

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301363789>

Quality Assurance in Palestine's Teacher Education Programs: Lessons for Faculty and Program Leadership

Article · March 2016

CITATION

1

READS

21

1 author:



Refa Ramahi

Birzeit University

8 PUBLICATIONS 1 CITATION

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



The relationship between Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) for mathematics and science teachers and their students' achievement. [View project](#)



The Efficacy of Science and Mathematics Teacher Professional Development Model Based on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) [View project](#)

Quality Assurance in Palestine's Teacher Education Programs: Lessons for Faculty and Program Leadership

Abdallah Bsharat, Refa' Rmahi*

Curriculum and Instruction Department, Birzeit University, Ramallah, West Bank

*Corresponding author: absharat@birzeit.edu; ralramahi@birzeit.edu

Abstract This study aims at assessing dimensions of quality in pre-service teacher education programs in Palestine from the perspective of a purposeful sample of teacher educators and student-teachers at three universities. To achieve this goal, in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted. Results suggest that intended learning outcomes of the curriculum, the teaching and learning processes and practices, and the mechanisms for both supporting and assessing students' progress and achievement did not reach levels of quality aimed at in the missions of the programs. The study offers recommendations for improvement in three areas of Palestine's teacher education programs: the quality of instruction; the quality of learning opportunities for both student-teachers and the teacher educators who teach them; and, the quality of academic leadership from the administration.

Keywords: *teacher education programs, quality assurance*

Cite This Article: Abdallah Bsharat, and Refa' Rmahi, "Quality Assurance in Palestine's Teacher Education Programs: Lessons for Faculty and Program Leadership." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 4, no. 2A (2016): 30-36. doi: 10.12691/education-4-2A-5.

1. Introduction

As educators we live in a world that presents both huge challenges and opportunities for educational leadership. Thanks to the revolution in information technology in the past two decades, never before in human history has so much information been so accessible to so many people globally. While having access to data and information is critically important, what really matters is how information is put to work to inform decision-making, formulate strategic action, and evaluate impact. In the 21st century, institutions of higher education, like any competitive business or financial institution, strive to develop their human resources with the aim of assuring high quality programs and services to their students, staff, and local communities more broadly.

Higher education in general and schools of education in particular play a vital leadership role in contributing to research of value to society and in preparing individuals with knowledge, skills, and dispositions to advance the social, cultural, and economic development of society. Despite the competitive race towards the internationalization of higher education that markets courses and degrees beyond national boundaries, the mission of schools of education is still predominantly focused on the national level [1,2,3]. This is certainly the case in the context of teacher education programs in Palestine.

In order to achieve high quality teacher education programs, the leadership of Palestinian universities, like their counterparts in other countries, understand that the quality of a program is only as good as the quality of the teaching and learning environment in which faculty and students interact. Despite this understanding, research

suggests, to the contrary, that teacher education programs tend to emphasize theory and summative assessments of knowledge in course work rather than the application of theory and pedagogy in experiential and formative contexts of teaching in authentic contexts [4,5].

This gap between theory and practice also applies to the Palestinian context, where pre-service teachers have few opportunities to challenge the highly didactic, teacher-centered modes of teaching that they experienced as students in basic through secondary education. They read and get tested on their knowledge of prevailing theories and popular trends in teacher education such as learner-centered pedagogy, 21st century learning skills, and pedagogical content knowledge [6], but rarely do they get the chance to put them into practice, reflect on the experience, or learn to give and feedback in collaborative groups [7].

The purpose of this study is thus to evaluate the quality of teacher education programs in Palestine from the perspective of student-teachers and the instructors who teach them. The study aims to contribute to policy discourses among university leadership on improving the quality of teacher education programs. A review of the literature shows that the process of evaluating higher education programs (e.g., through self-studies for strategic planning or accreditation) contributes to quality assurance [8,9,10]. For this reason, we adopted the British Quality Assurance Standards to scaffold the analytical framework of our study [11].

1.1. Definition of Quality

We agree with Harvey and Green [12] who write that defining what quality means for education in general and higher education in particular is an elusive task because it

means different things to different people in response to changing times and conditions of life. With this caveat in mind, we find the description offered by Navaratnam and O'Connor [13] who, writing in the context of vocational education where quality is judged by the fitness of students' education to the needs of the labor market, describe quality in higher as a constellation of concepts, strategies, instruments, beliefs, and practices that support a learner's needs and expectations for acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to their lives in the real world. But while there may be standards or benchmarks from professional associations or accrediting agencies that an institution may use to evaluate the performance quality of its operations and services, the onus is still on each individual institution to employ suitable mechanisms to monitor quality assurance in accordance with its mission and strategic plan [14].

