

تطوير برنامج التدريب الميداني بكليات التربية في ضوء معايير ضمان الجودة

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الملخص باللغة العربية:

يعد التدريب الميداني او التربية العملية جزءا لا يتجزأ من برامج اعداد المعلم في جميع انحاء العالم، حيث انها الفترة التي يستوعب فيها الطالب المعلم المعارف والمهارات التي درسوها انتقالا من التعلم النظري الى ممارسة عملية داخل الفصل الدراسي. وعلى الرغم من ذلك، فهناك العديد من المشكلات التي تعوق التدريب الميداني من الإتيان بالفائدة المرجوة منه. وانطلاقا من تلك الأهمية، يهدف البحث الحالي الى اقتراح اطار لتطوير برنامج التدريب الميداني بكليات التربية. ويسترشد الإطار المقترح بمعايير ضمان الجودة التي أقرتها الهيئة القومية لضمان جودة التعليم والاعتماد لبرامج التدريب الميداني بمؤسسات التعليم العالي. فضلا عن ذلك فإن هذا الاطار يوظف مدخلا تكنولوجيا حديثا و هو التعلم المدمج والذي ييسر الإعداد للتدريس، التواصل بين الطلاب والمشرفين، وكذلك التأمل.

الكلمات الدلالية:

التدريب الميداني، إعداد المعلم، التعلم المدمج، معايير ضمان الجودة،
التدريس التأملي، مهارات التدريس

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Upgrading Teaching Practice Program at Faculties of Education in the Light of Quality Assurance Standards

A Research Paper

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Abstract

Teaching practice or field experiences are part and parcel of teacher education programs all over the world. It is the period where student teachers internalize knowledge and skills, transitioning from theory-based learning to a classroom-based practice. However, it suffers from several problems that hinder it from attaining its utmost benefit. Stemming from this importance, the current paper aimed at proposing a framework for upgrading the teaching practice program at faculties of Education. The proposed framework is guided with quality assurance standards set by the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE) for field experience programs in higher education institutions. Moreover, it integrates a new technological approach; namely blended learning which facilitates teaching preparation, student-supervisor communication, and reflection.

Key words: Teaching practice, teacher education, blended learning, quality assurance standards, reflective teaching, teaching skills.

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Introduction:

In an age of globalization and information technology, higher skill levels in most occupations become an urgent demand. A new array of competences such as adaptability, team work, communication skills and the motivation for continuous learning have become critical. Thus, countries aiming at moving towards global competition are challenged to carry out reforms to promote the quality of education and training through changes in both content and pedagogy. Universities and colleges all over the world today are paying special attention to designing and implementing new quality assurance systems to achieve that aim.

Quality, quality assurance, and accreditation have become key issues for higher education internationally in the 1990s, reflecting the need for better education service. In many countries, stakeholders of higher education systems and institutions are concerned about quality and how to put in place appropriate quality assurance mechanisms and systems in order to ensure that students receive high quality education (Edwards, 2000; Harman& Meek, 2000; Albandary, 2005; ENQA, 2005). Quality in general means value, worth, or standard. When applied to higher education, quality can be identified with attributes of the framework that allude to a scope of components including the level of student achievement, the ability and qualification of staff, the standard of facilities and equipment, the effectiveness of teaching, planning and administrative processes, and the relevance of programs to the needs of students and the nation in an emerging global knowledge economy. Quality assurance can be defined as the processes of assessment, evaluation and follow-up action relating to quality of performance that serve

to ensure that the desired levels of quality in higher education are being maintained. Improvement and accountability are supposedly the main purposes for establishing quality assurance (QA) agencies (Al bandary, 2005).

In the same realm, technology is having a significant effect on colleges and universities, giving birth to new avenues for learning and thus producing one of the most challenging periods in the history of higher education. Educational institutions are experiencing change as a result of a changing society, new technologies, and the varied demands of students. Consequently, institutions are considering how they will have to make changes in their curriculum, instructional methods, and in the delivery of their courses (Dzakiria et al, 2006; Fountain, 2006). In other words, teacher training programs require continuous innovations to respond to changing needs.

