1988) concluded that only 30 % of practice from training settings was transferred to actual teaching settings.

In their study of pre-service and novice teachers’ perceptions of their teacher training, Ezer, Gilat and Sagee (2010) examined motivation, teaching concepts and teachers’ roles in teacher training. They determined that many novice teachers felt confident in their abilities and are motivated by the intrinsic rewards of the profession, and that the practical aspects of teacher training (e.g., practicum and mentor teachers) are more important to their professional development than the more theoretical and subject-based components.

Although teacher education aims to integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching, both aspects of which are important for teachers to carry out their duties, novice teachers many have difficulty applying experiences from their education program to the reality of teaching. For example, Holligan (1997) suggests that the practicalities of teaching are more difficult to deal with than theories of education, and so it is this practical experience which students tend to value more (for example, that which they gained during their practicum experience). Melnick and Meister (2008) found that novice teachers did not realize, as pre-service teachers, the complexities of issues such as time management either. They asked novice teachers to rank areas which were much more useful than course-work, and the top four ranking items were classroom management, motivating students to learn, conflict resolution and strategies for interacting with parents.

Even, at times, if students have benefitted from, and agreed with, theoretical ideology, some are unable to put it into practice (Ezer et al., 2010). This study also finds that there was a clear preference of constructivist teaching methods among novice teachers (whereby knowledge is acquired by a process of learning which builds new knowledge into existing knowledge), in theory at least; whether this translates into a teaching reality was unclear. The issue is complex because students may, in theory, agree with certain practices, yet be unable or struggle to use these in practice. It is important, then, to analyze this ‘gap’ between theory and practice, if there is one, and examine whether the training which the students received has equipped them to handle their first year of teaching.

There is no doubt that teacher preparation cannot, inevitably, prepare for every single eventuality and cannot fully prepare teachers for their entire career (Northfield & Gunstone, 1997). Overwhelmingly, the literature on teacher preparation effectiveness calls for the generalization of teaching preparation; a gradual process which will lead to mastery of skills, and critically, to the ability to apply these skills in new and unfamiliar situations. It is rare that novice teachers are completely unaware of particular skills or strategies, but simply that they struggle to apply these skills away from the college environment: “Newly certified teachers may be highly qualified due to coursework yet not be very effective once in their own classrooms because they do not generalize newly acquired teaching techniques to real world setting” (Scheeler, 2008, p 146). Some of this is perceived to be due to inadequacy on the part of the teacher preparation: “Generalization training continues to be a missing link between pre-service teacher preparation and in-service application of skills ... Teachers who generalize and maintain effective teaching skills in turn should enhance student learning” (p 157). Complimenting an ability to generalize, Haymore Sandholtz (2011) point

out that reflecting on practice is a valuable way to improve teaching and promote student learning. To enhance effectiveness, novice teachers need to develop the reflection habit very early on in their practice, not only through their teaching itself, but on the outcomes, for example student learning (Moir & Baron, 2002). Being able to measure how effective a college preparation course by the measure of teacher effectiveness is important since teacher effectiveness and quality is strongly linked to student attainment (King Rice, 2003).

Therefore, the focus of this research paper is to examine the perceptions of novice teachers on their teacher education preparation and the realities of teaching in their classrooms. Hence, provide possible implications for teacher education programs.

METHODOLOGY

Framework of the Study

The research described in this paper focuses on the novice teachers' perceptions of their teacher preparation and is part of a larger study looking at multiple aspects of their novice teachers' journey. The aim of the research study was to obtain novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation at the college and their current practice as novice teachers in the schools. A mixed methods approach was used for this research. A survey questionnaire and interview guide was used as data collection tools.

For the purposes of this article, the focus is only on the areas of the work which relate directly to teacher preparation. The survey questions and statements were developed using the framework of the five ADEC Professional Teaching Standards: Content & Pedagogy, Diverse Learners, Learning Environment, Community, and Professional Development. The survey statements and interview questions straddle each of these standards in some way. For example, statements within the 'Teaching Profession' standard, read as "*My college courses prepared me to plan effective lessons*". Also, statements related to subject knowledge preparation to teach subject content (English, Mathematics and Science) were included in the survey questionnaire. Within the 'Content and Pedagogy' standard, factors such as college preparation "*to be able to plan instruction and implement curriculum confidently*" were stated. Within the 'Learning Environment' standard statements regarding their preparation for a safe, well-managed classroom environment, including behavior management were asked. For 'Addressing Diverse Learners', statements such as the preparation to teach a variety of different learning styles and differentiate across levels of student ability were included.