In the past several decades, higher education institutions have adapted models of quality management from business and manufacturing, particularly in response to the growing internationalization of higher education [15]. Contemporary approaches to quality assurance are traceable to William Edwards Deming whose work in the rebuilding of Japanese industries following World War II emphasized the systemic integration of management and production to ensure that customer satisfaction and quality are intertwined [16,17].

The importance of how industries frame quality by the perceived needs of the consumer has its parallel in the way that quality assurance in higher education focuses on services to students and staff in relation to the needs of the labor market. These include mechanisms to improve teaching strategies; increase student satisfaction of teaching and learning methods and processes; and providing resources and opportunities for students to obtain career preparedness [18]. Moreover, this consumer-based framework assumes that university administrators possess competencies in leadership that support, *inter alia*, curriculum development, the use of student assessment data to monitor quality and inform decision making, and in making educational technology accessible to instructors and students alike [19].

1.2. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for our investigation into the quality of teacher education programs of Palestinian universities is informed by standards set by the British Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) [20]. Specifically, we focused on three broad domains: (1) the quality of teaching; (2) the quality of learning opportunities; and (3), the quality of academic support from the administration.

Standards for quality academic programs in higher education include:

- **Intended learning outcomes (ILO):** Intended learning outcomes are clearly written and disseminated to students; ILOs are relevant to a student's major studies; and, are designed to be achievable.
- **Content of academic plan:** Content of courses are current; flexible; aligned with the international standards; clear; comprehensive; and supports the development of critical and creative thinking.

- **Assessment:** Student learning is assessed using a variety of methods for evaluation; students are informed in writing of the criteria for evaluation; prompt feedback (written and oral) on all learning activities is provided to students and aligned with intended learning outcomes; all assessment tools are designed to be reliable, transparent, and clear.

Standards for the quality learning opportunities include:

- **Teaching and learning are characterized by:** There is a variety of teaching methods (small and large groups or individual and self-learning); a focus on active learning; students are responsible for their learning; student attendance is optimal; availability of training opportunities for faculty.
- **Student progress:** Students are supported in matching coursework to their majors and specializations; student dropout ratio is minimal.
- **Teaching and learning resources:** Students have access to a variety of teaching and learning resources, e.g., science and computer labs and libraries; effectiveness of these resources in supporting ILO's; competencies and expertise of teaching faculty fit the program ILO's.

Standards for the quality of academic administration include:

- **Goals:** Administrators and faculty establish transparent descriptions and goals for all academic programs.
- **Monitoring:** Administrators and faculty are committed to ongoing monitoring of quality in all specializations.
- **Data-driven decision making:** Administrators collect and utilize data from students and faculty on a regular and systematic basis to support decision-making on improving program quality.

1.3. Challenges to Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The implementation of quality assurance standards such as those prescribed by the British Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education is fraught with challenges for under-resourced educational systems like those in Palestine [21]. Frequent hindrances can include: weak integration of ICT in teaching and learning; inadequate infrastructure to support quality assurance mechanisms and processes; inability to conduct self-assessments and internal academic audits; insufficient financial and human resources to sustain the system; and, lack of research opportunities for both faculty and graduate students that would otherwise connect the higher education institution to the local society [22].

Relatively few studies on the problem of quality assurance in higher education have been conducted by Palestinians. Writing on the problems of establishing quality assurance standards, Harbi [23] finds that Palestine's higher education sector needs to focus on improving curriculum, academic resources, faculty development, the assessment and evaluation of student achievement, and capacity building for administrative systems. This view is echoed by Abassy [24], whose unpublished MA thesis found that faculty members at Al-Quds Open University have negative perceptions in general about the quality of higher education in Palestine.

On the other hand, Mitri [25] reported in an unpublished MA thesis that faculty members at Birzeit University were satisfied with the quality of education at their university, noting in particular effective levels of cooperation among academic and administrative units in maintaining standards of quality, of which one indicator was the positive relationship between the university and the local community. Writing in the journal of the Islamic University of Gaza, professors Abu Daqa and Lolo [26] reported on findings from their study of the university's teacher education program. They found that student teachers in the pre-service program were satisfied with both their instructors and the program in general, especially in regards to the development of their knowledge, attitudes and skills to be effective teachers. On the other hand, they expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of training they received in the use technology in teaching and learning.

A national study of teaching practices in higher education institutions in Palestine published by AMIDEAST point to a number of findings relating to the quality of pre-service teacher education [27]. The study concluded that Palestinian universities continue to emphasize teacher-centered instruction and assessment in spite of faculty exposure to learner-centered approaches and the increased use of information technology by students. The study also reported that universities generally offer no formal system of induction or mentoring in learner-centered pedagogy for new faculty. Moreover, methods for the assessment of learning outcomes were mostly limited to traditional mid-term and final exams. This tends to encourage rote memorization and teaching to the test at the expense of alternative assessments like projects, small group work, or simulations that help promote creativity, critical thinking and collaborative problem solving. Finally, the study found that the systematic use of co-curricular resources that would otherwise enhance students' learning experiences such as libraries, media services, computer and science labs, e-learning, and teachers' office hours remain largely underutilized or underdeveloped.