One of the major components of teacher preparation programs is field experiences. Field experiences- sometimes called practicum or student teaching- is part and parcel of teacher education programs, not only in Egypt, but all over the world as well. No matter how different the system of higher education is in various countries, the title given to the student teaching program, or its duration and order in teacher preparation programs, there is a consensus that it is a must for the success of any teacher preparation program. As mentioned by Hixon & So (2009), transitioning from theory-based learning to classroom-based practice is a crucial process necessary to internalize the knowledge and skills needed by student teachers to become effective teachers.

By observing student teachers in actual classroom contexts in the teaching practice programs, the researcher noticed that they are not gradually introduced into the

classroom responsibilities; they are totally immersed in all aspects of teaching from their first day in the classroom. Student teachers are not encouraged to either search for and apply new techniques or reflect upon their teaching in real classroom setting to get the utmost benefit of student teaching.

The pilot study:

To explore the actual status of the teaching practice program, the researcher designed a questionnaire for a sample of 3rd year English major student teachers (n= 20) to reflect upon their own teaching practice experience. The questionnaire (Appendix 2) explores various dimensions that contribute to the success of the teaching practice program as a whole. Results of the questionnaire are presented in the following table:

Table (1) Frequencies and percentages of student teachers' responses on the teaching practice questionnaire

Statement No.	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	10	50	1	5	9	45
2	3	15	9	45	8	40
3	18	90	2	10	-	-
4	17	85	2	10	-	-
5	-	-	3	15	17	85
6	7	35	7	35	6	30
7	4	20	6	30	10	50
8	2	10	4	20	14	70
9	3	15	2	10	15	75
10	-	-	1	5	19	95
11	-	-	6	30	14	70

Table (1) clarifies that there are some positive aspects in the current teaching practice program, as reflected in the percentage of student teachers who agreed to them, such as consistency between theory and practice (50%), availability of discussing problems with the supervisor (90%), and constructive feedback provided by the supervisors (85%).

However, the table clarifies negative aspects of the teaching practice program, as reflected in the percentage of those who disagree to the corresponding statements. For example, missing explicit goals of the program (40%), pre-teaching conferencing (85%), self- and peer- evaluation (70% and 50% correspondingly), encouraging reflective teaching (75%), and integrating technology to enhance teaching practice (95%, 70%). Consequently, it becomes clear that the teaching practice program lacks clear-cut specific quality standards that qualify it for accreditation. Moreover, it suffers from discrepancy between student teachers' knowledge about teaching aspects and the teaching skills they are supposed to be trained on.

(A)Field experiences in teacher preparation programs:

Field experiences are a foundation in preservice teacher education programs today as they represent a variety of early and ongoing school-based opportunities. It is the period when student teachers are aided to put into practice the theories and principles of education which they have learnt at the faculty in a real context which is the classroom as they teach students in the partnership schools (Ogoner& Badmus, 2006; Bhargava, 2009).

Numerous benefits of field experiences in teacher preparation programs have been documented in the literature. They include providing an opportunity for students to develop knowledge and practice skills, providing authentic

opportunities for evaluating student work, documenting student progress, managing classroom discipline, and communicating with students, parents, and peers, helping preservice teachers start viewing themselves as teachers, and improving preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching. Field experiences are also typically offered in conjunction with a course as a way of helping students better understand the conceptual and theoretical knowledge being presented. Recently, much attention has also been paid to the role that field experiences may play in helping preservice teachers learn how to effectively integrate technology into their teaching (Sanchez, 2006; The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008; Bhargava, 2009; Gebhard, 2009; Hixon & So, 2009).

While field experiences are certainly a valuable component of teacher education programs, its quality may be affected by various factors. One of the main factors is the fact that prospective teachers may not be cognitively prepared to benefit from experiences in the field, especially when they occur early in their education program. In addition, the main focus of student teachers remains on finishing the task of preparing a specific number of lesson plans that matches the number of weeks of practice and maintaining proper written records rather than on developing deep understanding and skills needed for their professional development. Moreover, students are not taking an active role in developing, processing, and reflecting on their field experiences. Students often participate in field experiences with a very mechanical, "learn the skill" approach and are not thoughtful about the experience although reflective thinking has been emphasized in teacher education programs. Finally, the traditional teacher preparation programs instead of encouraging a reflective

analysis of the complex process of teaching and learning focus on the provision of the toolkits of instructional practice (Hussein, 2006; Sanchez, 2006; Hixon & So, 2009, Bhargava, 2009).