Background of the Participants

The graduates from the college where this research took place have a four-year Bachelor of Education degree. They have taken courses on the content and pedagogy of, science, mathematics, and English subjects. In addition to this, they studied a range of Educational Studies courses, which include theories of learning, diverse learners and effective classroom practice. As pre-service teachers, they had practical experiences during their course of study; two, three, four and ten week placements in elementary schools, referred to as Cycle 1 schools.

The participants for this study were recent graduates of our teacher-training college who have been employed as English medium teachers (EMT) in ADEC schools since the beginning of the academic year (2012-2013). These graduates will be referred to as novice teachers and are teaching in Cycle 1 (Grades 1-5) and Kindergarten, both as EMTs. Thirty novice teachers took part in the survey, while thirteen participated in the in-depth interviews. Out of the 30 participants, 27 were females and 3 were males. About 79% were between the ages of 20-24 years, 17% between 25-30 years and 3% were above 30 years.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was designed to address several components such as the academic program preparation and their field experiences during their course of study, as they relate to the professional teacher standards and the New School Model. The questions consisted of Likert-scale statements with which participants ranked their agreement. The survey tool was developed by the five researchers, all established professional academics in their fields, and it underwent numerous iterations and discussions about its reliability and validity as a tool. It was checked by two pre-viewers, one an academic professor and the other a graduate from the college who was not part of the study. These individuals gave feedback on the relevance and clarity of the questions; adjustments were made on this basis. The survey had a total of 75 items including demographic information. eSurveysPro software was used to construct the survey and also to collect the data online. An introduction to the research study, informed consent and the survey link was emailed to about 40 graduates who were employed as EMTs. About 30 of the participants completed the survey questionnaire. The survey data was entered into the eSurveysPro online software and responses tabulated electronically. Using descriptive statistics such as means and percentages, quantitative data was analyzed. Statistics were calculated for all questionnaire sections and subsections.

Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed with an aim to broaden and interpret the survey results. Specific questions were asked about how the novice teachers felt the college had prepared them for their teaching practice, and areas in which they had felt inadequately prepared. It is these responses which we explore in this paper, set against the backdrop of the related survey responses for breadth. Out of the thirty participants, thirteen formally consented to participate in a face-to-face individual interview which was audio-taped and transcribed.

The interviews were coded according to the original framework set up in the questions, and re-coded when appropriate as a result of emergent in-vivo codes. A second level of sub-codes then emerged upon deeper analysis of the data. The coding underwent a rigorous process of blind inter-coder reliability checking. The qualitative interview data was classified into main themes which emerged as areas where the novice teachers reported their college preparation being significant, both negatively and positively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the novice Emirati teachers' perceptions of their teacher preparation obtained from the survey and the in-depth interviews are presented and discussed under the following themes: 1) Planning effective lessons using the ADEC curriculum; 2) Teaching strategies; 3) Behaviour management and students with special educational needs; 4) Content versus pedagogical knowledge; 5) College internship; 6) Teaching using the medium of English language.

Teacher Preparation: Planning Effective Lessons using the ADEC Curriculum

Table 1: Novice Teachers' Perceptions of their Preparation for Planning

Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
My college courses taught me how to organize an effective classroom.	61	39	0	0
My college courses prepared me to plan effective lessons.	75	21	4	0
My college courses prepared me to implement the ADEC curriculum.	61	28	11	0

My college courses taught me theories of learning.	71	29	0	0
I can plan to ensure progression across ages and ability ranges.	11	81	4	4
I can create unit plans and lesson plans from the ADEC curriculum.	63	30	7	0

The students were asked to rate their agreement with these statements concerning their perception of the effectiveness of the college preparation regarding organization and planning (Table 1). About 75% of the participants strongly agreed that the college prepared them to plan effective lessons and 63% were also in agreement that they could create unit and lesson plans. Also, 61% strongly agreed that they felt prepared to implement the ADEC curriculum in their classrooms. A high level of confidence in their preparation to organize their classroom, plan effective lessons and in theories of learning was found. One of the students expressed this sentiment in her interview:

“I don’t think anything is missing, everything is great. When I came here, I feel I am ready and don’t need to be prepared to teach. Everyone was asking me, “How do you know how to do this?” I said from the college, I learned everything I needed to learn.”

