

## Feedback on the Classroom Performance of Pre-service English language Teachers in Oman

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### Abstract

The research reported here is part of a larger, doctoral study that aims at examining the process of assessing the classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers in three higher education institutions in Oman. This article reports on an investigation into the social practices associated with assessing the classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers at Sultan Qaboos Univeristy (SQU), Rustaq College of Education and Nizwa University. Specifically, this study aims at answering one research question: How do stakeholders understand and experience feedback when assessing pre-service teacher classroom performance? The research adopted a phenomenological approach for examining a total of 10 participants' feedback experiences through semi-structured interviews and observations of the phenomenon in situ. The findings of this study revealed shared understandings about the purpose of feedback for improving pre-service teachers' classroom performance. However, it was revealed that variations in feedback processes affected its efficacy in enhancing pre-service teachers' classroom readiness. Pre-service teachers confirmed this finding and expressed their desire for greater agency and some consistency and uniformity in the type of feedback they receive during their school experience. The paper concludes by presenting recommendations that go to heighten the quality of the feedback process provided to pre-service English language teachers in Oman.

*Keywords:* classroom performance, feedback, pre-service English language teachers, Omani institutions

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## Introduction

A sociocultural perspective fits well with this study, as it examines learning in a social environment. The sociocultural perspective, a recent learning theory, arises from a resurgent interest in the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). It focuses on the social nature of learning and the idea that a learner's performance is developed through socially mediated participation in meaningful practical activity (James, 2006; Shepard, 2006). That is, it embraces the social and cultural influences that develop the learner's performance. Thus, this view of learning takes into account the learner's social interaction and social participation within the environment in order to form their identity as a learner. In relation to this study, the apparent simplicity of the term 'feedback' and its literal definition (to feed something back) belie a complex social construct which Sadler (2009) refers to as the sine qua non of effective pedagogy. Feedback can be broadly understood as "information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82), or as "information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal" (Wiggins, 2012; p. 25) whereas Black and Wiliam (2009) refer to feedback as information that moves the learner forward. Based on these definitions the feedback provided to pre-service teachers should consist of information that enables them to improve their capacity to teach so they can meet the professional standard expected of graduating teachers. Thus, feedback is one of the 10 principles and practices for Assessment for Learning (ARG, 2002a).

Moreover, feedback as a social practice is constituted as a dialogic interaction that enables a supervisory teacher to create a context in which pre-service teachers can actively participate with the assistance and support of the supervisory teacher (Mustafa, 2012). This assistance and support will be gradually reduced once pre-service teachers are self-independent. Thus, the application of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provides an opportunity that can support the pre-service teachers in order to reach their intended goal, and to be less dependent. In other words, feedback is said to be mediating as it promotes pre-service teachers to self-correct and be more self-reliant. Within the sociocultural perspective, feedback is also an important practice for mentors so as to enhance a pre-service teacher's pedagogical development. Hudson (2007) highlighted types of feedback required which are: observing teachings to provide feedback; providing oral feedback; reviewing lesson plans; providing formative assessment on teaching; providing written feedback; and articulating expectations. Similarly, Smith's (2010) study stressed that pre-service teachers generally wanted feedback on the overall quality of their lessons and practical suggestions to how to improve their performance. Further, Akkuzu (2014) has emphasized that feedback is a vital informative practice allowing pre-service teachers to view their teaching performance critically, and as a means of improving their own teaching performance and style of presentation. To conclude, this sociocultural perspective will give a lens on how feedback is constituted between pre-service teachers and their assessors namely university supervisors and cooperating teachers.

This study aims to investigate into this social practice associated with assessing the classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers at Sultan Qaboos Univeristy (SQU), Rustaq College of Education and Nizwa University. These institutions host English Language Teaching (ELT) program. Pre-service teachers are offered a teaching practice course where they experience their first-hand teaching. Those pre-service teachers are guided by feedback

provided by university supervisors and cooperating teachers who visit and observe the process of teaching in classrooms. As one of the authors used to be a supervisor at one of the institutions in Oman, she felt strongly that the assessment practices do not reflect what is quality teaching. Feedback, as an integral component of assessment, was sometimes postponed or never provided. Most importantly, there was no clear picture of how both supervisors and cooperating teachers understand and experience feedback for assessing pre-service teachers' classroom performance. For this reason, the study was conducted.

The study is significant in terms of its aim. In relation to what the study aims to achieve, there is limited extant research that undertakes a cross-national research on how feedback is understood and practised among all stakeholders involved in the assessment practices of pre-service English language teachers. A great number of studies focus on one institution; for instance Al-Mahrooqi (2011) examined SQU pre-service teachers' views about teaching practice component, classroom observation and supervisors' feedback. Similarly, Al-Issa (2008) conducted a study related to the implications of the SQU school professional experience to the ELT policy implementation in Oman. Also, Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2010) conducted a study describing the SQU supervisor's roles, approaches and strategies used to help the pre-service teachers to become reflective teachers.