Stemming from the importance attached to the role played by field experiences in student learning, the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE) has set standards for field experience programs in higher education in general (Appendix 1). However, by reviewing the recent internal by-law of Mansoura FOE (2005) concerning the component of field experiences of student teachers, the researcher found that the regulation does not include any specification of goals or intended learning outcomes that student teachers should demonstrate by the end of the program, either by the end of the third or the fourth year. All what is mentioned there concerning field experience is the distribution of its marks between the school (the practical part) and the faculty (the oral part), and a very general aim that relates to student teachers' ability to apply theoretical knowledge gained from college into the classroom context. Even, there are no stated standards for that specific program.

For improving, adding attribute and attaching value to teaching, student teachers have to interpret the classroom situations through exploratory actions and reflect in action. Student teachers need to bring more new ideas rather than just a replication of their own teachers' teaching style. They need to discuss their concerns, theories and practice with their lecturers and supervisors, instead of narrowing their conceptions of teaching to the observation and imitation of workplace skills. That is why it is recommended by Coskun and Daloglu (2010) in a recent study for evaluating an English language teacher education program in Turkey that there

should be a course in the program to help student teachers to share ideas and get feedback about their School Experience course and reflect on their teaching practices so that they can establish the link between theory and the practice.

Teacher training should not appear as apprenticeship, where only student teachers imitate their lecturers/ supervisors; rather it should be flexible, challenging and reflective. Using reflection as a tool in refining and improving teaching techniques enables them to critically examine their own effectiveness in the classroom and to continually develop new strategies that will incorporate best practice. The ability to reflect is often regarded as an important attribute of effective teachers. Typical forms of reflection that are used during the student teaching practicum include portfolios, journals, lesson analysis forms, discussion groups, peer observation, mind mapping, role play, and giving feedback (Hall, 1997; Ferwana, 2006; Bhargava, 2009).

As reported by Rodman (2010) in a recent study that aimed to identify ways in which the teachers engage in reflection; determine their levels of reflective engagement; examine what they discover about teaching through reflection; and establish how this reflection affects their pedagogical ability; reflective engagement and self-correction have been shown to lead to increased understanding of skills and knowledge and thereby improved performance by pre-service teachers. Moreover, the discoveries and realizations generated by self-reflection have the potential to encourage continued development for pre-service teachers, and provide ways for college professors to promote continued, deepening and sophisticated levels of reflection.

(B) The importance of reflection in field experiences:

Reflection is an abstract construct with its existence being assumed on the basis of observed performance and expressed beliefs. The goal of reflective practice is not necessarily to address a specific problem, but to observe and refine practice in general in an ongoing process (Ferwana, 2006). In reflective practice, reflection is the essential part of the learning process because it results in making sense of or extracting meaning from the experience. As concluded by Richards (1997), reflection in teaching can help to achieve a better understanding of one's own assumptions about teaching as well as his/her own teaching practice, it can lead to a richer conceptualization of teaching and better understanding of teaching and learning processes. Moreover, reflection can serve as a basis for self-evaluation. Further, it can be an important component of professional development as it enables teachers to feel more confident in trying different options and assessing their effects on teaching.

The study of Ogonor and Badmus (2006) assures the benefits of reflection in teacher preparation. It examined the reform outcome of reflective teaching introduced by the Faculty of Education among the student teachers in a Nigerian University during the 2002\2003 teaching practice exercise. Four sets of open ended instruments were used to elicit information on student teachers' activities and support by teachers of partnership schools during the teaching practice, perception of student teachers' performance by Faculty and mentor teachers, as well as the challenges encountered by trainees during the exercise. The findings from this study indicated that student teachers were elated and had opportunity for professional growth as they practiced reflective teaching. Faculty's perception of trainees' activities during the practice period was that student teachers had more problems with the

application of pedagogy than knowledge of subject matter, while mentor teachers rated students' general performance as very high.