From the college’s point of view, these results are rewarding as they match very well to the NSM, aiding the “standardization of curriculum, pedagogy, resources and support across all ADEC school types” (ADEC New School Model Documentation, 2009, p.2). However, the deeper examination of views which interviewing allows painted a picture wherein not everyone felt the same, particularly not those teaching in upper grades. The New School Model learning outcomes had only been rolled out in Grade 5, for the first time that year, meaning that, if the novice teacher happened to be selected to teach that grade, they did not have the advantages of the earlier grades, i.e. experience and possible exposure to the curriculum of different grades on prior practicum experience, teaching colleagues who had previously taught those grades, and some availability of resources as a result of the latter.

“There was like enough support in preparing for teaching, but the only thing that, as I told you, grade 5. Because the... Grade 5 curriculum. But it’s not their fault, they don’t know that maybe grade 5 will be like, the New School Model will be applying to grade 5.”

This novice teacher has been magnanimous in not apportioning blame to the college for lack of preparation to teach Grade 5 (*“But it’s not their fault, they don’t know that the New School Model will be applying to grade 5*) although in fact, it was known, quite universally, that Grade 5 was going to be rolled out in the subsequent year. Perhaps there was an assumption on the part of the college that novice teachers would be unlikely to teach a new grade, given their lack of experience, but it is also true that, the nature of reform being what it is, communication has often been imperfect, nor the sharing of resources and information about the curriculum and new standards, meaning that it may have been difficult for college faculty to prepare students for a new grade.

The other area where novice teachers elaborated in their interviews that they had felt unprepared was for those who were teaching Kindergarten (KG). Placement of novice teachers into government schools in Abu Dhabi was dependent upon their scores in the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) – only those scoring above a certain level were able to teach in Cycle 1 schools, and those not meeting these criteria would teach in KG, either as EMTs, if their score was high enough, or as Arabic medium teachers (AMTs). This delineation was a development which occurred during their degree course and was not in place when they initially embarked on the course. An earlier study of the same cohort of novice teachers, as pre-service teachers, showed that this requirement and its resulting school placement was a highly contentious issue among the then students (Dickson, 2013). So, given that the Bachelor of Education program was designed to prepare students to teach in Cycle 1, it was perhaps not surprising that some novice teachers felt ill-prepared to teach KG. Some of their perceptions are described below in their own words:

“We don’t have the specific training for the kindergarten, so ...”

“The college was good in all the areas – management, how to teach reading, writing, how to do the assessment. The teaching was perfect. In teaching I find myself perfect. So the college gave us all the ideas that we needed. [But] in applying this maybe there is a problem because I am working in the KG. Maybe this is the problem. If I was in Grade 2 or 3 I will do the story but with different strategies and language. In shared reading I will use language suitable to them. In the KG it has to be simple things.”

The latter statement was interesting as being slightly contradictory, since on hand, the teacher feels ‘perfect’ in teaching, having had all the ideas needed from college. However she then admits to having difficulty in actually applying these ideas, or taking ideas which she feels sure about for older grades, and adapting these to younger students. Others corroborate this difficulty in transferring teaching methodologies to younger students:

One teacher made the point that most of the educational theories learned in college were based on Western theories, and there was a need for more of a local context to this:

“Some of these projects are based on NSM or certain theories. But I think it would be better to take the feedback from Emirati teachers who have, or ... it will benefit us, because all theories come from Western countries. Some of the western theories don’t suit the students so it’s better to take feedback from UAE experts and UAE teachers.”