### Literature Review

Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Sadler (2002) recommend feedback strategies, both effective and cognitive, that focus on closing the gaps in student's performance and building a trusting relationship between givers and receivers. Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that feedback reduces the difference between knowledge understanding, and present learning results and expected outcomes. They summarize three main components in feedback as questions: Where am I going or what are the goals of learning? What I am supposed to do to achieve the goals of learning? Where do I go next or what activities need undertaking to make better progress? These three questions match three types of feedback: feed-up, feed-back and feed-forward. Carless, Joughin and Liu (2006) emphasize that feedback includes forward-looking perspectives to maximise students' opportunities to progress in learning.

A number of researchers have highlighted the technical structure of quality of feedback (e.g. Brookhart, 2013; Falchikov, 1995; Carless, 2009; Richards, Bell & Dwyer, 2017). For example, one of the technical structures is that feedback should be timely, accurate, comprehensive, appropriate and accessible to students' work. Wiggins (2012) asserts that features such as goal-referenced, tangible and transparent, actionable, user-friendly, timely, ongoing, and consistent and progressive towards a goal make feedback effective. Another technical but important structure is the language of feedback. Falchikov (1995) highlights that the discourse of feedback should carefully avoid negative emotional effects. In their meta-analysis, Richards, Bell and Dwyer (2017) summarize the features of quality feedback as:

- Feedback must focus on content rather than grammar, and minor issues such as referencing, structure as the latter produce a negative emotional response in students;
- Feedback must be timely in order for it to be useful

- Feedback must be about the task rather than students
- Feedback must be consistent, tailored, and explain not only what students have done poorly but what they have done well - and why
- Feedback must not be generic such as ‘good work’ as that do not explain the reason for student’s achievement.

In relation to pre-service teacher’s classroom performance, feedback is a valuable component throughout school-based professional experience. A number of researchers have emphasized the value of providing appropriate feedback when assessing pre-service teacher classroom performance. For example, White (2007) found that supported and effective guidance on feedback for pre-service teachers had been given. However, his research indicates that spoken or written feedback which is specific and containing information relevant to the behavior of the pre-service teacher can make a difference. In the English language context, Ali and Al-Adawi (2013) agree with White (2007) and found that pre-service English language teachers in Oman believe that both types of feedback are important to them yet they prefer written feedback more than spoken as “they can refer to it in the future and they can reflect on it” (p. 29). A number of studies (such as Hudson, 2007; Smith, 2010; Tillema, Smith & Leshem, 2011) have focused on the value and quality of feedback for pre-service teachers. Tillema et al. (2011) found that in a comparative study between Israel, Norway and Netherlands that pre-service teachers perceived good mentoring as being given feedback and guidance. White (2007) proposed that collaborative supervision is deemed more helpful in changing the pre-service teacher’s behaviors when the feedback is focused and specific.

Feedback can have a positive and negative impact on pre-service teachers’ classroom performances. Thomas and Sondergeld (2015) show that feedback must be timely or it loses its effectiveness. Without timely feedback, pre-service teachers might not be able to recall the teaching processes that need to be improved, thus delaying advancements in the thinking and learning processes. Immediate feedback, on the other hand, allows pre-service teachers to correct mistakes before further ingraining them into their teaching practices as well as it allows them to build upon and apply positive strides when strengths are exemplified in the feedback. Furthermore, positive or negative impact on pre-service teachers’ motivation are related to the feedback given. Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that feedback should be robust and used judiciously in order to keep feedback motivating. Also, to make feedback constructive, it should be personal and individualized, thus it needs to be tailored to pre-service teachers’ individual strengths and weakness. Moreover, feedback should not be only detailed enough that pre-service teachers understand their strengths and weakness; it should also be manageable, specific and directly related to assessment criteria.

To empower the impact of feedback on pre-service teachers, university supervisor and cooperating teachers need to liaise. A number of international studies emphasize that the two experts ought to work closely together and collaboratively to assist pre-service teachers become skilled and knowledgeable teachers. In a review of 113 empirical studies conducted by Cohen, Hoz and Kaplan (2013), they found that in Asian and Australian teacher education programs cooperating teachers engage in mentoring the pre-service teachers and assessing their classroom performance according to university guidelines. The university supervisors collaborate with the

cooperating teachers through collecting feedback about the pre-service teacher's performance and provide professional learning for pre-service teachers. Cohen et al. (2013) also found that in the UK, the cooperating teachers had more collaboration with university supervisors through their taking part in the implementation, design and assessment of the pre-service teachers including providing feedback. Smith (2007) proposed a model that enabled all stakeholders including pre-service teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers to collaborate in developing the assessment in Norway. The model focused on aspects of collaboration between the stakeholders: basic knowledge of assessment, defining what to assess, deciding on tools, developing criteria/rubrics, delegating of responsibility, and having moderation and discussion of how to reach agreement when final assessment is undertaken.