Observations from a case study conducted by Shoultz (2002) also showed that reflection allowed the student teachers to understand their failures and celebrate their successes in a constructive and critical way without the fear of judgment and also allowed them to express many levels of thinking and react in more thoughtful ways. The researcher recommended that as universities attempt to create reflective practitioners, they should consider the complexities of reflective practice and also provide direct instruction about the practical aspects of teaching with real students.

The three well-known levels of reflective practice are **technical reflection**, **practical reflection** and **critical reflection** (Hatton & Smith, 1995). The first level is concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of the means used to achieve certain ends. The focus of reflection at this level is on making effective utilization of available skills and technical knowledge to tackle a problem or a challenge. Practical reflection is a slightly more advanced reflective practice that involves the practitioner in the process of examining his/her practices and the values and assumptions upon which that have informed his/her practices. The practitioner's fundamental interest is 'understanding the environment through interaction based upon the consensual interpretation of meaning'. Critical reflection is the highest level of reflectivity. A critical-reflective practitioner is engaged in an autonomous action arising out of authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society and by doing so develops a better understanding of forces that constrain free thoughts and action and ways of acting up on them.

In a recent classification, Larrivee (2008) identified four levels of reflection as follows:

Level 1. Pre-reflection

At this level the teacher interprets classroom situations without thoughtful connection to other events or circumstances. Beliefs and positions about teaching practices are generalized and not supported with evidence from experience, theory, or research. The teacher's perspective is undifferentiated and general regarding the needs of learners.

Level 2. Surface reflection

At this level the teacher's examination of teaching methods is confined to tactical issues concerning how best to achieve predefined objectives and standards. Beliefs and positions about teaching practices are supported with evidence from experience, not theory or research. The teacher's view of learners is somewhat differentiated, acknowledging the need to accommodate learner differences.

Level 3. Pedagogical reflection

At this level the teacher is constantly thinking about how teaching practices are affecting students' learning and how to enhance learning experiences. The teacher's goal is continuously improving practice and reaching all students. Beliefs and positions about teaching are specific and supported by evidence from experience, as well as being grounded in theory or research. The teacher's view of teaching and learning is multidimensional, connecting events within a broader framework.

Level 4. Critical reflection

At this level the teacher is engaged in ongoing reflection and critical inquiry concerning teaching actions as well as thinking processes. The critically reflective teacher is

concerned with promoting democratic ideals and weighs the ethical and social implications of classroom practices.

Student teachers who are trained to move gradually from one level to another can end up exploring, analyzing systematically and understanding thoroughly the entire context in which they are located (Al-Issa, 2010).

(C) Blended learning as an option for fostering reflection into field experiences:

It is widely acknowledged that traditional classroom activities where face to face teaching is the dominant method, is an inappropriate delivery method within the context of outcomes-based education with its embedded learner-centered approach. The 21st century with its wealth of information technology opportunities poses a range of authentic alternative learning facilitation methods, i.e. experiential learning, practical learning and E-Learning technologies. These methods offer new ways for the delivery and dissemination of content material, provide for supplementary instruction and ensure a move away from a teacher- to a learner-centered approach (Kolbo & Turnage, 2002). However, though e-learning has proven to be largely successful, effective knowledge transfer can only be achieved if e-learning is blended with instructor-led training.

The term 'blended learning' has gained a considerable interest in recent years as a description of particular forms of teaching combined with technology. It is an instructional approach that combines the benefits of online and classroom instruction. It initially originated from efforts to improve distance learning environments as it was aimed at improving online learning environments where learners can be easily disoriented due to a lack of communication or direct guidance (Dzakiria et al, 2006; Oh& Park, 2009). Moreover, it has been

proven that while student success and high levels of student and instructor satisfaction can be produced consistently in the fully online environment, many faculty and students complain about the loss of face-to-face contact. Blended learning retains the face-to-face element, making it "the best of both worlds" (Bersin & Associates, 2003; Dziuban, Hartman& Moskal, 2004).