It is not clear which theories exactly this teacher is referring to, but it is true that the main learning theories taught (probably universally) in teacher-training courses tend to be based on European or Western theories and ideologies, so it may be a good point and one worth considering, particularly the suggestion of making more use of local teachers to inform. Another teacher reiterates this idea, appealing for more teachers from the local context, this time suggesting they give some lessons in college too. One of them mentioned:

“Maybe if they invite the (Emirati) teachers from the KG and let them give us some lessons and deal with us as the kids ... bring teachers from the schools, this is the best way you know ... we want to observe them, to take benefit from them”.

Teacher Preparation: Teaching Strategies

Table 2: Novice Teachers’ Perceptions of their preparation to teach using a variety of strategies

Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
I know how to adjust my teaching practice for different learning styles.	33	63	4	0
I can create and use resources to support my students’ learning.	59	41	0	0
I can use teaching strategies to suit individuals, groups and whole classes.	48	48	0	4
I am knowledgeable about teaching strategies that include co-operative learning.	52	48	0	0
I know how to set challenging learning outcomes and differentiate them for my students’ diverse needs.	33	63	4	0
I can use multiple methods of assessing student work.	41	59	0	0
I am a reflective teacher and frequently reflect on my lessons.	26	55	19	0

When the novice teachers were asked about the effectiveness of their college courses regarding their practice in the classroom, 59% strongly agreed that they could create learning resources to support their

students' learning (Table 2). With regards to teaching strategies, 52% strongly agreed that they are knowledgeable with the teaching strategies. Also, 33% responded that they were well prepared to teach diverse learners. Some of the teachers elaborated with pride on the types of student-centered strategies they had learned from the college and implemented in the classroom. Excerpt from one of the interview participants state:

“Yes, yes. [I use] manipulatives, games ... they can go back to the [learning] centre and use the manipulatives to support their learning ... I give them choice. So they have the choice so they can have their preference ... and so they choose the centres, they work on the areas they can work on, so it's differentiated by choice and by level ... it should be fun, because it's painting, manipulatives”

This teacher creates a very vivid image for us of a classroom where student-centered approaches and experiential learning are the order of the day, and, importantly, where student autonomy (*“they have the choice so they can have their preference ... and so they choose the centers”*) is an integral part of the lesson. In essence, this description could not be further from the didactic learning environments which existed in the past in schools in the UAE. One of them stated:

“Everything I applied I learned in the college [was useful]. We studied the New School Model so everything is from that, I use it in my classroom nothing is new from me. I use demonstrations a lot. I use this in order to give the idea or information to the students. Sometimes the students cannot understand the first or second time so the need more demonstration. Sometimes this is conflicting with the strategies we took at the college, but use this for the students not for me”

The reflection in the latter statement that the teacher is aware of the conflict of excessive demonstration with student-centred learning highlights the gap that novice teachers may feel at times between theory and reality.

One teacher felt so well prepared in the area of inclusion and provisions for gifted and talented students, that they felt superior to their more experienced colleagues and perhaps bored by the professional development sessions offered by their school:

“In the PD session, we had on gifted and talented and inclusion, we responded to all their questions and feel we are prepared. Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs) don't know much. I wish we could do other things instead of the CPD.”

Inevitably, not all of the novice teachers shared this confidence, and one suggested that she could have felt better prepared in the area of differentiation:

“Maybe how to... differentiate lessons, because one lesson in the book it has different levels, but unfortunately all lessons should have these activities, even if it's hard, they should do it. Maybe if they trained us, like if you have this paper, you can make it differentiated. Instead of making 4 different level papers.”

Some of the novice teachers expressed appreciation for the practical, hands-on approach which some classes in the college adopt:

“When I was at the college I thought we are taking everything in an easy way and we are not prepared well for teaching but then I found that our college prepared us in a practical way unlike other universities who prepared their students depending on books and just theories away from reality.”

This perception was interesting, because the majority of these novice teachers were probably not educated themselves in a very practical way, and there is, of course, much research to show that not only are

teachers of didactic schooling themselves uncomfortable with student-centred learning approaches, but they are also much more likely to be didactic teachers themselves. It may explain this initial response (“*I thought we are taking everything in an easy way*”) which is a common interpretation of activity based approaches by students used to rote-learning and information stock-piling. Pleasantly, the findings from both survey and interview appear to repeatedly suggest that this is not the case for these novice teachers. Even more heartening is the evidence of a shift in thinking here, and the reflection which has contributed to this shift.