Thus, based on the powerful impact of feedback on pre-service teacher's performance, this study investigates the stakeholders' understanding and experiences of feedback pertained to assessing the classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers in Oman.

## Method

### *Interpretive Phenomenology*

Interpretive phenomenology, has been employed for understanding feedback on classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers. It is chosen as a suitable approach for this research because it allows the study to understand human experience by using discursive language underpinning both hermeneutics and phenomenology. Fundamental to the aim of this study are qualitative interpretations and analyses of all stakeholders involved in providing and receiving feedback on classroom performance. Hermeneutic phenomenology provides the research with the best opportunity to 'give voice' to all the stakeholders, including cooperating teachers, university supervisors and pre-service teachers as "ironically, pre-service teachers' voices are rarely used to ascertain whether their teacher education program achieves its goals" (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006, p.1020). Also, Heidegger (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) highlighted that an observer/researcher could not remove him/herself from the process of essence-identification because he/she exists within the phenomena and the essence.

### *Participants and Instruments*

The research participants were three pre-service teachers, four university supervisors and three cooperating teachers. Purposive sampling has been utilized by selecting only those participants who satisfy the criterion of being stakeholders with specific roles in each school and institution and who are currently involved in the school-based assessment practices. This is consistent with Patton's (2002) phenomenological approach that selected participants "make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness both individually and as a shared meaning" (p.104). Therefore, in this study, the participants were chosen for a specific purpose (i.e. I wanted to include a minimum of three different stakeholders from each school and elicit their experiences and observe the participants who had empirical experience of feedback). Thus, the chosen participants were all stakeholders, namely pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors, who are directly involved, and lived the experience of assessment practices during their professional experience. Table 1 shows the stakeholders in each institution.

Table 1. *The distributions of the participants involved across the three participating schools*

Participants/institutions	SQU	Nizwa university	Rustaq-CAS	Three participating Schools	Total
Pre-service teachers	1	1	1		3
university supervisors	1	1	2 (Rustaq has two university supervisors for each pre-service teacher)		4
Cooperating teachers				3	3
Total					10

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Ethics Committee approved the study before data collection began. There are two sets of data in this study namely interviews and observations. The first set of data was collected by interviewing these key stakeholders who were involved in the assessment practices. Interviewing is important in interpretive phenomenology because it allows the experiences of the participants involved in the phenomenon to be revealed. The key stakeholders were interviewed individually to capture the lived experience of participants regarding the phenomenon of assessment practices. Each interview was recorded and immediately transcribed. Then, the interviews were transcribed and analysed using the guidelines of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provided by Smith et al. (2009).

The second set of data was collected by observing the phenomenon in situ, that means, the assessment process was observed. Also, the feedback sessions that occurred during post-assessment events between the stakeholders was recorded. The aim of this process was to examine the feedback practices among all stakeholders across the three participating schools. With regard to recorded sessions, the language was analyzed using various devices recommended by Fairclough (2001) regarding the turn-taking system, such as controlling topic, enforcing explicitness and interruption to analyse the dialogues (feedback sessions) between pre-service teachers and their assessors as this allowed me to understand the assessment relationship between the stakeholders.

The following section presents the findings of the study. The first part of the section demonstrates the stakeholders' understanding of feedback through the value of cognitive and effective strategies, timely feedback; emotional impact of feedback and having voice. Then, the section part shows the stakeholders' practices of feedback in particular the different practices of feedback between university supervisors and cooperating teachers.

### **Findings**

#### ***Stakeholders' Understanding of Feedback***

##### *Value of Cognitive and Effective Strategies*

The university supervisors and cooperating teachers interviewed recognized the value of cognitive and affective strategies when providing feedback to pre-service teachers. With regard to

the cognitive strategies, they understood the importance of the pre-service teachers' involvement with the feedback. In the case of the university supervisors, the university supervisor at SQU emphasized that she always encouraged her pre-service teachers to be 'critical' and to 'self-assess' themselves. She indicated that she employed an 'open-dialogue' strategy with her pre-service teachers to self-assess by maintaining:

*I always give them the space to talk about themselves and why they perform in a certain way so that they can self-assess themselves. For example, what are your good points and weak points. Why did they do this task? How can you explain this task to me? We might agree or disagree... (# the university supervisor at SQU)*