What blended or hybrid learning means:

In the world of instructional design today, blended learning usually refers to learning environments which combine the best features of traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with the best features of anytime, anywhere Web-based instruction (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002)

Blended learning should be viewed as a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment; a fundamental redesign of the instructional model with the following characteristics:

- A shift from lecture- to student-centered instruction in which students become active and interactive learners
- Increases in interaction between student-instructor, student-student, student-content, and student-outside resources; and
- Integrated formative and summative assessment mechanisms for students and instructor (Dziuban, Hartman& Moskal, 2004).

Further, blended courses should be characterized by focusing on learner-centered, engaging instruction using components such as discussion groups, chat rooms, and e-mail to facilitate increased interaction among students and with the instructor. Assessment consequently becomes creative and

authentic. For example, instructors develop rubrics for measuring learning through discussion content and incorporate active learning components (Dziuban, Hartman& Moskal, 2004; Fountain, 2006).

Options for blending are wide open to instructors, not just limited to the activities and applications that have been known or used previously (Oh& Park, 2009). However, in determining the appropriate mix of instructional methods for blended instruction, one should consider several traits of learning modes such as live events, self-paced learning, collaboration, assessment and learning support or reference materials that facilitate students' learning during the process of blended instruction (Carman, 2005).

For the purpose of determining the right mix for suitable purposes and situations, blended learning has been categorized into three models as follows: (Valiathan, 2002)

- skill-driven learning, which combines self-paced learning with instructor or facilitator support to develop specific knowledge and skills
- attitude-driven learning, which mixes various events and delivery media to develop specific behaviors
- Competency-driven learning, which blends performance support tools with knowledge management resources and mentoring to develop practical competencies.

As confirmed through many studies, blended learning proved to have effective implications in the field of teacher education and training. In a recent study conducted by Yilmaz& Orhan (2010), a blended learning environment is recommended for training of pre-service English language teachers with different learning approaches. The study aimed at investigating whether the academic performance and satisfaction levels of pre-service EL teachers varied in relation

to their learning approaches in a blended learning environment. Fifty three student teachers at department of foreign language education at Yildiz Technical University in Turkey participated in the study. As for their learning approaches, they were classified into deep and surface learners. The results of the study indicated that a) academic performance scores of the students in the BLE did not show statistically significant difference between deep and surface learners, b) the average satisfaction level with the BLE of deep learner students was statistically significantly higher than the average of surface learner students.

In a small- scale research conducted by Černá (2009), the effectiveness of blended learning in the context of pre-graduate English language teacher education is verified. The researcher examined the trainees' perspectives of the blended learning experience, using computer mediated conferences (CMC) as an on-line component of a blend. Results of the study revealed the trainees' perceptions of positive aspects of computer conferencing such as getting new information, sharing and interaction, interesting topics, and asynchronicity that means available accessibility at any time.

According to a study conducted by Comey (2009) that examined how students' perception of the classroom environment differs across traditional face-to-face, online, and blended courses, blended classes provided an atmosphere that was as good as or better than both face-to-face and online classes. The study compared feedback from students enrolled in courses taught in each format to determine if the blended learning environment produces higher levels of participation, a stronger sense of connection to the instructor, a more positive feeling about the cooperative nature of the classroom environment, a stronger perception that the course is

intellectually challenging, a better feeling that the instructor is supportive and student-centered, and a more positive sense that the evaluation criteria and course content have been clearly articulated. Study participants consisted of 368 students enrolled in courses taught at a community college. The analysis revealed significant differences on all six dependent variables. Overall, the results seem to suggest that by combining elements of both face-to-face and online courses, blended courses can create a positive learning environment while providing some of the convenience of an online course without eliminating the face-to-face contact that many students desire.

Wang (2009) conducted a study that aimed at examining a blended learning teacher education program and analyzing students' and faculty members' perceptions of online learning in teacher education. The methodology of case study with mixed methods data collection analysis was applied in this study. 167 recent graduates from the chosen teacher education program completed an online survey. Eight of the survey participants were interviewed. Six faculty members also participated in interviews. Findings from this study support the feasibility and benefits of applying blended learning in teacher education at the program level. The opportunities for students to take classes and complete their program online increase the convenience, flexibility, and access of teacher education programs. Consequently, through applying blended learning, a teacher education program may maintain or improve the quality of teaching preparation.