Overall the survey results (see Table 2) indicate positive aspects of their teacher preparation with the majority of novice teachers expressing high levels of confidence in these areas of planning and implementing student centered approaches to learning. Linking the findings to the vision of the New School Model wherein students would be encouraged to “develop critical thinking skills, and cultural and national identity through the consistent use of rigorous learning outcomes and pedagogy” (ADEC New School Model Documentation, 2009, p.2), the findings are very optimistic, since a high confidence in all of these would imply their use in the classroom, which would lead to those outcomes.

Teacher Preparation: Behaviour Management and Students with Special Educational Needs

Table 3: Novice teachers’ agreement on their preparation to use behaviour management strategies and handle students with SENs

Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
I can use different strategies to manage students’ behavior.	48	52	0	0
My college courses helped me understand the needs of students with special needs.	37	52	11	0

All of the teachers were in agreement (100%) that they were able to use different strategies to manage students’ behaviour, and about 89% were in agreement that they understood students’ SENs (see Table 3). Some expressed concern about dealing with students with special needs in particular; though some felt they had been taught useful strategies which they were able to apply. Some remarks by participants were:

“My friend in the other class has an autistic student. I thought if he came in my class what would I do? They should give us more information about the special needs. There are specialist teachers ... who [can help] the teachers. We need more information for special needs.”

“Yeah, I’m using the strategies that I have learned in the college like the traffic lights, putting their names in the red if they were not good, and moving it to the green if they were good. Ok. And I’m using the marbles jar, remember??? ... I’m using it! And it’s full now.”

Despite the very high percentage of agreement with the statement that they could use different strategies to manage student behaviour, during the interviews, many revealed a lack of confidence, deficiency of ‘tools’ and feeling that they had not been as prepared by the college in behaviour management strategies as they could have been, and that their knowledge had come only from practicum:

“To be honest with you the practicum really helped. It gave us a lot of experience to teach and give us the confidence to be teachers, to be ready to teach students.”

“From the college, indeed I asked to have a course for that [behaviour management]. I asked, and I thought we would be given that course last year in our final year, but surprisingly we didn’t get any of that, that would have been helpful. It will be really amazing if they made a specific course for that, we want that course because we are teachers ... no, I didn’t get this from college. Just from my practicum I got experience in these things.”

It is interesting that this teacher should feel that there was no course offered in behaviour management, because in fact there was a course which they took as pre-service teachers, offered at that time

to second year students, on exactly what she mentions. The course runs for approximately fifteen weeks and covers various approaches to classroom management: establishment of classroom rules, expectations, routines, strategies for managing positive behaviours and reducing disruptive behaviours. Perhaps it was too long before, or perhaps the issues is (once more) in the challenge of applying learned theories in practice. We should not be surprised, however, since as discussed earlier in the literature view, generalisation is something which most novice teachers struggle with, and which many teacher-training colleges are apparently ineffective at training pre-service teachers to do. As practitioners in this field, we should remind ourselves that “it is essential to prepare new teachers to not just demonstrate newly learned teaching skills in practicum or student teaching but to retain these skills and apply them in their own classroom as they transition from student teacher to professional without the supports of co-operating teachers and university supervisors” (Scheeler, 2008, p 147). The role of the college and the teacher educator comes up in the literature repeatedly, and Scheeler concludes that teacher educators should strive to create “teachers who generalize and maintain effective teaching skills [who] in turn should enhance student learning” (p 157).

Our pre-service teachers are not alone in their concerns. The sentiment of dealing with problematic behaviour as being one of novice teachers’ main challenges also echoes Melnick and Meister (2008), who found that the greatest concern voiced by novice teachers was their “inability to deal with the aberrant behaviour and diverse needs of some students” (p. 42). World-wide, beginning teachers continue to identify classroom management as a concern and an area in which they need more preparation (Meister & Melnick, 2003). Indeed, “the extent to which novice teachers can focus on instructional outcomes before classroom management is a matter of debate” (Haymore Sandholtz, 2011, p 27).