Similarly, the university supervisor at Nizwa identified his 'questioning strategy' to engage the pre-service teachers in their own self-assessment, by saying:

*I asked her questions like what can you say about your lesson, what are the good things that you did? And, if you are given the same chance to teach, would you follow the same procedures. In this way, she can see by herself the shortcomings of her lessons. (#the university supervisor at Nizwa)*

The same questioning strategy was applied by university supervisors at Rustaq-CAS to engage the pre-service teacher to evaluate her performance. Their justifications for applying the 'questioning strategy' were to engage the pre-service teachers in discussion to elicit their reasons for their performance. This is illustrated by the following excerpt,

*Maybe I have written some notes and I understand the things from a different point of view but by asking the pre-service teacher what they thought about their lessons, the pre-service teachers have a logical justification or a different point of view about her teaching tasks. (#the first university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS)*

*Some teaching practices I may see as negative but when I ask and discuss them with the pre-service teachers I will be clearer as I will be able to see the pre-service teacher's reasons, and her rationale, for that practice. (#the second university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS)*

The same scenario was implemented by cooperating teachers at Nizwa and SQU. Whereas the cooperating teacher of Rustaq-CAS did not mention the value of cognitive strategy, the cooperating teacher at SQU saw the significance of involving the pre-service teacher in the feedback practice. She indicated that she asked the pre-service teacher to reflect after each lesson so that she could avoid making the same mistakes in the following lesson. Similarly, the cooperating teacher at Nizwa, who together with the university supervisor provided feedback, indicated how significant the engagement and involvement of the pre-service teacher was in the feedback practice so that she could 'think deeply' about her lesson and come up with 'alternatives' to the difficulties she faced in her lesson. She clarified her understanding in the following excerpt:

*I involve the pre-service teacher to try to find an alternative to the difficulties she faced in the lessons and I gave her an opportunity to think deeply about her lesson... by this she will try to discover and recall what she had done during the lesson, what difficulties she had and think of some alternatives. If she fails to tell me how to deal with it, I will try to*

*help her by asking some questions which will eventually lead her to find a way to overcome that difficulty. (#the cooperating teacher at Nizwa Univeristy)*

Not only did they recognize the value of cognitive strategies, but also the value of the use of effective strategies when providing feedback. For example, the university supervisors at Nizwa and SQU mentioned that they started the feedback with positive points about the observed lessons. Their justifications for beginning with positive points was to ‘encourage’, ‘build confidence’ and ‘prepare’ the pre-service teachers to listen more to the negative points, and action points, required to improve their lessons.

However, the first university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS indicated that she did not initially start with positive points in the feedback, but rather with the negative points. She articulated the negative effect of this experience on her pre-service teachers, and her need to change her feedback strategy, saying,

*I realized from this experience that the pre-service teachers get demotivated by my first negative comments. They like me to give them first, positive reinforcement of what they have done well and I did not pay a lot of attention to this point so I tried towards the end of my last visit to start the feedback with good comments of what they have done in the lesson to encourage them, and then gave them negative points in an indirect, or nice way, to tell them how to improve. That is, I tried to use positive language with them when I give them feedback and I thought it went well after I changed the way of giving feedback. (#the first university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS)*

The need for effective strategies when providing feedback was confirmed by the cooperating teachers at Nizwa and SQU. For example, the cooperating teacher at Nizwa indicated that she always started with positive points to ‘encourage’ and the action points to ‘help’ the pre-service teachers in her subsequent lessons. The cooperating teacher at SQU confirmed that “I can’t tell the pre-service teacher you are not good in a bad way, and immediately, because she might hate teaching”. For her, delivering ineffective strategies when providing feedback can have a detrimental effect, possibly causing the pre-service teacher’s ‘hating’ her future career as ‘a teacher’ and demotivating the pre-service teacher’s willingness to make subsequent improvements.

#### *Timely Feedback*

The university supervisors and the cooperating teachers indicated that the feedback should be given aptly. However, the university supervisors at Rustaq-CAS institution mentioned the difficulty of always providing timely feedback, explaining that due to the ‘amount of observations’ this sometimes hindered timely feedback. The first university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS said,

*I have to observe four pre-service teachers every time I come to school and I don’t have time for feedback or I am rushed during feedback. (# the first university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS)*

Above-quotation shows that the first university supervisor either did not have time for feedback or she was rushed with feedback while the second university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS mentioned that she attempted to provide feedback within 24-48 hours after observing the classroom



performance of the pre-service teacher. However, the second university supervisor found a delay of feedback to be ineffective and added that *“it was very difficult as both the pre-service teachers, and myself, have forgotten so many things of the observation”*. (**# the second university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS**)

#### *Emotional Impact of Feedback*

Not only university supervisors and cooperating teachers demonstrated their understandings of feedback, but also pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers clearly recognized the importance of the feedback for them and across the three institutions two key features were listed that strongly affected them when receiving feedback. These included: ‘the emotional impact of feedback’; and ‘having a voice’. Each feature of these as recounted by the pre-service teachers is explored in the following paragraphs.