Recently, a study conducted by Hassan (2013) to investigate the effect of a proposed learning program on developing reflective teaching skills proved that BL can be a promising option for developing reflection and consequently

students' teaching performance with its cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. Reflective tools were designed to aid reflection of 4th year English major student teachers throughout the teaching practice period.

Based on the previously mentioned studies, it becomes clear that blended learning can affect teacher preparation, especially at the program level. One of the most prominent programs in the process of teacher preparation is the field experiences program where student teachers find the opportunity to practice and polish their teaching skills.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are provided on the way to upgrading the student teaching program at faculties of Education, with special reference to EFL program:

- More attention should be directed to the teaching practice or student teaching program; it should have its own program description with specific learning outcomes, resources, assessment techniques and procedures in a way that consolidates its special nature as a part and parcel component of teacher preparation programs.
- Reflective teaching should be pinpointed and focused upon during the teaching practice program as it is a major indicator of professionalism in teaching.
- Special attention should be given to the process of preparing reflective tools for the student teachers to practice reflective teaching skills. These instruments would be simultaneously a means for learning and assessment.
- Blended learning is a promising approach that can be made use of in the teaching practice to overcome many obstacles that encounter both student teachers and their

supervisors in the program such as time constraints and few communication chances.

- Blended learning can be implemented as a whole community for learners that allows synchronous and asynchronous communication among learners, thus they can discuss in advance their lesson plans and reach a consensus about problematic issues that they may find confusing.
- Reflective teaching can be facilitated through blended learning through adapting learning management systems (LMS) such as the Moodle or Blackboard to be complemented with reflective teaching tools such as blogs and wikis.
- Overcoming the shortage in the number of supervisory staff members can be overcome through implementing blended learning programs that would enable faculty staff members to concurrently supervise more than one group.

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APPENDIX (1)***A Guide to Accreditation for Higher Education Institutions
in Arab Republic of Egypt (July, 2008)*****The second domain: Educational Effectiveness**

Standard No. (4): ***Teaching, Learning and Physical Facilities***

Indicator No. (3): ***Field Experiences:***

There are seven exemplars that should be valid in the institution's field experiences program. These exemplars are as follows:

- 1- The institution designs effective field experience programs for students that depend on their real needs and include specific and clear techniques of implementation, supervision, and evaluation.
- 2- The institution cares about variation in locations of field experiences.
- 3- The institution cares about the contribution of social parties in field experience programs for students (providing practice opportunities, supervision, and contribution in evaluation).
- 4- The institution makes sure about the seriousness of supervision and follow-up of field experience programs.
- 5- The institution employs suitable models for carrying out the process of evaluating students during and after field experience. the evaluation process is done with the contribution of supervisors and locations of practice.
- 6- The institution investigates the effectiveness of field experience of students in achieving intended learning outcomes (surveying students' opinions, and analyzing results of evaluation)
- 7- The institution implements objective evaluation process for student field experiences (the person responsible for practice on site, location of practice, and students).

APPENDIX (2)

A Teaching Practice Evaluation Questionnaire

Dear student teacher,

This questionnaire aims at exploring your reflection on and opinion in the teaching practice program. Please put a tick (√) in front of each statement under the column that matches your opinion as follows:

A= Agree

NS= Not Sure

DA= Disagree

Thanks for your cooperation

The researcher

A Teaching Practice Evaluation Questionnaire

No.	Statement	A	NS	DA
1	There is consistency between what you learn at college and what you practice /apply at school			
2	There are explicitly stated goals for the teaching practice program.			
3	There are opportunities to discuss the problems you encounter while teaching with the supervisor			
4	Supervisors provide you with constructive feedback			
5	Supervisors conduct pre-lesson conferencing to discuss what you are going to teach in class			
6	Supervisors hold feedback session during the same day of observing your teaching			
7	Supervisors ask you to complete evaluation forms about your classmates' teaching			
8	Supervisors ask you to complete evaluation forms about your own teaching			
9	Supervisors ask you to keep notes, a diary, a journal, a portfolio about your teaching practice experience			
10	Supervisors involve you in online discussions with other trainees about various aspects/ issues in teaching practice			
11	Supervisors motivate you to use technology in preparing for your teaching practice (e.g. online lesson plans, activities, worksheets,...etc)			