One teacher acknowledged that the college had provided some preparation in this area, but felt that behaviour management courses needed to go deeper, and was critical of her own culture in the way that some parents raised their children:

“For management [in the college] they just did simple things. We need to go deep in some of the behaviours. In this culture, to be honest with you, parents give their kids everything – most of them – give them the money and everything they want and say they are kids. When I tell him I will not give him a sticker he says my mum will get me one. When I say you will not get a gift he says my mum will get me a gift.”

There is a sense of a conflict going on for this novice teachers, knowing what is good practice and what should be done, and not having the experience or tools, yet, to deal with it. Having to deal with parents is a challenge for some, too. In the following statement, a teacher feels that strategies for interacting with parents is something that college could have prepared her better for, a finding shared by Melnick and Meister (2008):

“I think the college could have taught us to deal with the parents. Parents ... some of them are educated and want their child to have good behaviour and for some of them it doesn’t matter to them. The teacher should do something so we need to know how to deal with these parents who think that hitting is the only solution. We need to find another solution. I think in the college we need to have a course like psychology.

Another teacher sought help for dealing with team members, presumably in a conflict-resolution vein:

“If we could get how to deal with others – team work – because you face people who do not like to work with others or who want to be the best and they can do anything to be the best. So if we have a course that shows us how to work as a team – how to work with some of the people who think in a different way and it is difficult to convince them about something then how can I deal with these people. Some people have maybe more than 12 years experience and you come as a new teacher they feel like you have something different.”

Teacher Preparation: Content versus Pedagogical Knowledge

Table 4: Novice teachers' agreement on their preparation in subject knowledge – both content and pedagogy

Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
My college Curriculum Studies (CS) Math courses taught me how to teach math.	37	52	11	0
My college Subject Knowledge (SK) Math courses taught me math content knowledge relevant to my teaching.	33	52	11	4
My college Curriculum Studies (CS) Science courses taught me how to teach science.	41	48	11	0
My college Subject Knowledge (SK) Science courses taught me science content knowledge relevant to my teaching.	44	41	11	4
My college courses prepared me to use ICT effectively in the classroom.	48	41	11	0

It is interesting to note that 48% strongly agreed that they were well prepared to use ICT in the classrooms. About 44% reported that their science content knowledge were relevant followed by 41% in the sciences and 37% in Math content and pedagogy. Table 4 shows that there were about 11% who disagreed in the survey responses as to the relevancy and usefulness of certain courses, namely mathematics, science and ICT to their teaching, in terms of both content knowledge and pedagogy. Slightly more disagreed that the mathematics and science content (as opposed to pedagogy) they learned was relevant to teaching. This could be considered a reminder to college faculty to frequently check content for alignment to the most up-to-date version of the ADEC curriculum; not that these content courses are supposed to be at the same level by any means, but at least they should encompass the main topics. As with the earlier discussion on behavior management, the issue may be again one of knowledge transfer, since it would be impossible to teach every aspect of mathematics and science content that the pre-service teacher is likely to face in practice. No qualitative comments were made regarding this area of preparation in the interviews.

Teacher Preparation: College Internship

Table 5: Novice Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of their Internship

Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
I feel that I had enough time on internship to prepare me to be an effective teacher.	55	37	8	0
My internship was useful and relevant to me as a new teacher.	67	29	4	0
My internship gave me the skills, knowledge, and confidence I needed to teach successfully.	70	26	4	0
I am a reflective teacher and frequently reflect on my lessons	26	56	18	0

As pre-service teachers, in their final semester of college they undertook a ten-week internship, in one of grades 1-5 in a Cycle 1 school. About 70% of the participants strongly agreed that their internship provided them with the skills, knowledge and the confidence to teach (Table 5). Also, 67% found the internship to be relevant as a novice teacher. About 55% of the graduates indicated that they 10 week placement in the schools prepared them to be effective teachers though a small percentage did not feel that they had enough time on the internship. Some explained that one of the reasons they had found practicum to be such a positive experience was because of the particular mentor teacher they were assigned to:

“Honestly, I learned a lot from my last practicum because my class mentor teacher was amazing, she was a great model teacher.”

“I went to a great school, they are so welcoming ... my mentor teacher, do you believe that she stayed with me after the school time to prepare for the whole week, what we have to do, which worksheets, helped me to write notes. She’s great, so helpful and co-operative, I had heard about [her] before I came ... one of the students told me, if your teacher is Ms X you will be the luckiest person in the college, and it was true”.