With regard to the emotional impact of feedback, pre-service teachers at SQU and Nizwa University indicated that university supervisors and cooperating teachers provided them with positive feedback. The pre-service teacher at Nizwa described the receiving feedback as ‘*helpful*’ and ‘*improving*’. She found it encouraging and clarified this by saying *“my assessors did not say something that won’t help me, rather they picked the real things”* that she did not do in the class which students needed to practice in their classes. In a similar vein, the pre-service teacher at SQU noted that feedback *“says something about my performance”* which accordingly increased her confidence to develop and improve her performance.

The pre-service teacher at Rustaq-CAS believed that receiving feedback allowed her to *“not to make the same mistakes again in order to improve myself in the next lesson”* although initially she had not been provided with positive feedback. She shared her experience of the emotional aspect of listening first to the positive points:

*I will be happier if I could listen first to my positive points to encourage and motivate me and then the negative points should be for a positive outcome. I like more the positive points as they really encourage me, for example the cooperating teacher said from the beginning ‘the game for searching for envelope’ was very good. I feel better when I listen to my positive points first as they motivate and encourage me for the next lesson, it gives me more chances to improve myself. (# the pre-service teacher at Rustaq-CAS)*

As the above quotation indicates, the pre-service teacher at Rustaq-CAS felt happy about receiving positive feedback frequently from her cooperating teacher and that listening frequently to the positive points of lessons from both the university supervisors and the cooperating teacher were encouraging and motivated her to continually improve. It is more effective than listening to negative feedback, because it increased self-confidence in being able to pursue and achieve performance.

#### *Having Voice*

With regard to having a voice, both the pre-service teachers at SQU and Rustaq-CAS, found that having a chance to discuss and clarify any lack of understanding about classroom practice, or if their assessors did not understand the motives for a certain practice or skill, there

was a chance to explain and clarify their teaching practices. Having a voice and being listened to was found so salutary.

However, the pre-service teacher at Nizwa University voiced her concern that her university supervisor sometimes did not listen to her when she defended her performance of certain practices. She provided two examples of when she noticed that her university supervisor did not listen to her. The first example related to applying technology in her classroom. She had brought a video to the topic she was teaching in the class, but the video took a long time to open and be shown. Her university supervisor viewed this as a shortfall in preparation but she was trying to argue that the school system, unlike the university system, does not allow preparing the video before the lesson starts because the classroom is occupied by another teacher beforehand. It is only after the class starts that she can set up the video yet the university supervisor insisted on his argument.

Another example related to the way her students were used to answering her questions by raising their hand and saying ‘teacher’ or ‘Miss’ as an indication of their willingness to answer. However, her university supervisor did not like this behavior and considered it a deficit in classroom management even though it was school policy and that the students did this yet he insisted that it was a problem in classroom management. It implies that the pre-service teacher at Nizwa University is not experiencing a healthy dialogue with her university supervisors which will enable her to learn how to discuss in a professional manner.

#### *Stakeholders’ Practices of Feedback*

One of the discourse practices found among the university supervisors across the three institutions involved controlling the dialogue through specifying the nature and purpose of the dialogue. For instance, statements like “let me start and tell you my thoughts and remarks then yours” (# **second university supervisor at Rustaq-CAS**) and “I have not seen enough lessons so my judgement is not a harsh one at the moment, I give comments and then I wait to see how you improve from one time to the other in your skills” (# **the university supervisor at SQU**). These statements indicate that the university supervisors are emphatic and didactic. Also, this discursive practice shows that the university supervisors were aiming to judge the pre-service teachers’ performance not aiming for understanding or allowing enough room for the pre-service teachers to have a say about their lessons.

This discourse practice was not found among the cooperating teachers across the three participating schools. Rather, they started their dialogues with statements like, ‘Thank you for your lesson, can you tell me about it or reflect on it?’ (# **the cooperating teacher of Rustaq-CAS**), ‘Miss ....., what do you think of your lesson, how can you reflect on your lesson?’ (# **the cooperating teacher of SQU**) and ‘First of all we would like to thank you for hosting us here in your lesson, can you please write three things that you like about your lesson and maybe one thing you are not satisfied about it?’ (# **the cooperating teacher of Nizwa**). These statements indicate that the cooperating teachers were not emphatic and aimed at understanding and negotiating with the pre-service teachers.

Another discourse practice found from the turn-talking of the university supervisors' dialogues was no interruption or little comments from the pre-service teachers. The cooperating teachers' dialogues, on the other hand, seem to sustain critical and collaborative reflection with the pre-service teachers. The following excerpts are two different examples of the university supervisor's dialogue and the cooperating teacher's dialogue at Nizwa institution. The two different excerpts show that the university supervisor's dialogue tended to be in the form of lecturing-genre whereas the cooperating teacher's dialogue was a dialogic-one. More explanations are in the excerpts in Table 2.

Table 2. *A dialogic-genre and the positive evaluation between the Nizwa cooperating teacher and the pre-service teacher*

Excerpt of the cooperating teacher's dialogue	Excerpt of the University supervisor's dialogue
<p>Nizwa Cooperative teacher: ..so what are the things you like about the lesson, can you tell us [cooperating teacher and university supervisor] the good things and the things that need to be modified.</p> <p>Pre-service teacher: maybe I wasted time trying to make the students write the introduction on the board and the aims was to let students have an ideas about the complaint letter because I want them to write the rest of the letter. The rest was probably good because I finished the complete tasks in one lesson and the students seem that they understand what the complaint letter means and what it contains and when do we write it and how to write it.</p> <p>Nizwa Cooperative teacher: so what was the most important thing you like about your lesson?</p> <p>Pre-service teacher: students understand what the complaint letter is.</p> <p>Nizwa Cooperative teacher: you felt the students understood the complaint letter↑.</p> <p>Pre-service teacher: yeh</p>	<p>University supervisor: The thing that I don't like in your lesson is asking students to come and write on the board and ask you to correct their work but they didn't , for example they wrote wrong sentences and you didn't correct it. So if you ask students to write be careful they may write wrong sentences and if you don't correct them students will think this is correct and here waste of time. Students might write wrong sentences so I don't think. So, if you think it is necessary to distribute the work ok let it but let it in flash cards but the most important thing in writing is to let students write in draft and I think when I write something, I write a draft and then I ask others to proofread it because writing without proofreading you can't reach to a good writing because here you train and teach students to proofread to each other and tell them don't be afraid of making mistakes, let them write and swap their work and check each other and your role to check with them and finally to write a final draft. so it is difficult you lead your students to learn but to teach them writing it will be difficult so if you ask students to write the rest of paragraphs, they will go and just copy or just make changes....</p>

<p>Nizwa Cooperative teacher: and also the procedures of writing the letter↑ right?.</p>	<p>Pre-service teacher: ok, so I am not supposed to make them write a letter.</p>
<p>Pre-service teacher: yes because they analysed the letter that they have in the book in a good way, for example what it contains, introducing the problem first, what the product, describing the product, describe the problem and the rest.</p>	
<p>Nizwa Cooperating teacher: right. you tried your best to make students understand.. try to achieve the aims during your lesson, you activated the group work twice and you time your students while working in group and you got the students to read every element you know I think you try your best to make them understand every point in the lesson....</p>	

The university supervisor at Nizwa University seemed to take control of the dialogue while the response of the pre-service teacher was more of passive in nature. The only statement after a long monologue pronounced by the pre-service teacher was, ‘ok, so I am not supposed to make them [students] write a letter (**#the pre-service teacher at Nizwa**). However, the cooperating teacher’s dialogue at Nizwa University tended to enforce explicitness from the pre-service teacher in order to allow her to clarify and defend her performance. Unsurprisingly, the cooperating teachers’ dialogues, unlike the university supervisors’ dialogue, had a tendency to sustain collaborative and critical reflection with the pre-service teacher until the end of the dialogue. They tended to enforce explicitness so that the pre-service teachers had a voice to say during the feedback dialogue.

Moreover, the cooperating teachers’ conclusions of the dialogue across the three participating schools were always stated like for example ‘summarize what you have said’, ‘what are the things you would like to improve’... (**# the cooperating teacher of Nizwa**) or ‘what are the action points that you need to think of’ or ‘how can you overcome these discussed points?’ (**# the cooperating teacher of SQU**). This shows that the cooperating teachers aim to help improve the pre-service teachers’ performance in future lessons, and assisted them to avoiding making the same mistakes.

Another major discourse practice was found in regard to the gist and essence of the feedback between the university supervisors and the cooperating teachers. Hattie and Timperley (2007) distinguished four levels of feedback: feedback about the task; feedback about the processing of the task; feedback about self-regulation and feedback about the self as a person. In

this context, there seems to be a different focus between the university supervisors and the cooperating teachers.