The support which a mentor can provide a pre-service teacher (and indeed a novice teacher) is well documented, and is supported by a recent UAE study which found that “the majority of respondents were in favour of an experienced teacher mentoring novices” (Ibrahim, 2012, p 246). Indeed, mentoring pre-service teachers in their internships has been advocated as an important part of reform in teacher-training since as early as the late 1980s (Hobson et al, 2012). The “need for purposefully mentored support, particularly during the early stages of integration into a teaching program cannot be overlooked” (Snyder, 2012, p 42), referring both to mentorship on teaching practice and on the program in general.

Some of the novice teachers acknowledged that the internship was tough, and talked of how stressful and difficult it was at times, even saying that it was actually much harder than their current teaching practice, but that with the benefit of hindsight, they recommended maintaining the perceived intensity of the experience as being good for them in the long run. One of them commented:

“First, I want to thank the [college] for giving me the chance to do that practicum. It was very very very stressful ...really. Because you know, the research project and practicum, it was very very like stressful, but when I get into the real teaching, I felt that teaching, comparing to the practicum, is easy. In fact, it’s not easy. But because I had that experience where I was like independent and like observations and research project and all of that? Thanks God. Teaching is fine.... Keep it as...as...that pressure ... to feel like we are confident...”

The sentiment that the intensity of the internship is beneficial in the long run is powerful, coming from a graduate of the college, much more so than would be from a faculty member. There is the sense of a mismatch between college and practicum in the latter statement; science inquiry being a good example of this, which often is not observed in practice on practicum, and yet the college places a large emphasis on it in teaching courses. Part of this is due to the fact that internship placements are not perfect, regarding the practices the pre-service teachers observe in the schools, causing them to question the link between college and school. The idea of having a difficult internship as being a good basis from which to begin ‘real teaching’ came up with regards to placement of students in schools, perceived by one novice teacher as unrealistic:

“I suggest ... most of the practicum schools we visited we really good schools like model schools, but when I began my real teaching it’s at a low level, in everything and this problem continues that the farther away the schools are from the city the lower they are.”

This statement has to be balanced against the reality of organising internships for students, who can often be very vocal about which type of school they would like to be placed in. Overall, most of the novice teachers had found the experience valuable, for various reasons, and many spoke of the confidence it had given them to teach, e.g.:

“To be honest with you the practicum really helped. It gave us a lot of experience to teach and give us the confidence to be teachers, to be ready to teacher students.”

With regards to their internship preparation at the college, certain tasks were required in terms of planning and teaching, assessment, and reflection. Predominantly, though, the tasks are related to reflection of their own teaching, designed to encourage probing and self-analysis to inform practice, an essential tool of the effective teacher, yet one which many pre-service, novice, and indeed experienced teachers struggle with. It is interesting to note that only 26% of the novice teachers strongly agreed that they were a reflective

teacher. Opportunities for reflection and analysis of one's own teaching and student attainment of learning outcomes are critical: "If teacher education programs genuinely focus on the student teacher as learner, then it is the ability to analyse and make meaning from their experiences that matters" (Korthagen, Loughran and Russell, 2006, p 1030). Baird and Northfield (1992) note that student teachers often struggle with interpretive discussions, which are a form of reflection. It may be that it is the reflection task itself that the students struggle with, and perhaps they need more support in this from college mentors.

By examining only the survey data, one might imagine that the novice teachers had no criticism of their college courses and internship whatsoever. The rich data and the often intimate one to one setting of the interview meant that the participants were willing to open up much more, and begin their narrative construction. Many voiced their displeasure at having to carry out an action research project simultaneously to the internship. This was a research task assigned to them requiring them to develop a research question, gather data, analyse and make suggestions for future interventions. Some of them recall having found this 'too much', a distraction from their teaching, and something which they suggest should be either omitted or left to another part of the course, which would be impractical since obviously, it would require school-based data to be gathered.

"In the practicum, you have ... action research and practicum at the same time means we lose the focus on the practicum itself ... Take it out. If they want action research, that's fine I will do it without the practicum portfolio that we needed for the college. Both of them it's too hard!"