The analysis shows that the university supervisors across the three institutions focused on feedback related to how well a teaching task is performed. The cooperating teachers went beyond the tasks and focused on the processing of the teaching tasks. In other words, their focus was on providing techniques that would help the pre-service teacher to improve their teaching methods as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *The different gist of discursive practices of feedback between the university supervisors and the cooperating teachers*

Gist of university supervisors' feedback focusing on		Gist of cooperating teachers' feedback focusing on	
praising pre-service teacher' task performed	<p>Such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'your introduction is good', 'good interaction with students', 'confident in taking role of being a guide', 'your knowledge of the unit plan is good', 'remembering students names is very good' (# the university supervisor of SQU)</li> <li>• ' you did a very good job', 'you have a good rapport with students', 'you have a good English' (# university supervisor of Nizwa)</li> <li>• 'you made very organized set up of the materials on the board', 'you committed some languages lapses', 'I like your flash card', 'I like your balance between kindness and fairness', 'you made very good explanation of the first activity' (# university supervisor of Rustaq)</li> </ul>	Techniques of helping the pre-service teachers better teach	<p>Such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'it was better I think to write the remarks on the board to make the task easy for the students', 'It would be better to choose one student from each group to search for the envelope' (# the cooperating teacher of Rustaq)</li> <li>• 'it is good you make students to read but also give them the chance to think, explain by themselves. They need to work a little bit independently', ' it is better to relate the lesson to student life like asking them questions such how much do you spend on such things' (# cooperating teacher of Nizwa)</li> <li>• 'you are right and even you can choose a letter for the whole group and then use the</li> </ul>

			expression', 'it will be better if you can elicit from the students before you give them the information' (# cooperating teacher of SQU)
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The university supervisors' feedback directed at praising a teaching task, such as 'good interaction with students; 'good rapport with students; and 'made very good explanation of first activity'. In addition to that, feedback was holistic; not focusing on particular tasks. On the other hand, the cooperating teachers' feedback aimed to provide techniques about how to teach better, such as 'it was better I think to...'. 'It is better to relate the lesson to..., and 'it will be better if you can elicit...'

**Discussion**

In this section, the findings are discussed in relation to the main research question: How do stakeholders understand and experience feedback when assessing pre-service teacher classroom performance across the three institutions in Oman? And then how feedback in Oman is positioned in relation to literature. With regard to the previous point, SQU implements an effective feedback provided to the pre-service teachers about their classroom performance by the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher. They each gave feedback that the pre-service teacher could use to improve her performance. The cooperating teacher and the university supervisor provided feedback that was timely and user-friendly in terms of its cognitive and effective strategies. Further, based on the observation, each person had a different focus and approach for feedback. Whereas the university supervisor focused on praising the pedagogy, the cooperating teacher focused upon providing techniques to help improve the pre-service teacher's teaching. Additionally, cooperating teacher's feedback tended to be less emphatic and having a dialogic-manner. The feedback provided by the cooperating teachers allows pre-service teachers a chance to discuss and negotiate which could ultimately enhance their classroom performance. However, as the data shows of Rustaq-CAS, feedback from the cooperating teacher and the university supervisors seems ineffective in terms of its timing and the quality of feedback in relation to effective strategies. Similar to SQU, both the cooperating teacher and university supervisor had different focus and approach to the implementation of feedback.

Feedback is provided by both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher at Nizwa University. As mentioned, the data presented shows that the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher collaborated to provide feedback to the pre-service teacher together. Also, similar to SQU and Rustaq-CAS, the feedback had a different focus and approach. Whereas the cooperating teacher's feedback focused on techniques to improve the pre-service teacher's performance and was more dialogic in manner, feedback provided by the university supervisor focused on praising the pre-service teacher for task performed and tended to be monologic, emphatic with no interruptions. Furthermore, the pre-service teacher seemed dismayed that her voice was not heard by the university supervisor. This means that pre-service teachers at Nizwa

would not have constructive dialogue with their university supervisor, in contrast with the cooperating teacher, to provide them with the skills in how to engage in professional discourse.

The provision of feedback is found among all the three higher education institutions, however, this current practice shows that effective feedback is more highly regarded by cooperating teachers than university supervisors in the Omani context. This is due to several factors and resonates with a number of international studies in the literature. First, the learning to teach happens in a school context where the cooperating teachers work, and are familiar with the curriculum. The cooperating teachers provide more help and support to the pre-service teachers to improve during the process of assessment, including feedback. Similarly, the international studies (e.g. Hudson, 2007; Hudson & Millwater, 2008; Moody, 2009; Nguyen, 2009; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012) have shown the powerful position of the mentor (cooperating teacher) in providing constructive feedback.

Second, university supervisors come to school for a visit three to four times a semester, which is not sufficient to provide quality feedback about the pre-service teacher's performance. Finally, yet importantly, university supervisors have a larger number of pre-service teachers to observe and assess per visit, compared to cooperating teachers. This role is similar to the role of supervisors in international countries like Singapore where supervisors are seen as assessors and evaluators of the pre-service teachers' performance, rather than coaches and mentors who enculturate the pre-service teachers into the profession (Kaphesi, 2013). This argues the case for clearly defining the responsibilities of cooperating teachers and university supervisors. It is highly important that cooperating teachers are empowered to be the main support and source of feedback, while the university supervisors should focus on providing liaison between the institution and school and to collect the feedback about the pre-service teachers' classroom performance from the cooperating teachers.

Further, feedback is employed throughout Oman's three higher education institutions. In their meta-analysis, Richards et al. (2017) summarize the features of quality feedback. Of relevance to this study are:

- Feedback must be timely in order for it to be useful;
- Feedback must be about the task rather than students;
- Feedback must be consistent, tailored, and explain not only what students have done poorly, but also what they have done well and why; and
- Feedback must not be generic such as 'good work' as that does not explain the reason for the student's achievement

The results in this study show that not all of the features of quality feedback exist in the Omani context and, in particular, the feedback provided by university supervisors. Along with these features of quality of feedback, this study added to Richards et al. (2017) study and showed two significant features of quality feedback namely the emotional impact of feedback and giving a voice to pre-service teachers. An example of the emotional impact of feedback is provided by the first university supervisor of Rustaq-CAS who perceived negative feedback as deleterious impact on her pre-service teachers. Similarly, the pre-service teacher at Rustaq-CAS highlighted the need

for constructive feedback that aims for support and encouragement. Meanwhile, the results show that the pre-service teacher of Nizwa University, unlike the pre-service teachers of the other institutions, experienced being unheard by her university supervisors. This implies that the pre-service teacher's dialogue with her university supervisor is not productive; that is, the feedback is not effective. This means that the university supervisors' understanding and practices of feedback is not of quality in comparison to cooperating teachers' feedback.

### Conclusion

The study aims to find out how stakeholders involved in the phenomenon of assessing classroom performance of pre-service teachers understand and experience feedback. The findings show that feedback is a vital assessment practice that is provided by university supervisors and cooperating teachers to the pre-service teachers across the three institutions in Oman. Though the stakeholders seem to have a mutual understanding of feedback regarding pre-service teachers' classroom performance, the quality of the cooperating teachers' feedback outperformed the quality of the university supervisors' feedback. The discourse practices of the cooperating teachers' feedback were less emphatic, dialogic and tended to sustain collaboration and critical reflection with pre-service teachers whereas the university supervisors' feedback were more emphatic and didactic. This cooperating teacher's quality of feedback helps the pre-service teachers to monitor their learning and improve their teaching. In addition, the findings show that pre-service teachers experienced a need for positive and constructive feedback; and for having a voice from their university supervisors whereas they did not experience these needs from their cooperating teachers.

Thus, it is important for future recommendations to note the findings from the analysis of the feedback practices to improve the assessment system in school-based practicum. Given that the most prominent themes were associated with variations in feedback processes between university supervisors and cooperating teachers, it can be reasonably concluded that the analysis has indicated a need for a consistent and uniform feedback between the stakeholders. It was further identified that this variation has negatively affected pre-service teacher's agency and identity as teachers to be. It was noted that the feedback given and received at SQU institution can be classified as good feedback practice aligned with international best practices and thus the other institutions in Oman can benefit from such a good experience to heighten the quality of the feedback process provided to pre-service English language teachers.

It is envisaged that findings from this research will provide a map for cooperation and collaboration between the three institutions in Oman to have a first and robust assessment system regarding school-based practicum. Importantly, data analysis and subsequent finding can be applied to identify and tailor the process of given and receiving quality feedback. In so doing, it would be possible to substantially improve the assessment system. Such research process has also identified which feedback practices would be deemed more effective to undertake and would facilitate a greater agency in pre-service teachers and ultimately allow for a fairer and strong assessment system. Given the increasing importance being placed on this field of investigation, it is becoming more difficult to ignore the limitations of this study. Firstly, due to the nature of the study, this article is part of PhD study which encompasses other elements related to assessing classroom performance of pre-service English language teachers in Oman. Thus, this study might



need to include a larger number of participants to have a fuller understanding of feedback across Oman. To draw firm conclusions about feedback of pre-service teachers' classroom performance in Oman, it will be of merit for future research to investigate how feedback is understood and practised globally. However, this research has raised the concern for educators and policy makers to rethink about training and providing job descriptions to stakeholders who are responsible of feedback delivery and has emphasized on searching for fine-grounded solutions accordingly.

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