The feelings are genuine, the internal conflict this perceived juggling act created is clearly expressed, and the imagery is again vivid (*"we were like cutting ourselves into pieces"*). There is no doubt that the action research project occupied lots of their time, but there are conflicting messages from the novice teachers as to whether or not this was a good thing, remembering the earlier teacher who reminded us of the importance of *'keeping up the pressure'*. Additionally, there is plentiful evidence in the literature which strongly advocates for the inclusion of an action research experience as part of pre-service teachers' practicum, e.g. "when student teachers are given permission to collect and analyze their own data from their own experiences during their practicum, the subsequent assertions about practice are qualitatively different in value and meaning from when similar assertions are passed on to them by a teacher educator" (Korthagen, Loughran and Russell, 2006, p 1030).

Teacher Preparation: Teaching using the Medium of English Language

Table 6: Novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation to teach using the medium of English

Statement	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
My college Curriculum Studies (CS) English courses taught me how to teach English.	44.44	48.15	7.41	0
My college Subject Knowledge (SK) English courses taught me English content knowledge relevant to my teaching.	44.44	44.44	11.11	0
My English language level is appropriate for teaching as an EMT.	32.14	64.29	3.5	0

The statement 'my English language level is appropriate for teaching as an EMT', was included in the survey, both in terms of college preparation, and because, as mentioned earlier, English language levels required by ADEC featured as a highly contentious issue with the same cohort of students in an earlier study (Dickson, 2013). These findings show that majority (96 percent) of the novice teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they had been prepared in a way that their language level was appropriate for their teaching. Table 6 shows that there is fairly high agreement of being well-prepared to teach English, *in* English, and although 11% participants disagreed they had been taught English content knowledge relevant to their teaching, on the whole, confidence seems high. One teacher thought that there was an emphasis over the teaching of one skill over another, e.g.

“We have to have more English courses. Sometimes I have to search for a term or teach terminology so if we have more courses in teaching terminologies it will be good. The English courses are good but not excellent. We have to have more English - more writing. Writing especially. Writing and speaking. We use speaking more and when we sit with other teachers we have to write.”

Based on college attendance records, we would counter these requests with tales of poorly attended additional English language courses, so the genuine need for such courses is uncertain. One teacher makes an interesting, if ambitious suggestion for an adaptation to the college courses, which she felt would enable her to have a more realistic experience of trying to teach English to EAL learners in a similar context to that of the UAE, i.e. non-native speakers living in a country where a language other than English is the main one:

“Sometimes, I think, why not, let them travel outside to see how the teachers teach them kids in English ... I mean, don't send me to England or America because this is their language. Send me to Finland! Any other country where they teach the students English but it's not their mother tongue. I don't know if it's possible or not!”

Overall, the novice teachers interviewed felt they had been well-prepared by their college courses and internship experiences, and have become extremely confident teachers, such as *“I think we are 99 % prepared. Like when they saw my lesson, they were amazed and said you are teaching like you have been teaching for a long time!”*

CONCLUSION

In summary, the perceptions of the participants from this research study have been positive with regards to their teacher preparation and applications in their own classrooms. The novice teachers gave many examples of the teaching methodologies which they learned in college and have been able to apply, and many describe dynamic and student-centered classrooms, which is very much in keeping with the kind of teacher needed to power ADEC's ambitious educational reforms. The main areas where novice teachers felt they could have been better prepared by the college included behavior management strategies, kindergarten-specific teaching, the use of English as a medium of instruction, strategies in dealing with children with special educational needs and overall being equipped with more practical experiences. Even though the study was limited to one graduating class from one teacher training college and the resulting sample size was small, it represented the majority of the novice teachers employed as EMTs at the time of the study. Although, broad generalizations cannot be drawn from this study for the entire population of novice Emirati teachers in the UAE, it is clear that certain areas of concerns need to be considered in improving teacher education programs. Suggestions resulting from the study include areas such as the generalization of teaching practices, application of behavior management strategies across grade levels, development of reflective thinking skills, and the tools needed for life-long learning could be given more focus in the college. This study is a starting point for further research on how novice Emirati teachers manage the everyday realities of their teaching in the classroom, the retention rate of novice Emirati teachers, and their sustainability in the new and emerging education system.

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