2. Methodology

The present study followed a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews and focus groups. The sample consisted of 48 students enrolled in pre-service teacher education programs or post-baccalaureate education diploma programs, and 12 faculty members at the colleges of education at four Palestinian universities: Birzeit University, An-Najah University, Al-Quds Abu Deis University, and Bethlehem University.

The sample of faculty members was selected on the basis of being employed full-time and teaching education courses at the BA and Diploma levels. Student teachers were selected on the basis of having completed at least their third year of study, while diploma students were selected if they had completed a minimum of 12 credit hours of the 30 required to earn their diploma in education.

Four focus groups were conducted with pre-service teachers and four with the diploma program students. Each focus group consisted of six individuals, giving a total of 48 participants. In-depth interviews were

conducted with the faculty members from each of the four universities for a total of 12 interviews.

A systematic and iterative analysis of the focus group and interview data was guided by the QAA standards described above. Using a grounded theory approach, recurring topics and issues were indexed and compared across the datasets. The results of our synthesis of the analyses across the three categories of participants generated seven thematic areas, the findings of which are discussed in the following section.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Overall Quality of the Teacher Education Programs

What is the general perception of the overall quality of teacher education programs on the part of faculty members and pre-service and diploma candidates? What do these groups think about key elements such as program goals, course content, relevance and usefulness, development of pedagogical skills, assessment and evaluation of learning, and teaching methods of faculty?

We found that faculty members had highly favorable views of the overall quality of their respective teacher education programs, whereas the pre-service and diploma candidates (referred collectively hereafter as student-teachers) were generally satisfied but not quite as strongly as the faculty.

The student-teachers explained they were satisfied with the fundamental teaching competencies they were expected to learn but less satisfied with the quality of their instructors' teaching practices and with the learning assessments used in their courses, which they described as mostly limited to paper-and-pencil tests of knowledge acquisition. A student-teacher, for example, commented:

Our teachers at the college of education never use alternative assessment as a tool. They depend on exams to evaluate us. And even though we've asked them many times to use different methods, they insist on using exams.

These differing perceptions in the program quality between the faculty members and student-teachers is possibly an instance of social desirability bias [28,29]. That is, because their professional identity is tied to the success of the programs in which they teach, they may be inclined to conflate the quality of their practices with the quality of the program, resulting in a favorable bias toward the programs compared to the student-teachers. For this reason, we are inclined to believe that the views of the student-teachers probably reflect a more candid assessment of the programs [30,31]. Conflicting and often contradictory perspectives between the two groups on the quality of pre-service teacher education occurs repeatedly in the discussion of results that follows.

3.2. Clarity and Relevance of Program Goals

How did the participants evaluate the clarity and relevance of the goals of Palestinian teacher education programs? Faculty members stated that their programs clearly articulated and disseminated information to all stakeholders about the vision and mission, goals, course requirements, and graduation requirements of their

respective programs. A faculty member, for example, explained:

The college of education at my university publishes the goals and the objectives of the program. The content of courses is reviewed and revised by the quality assurance committee, and the committee discusses course outlines and student outcomes with faculty.

Furthermore, they thought that the goals of the programs not only met the candidates' needs, but also were on par with international standards for pre-service teacher education. They strongly believed that the programs helped all candidates not only to develop competencies and skills to become effective teachers, but also to continue growing professionally on their own.

In contrast, the student-teachers were not as glowing in their assessment. They concurred that the goals and requirements of the programs were made clear to them. On the other hand, they said that these were not always reflected in their coursework. In particular, they felt that the programs fell short of meeting the national performance standards endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education for teacher competencies. One candidate, for example, explained:

Yes, the goals of the program are preparing me to graduate and meet the academic requirements that fit the teaching profession. But, professionally speaking, I don't see much emphasis on making me ready to meet the national education goals (for teaching performance).

3.3. Quality of Course Content

What views did the faculty and student-teachers have about the curriculum and courses comprising the academic plans? Once again, the faculty members tended to express highly favorable opinions. They maintained that program goals were aligned with the intended learning outcomes of all courses. Moreover, they believed that the coursework was helping students acquire knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to both academic content (e.g., courses designed to ensure content knowledge in mathematics, sciences, or arts and humanities) and to education theory (e.g., courses on educational foundations and curriculum and instruction). As one faculty member explained:

The content of the courses is up to date and the students are able to acquire professional skills relevant to their future jobs. And the course requirements gradually increase from year to the next as they progress to the upper levels in their programs of study.

What's more, the faculty described their instructional style as a balance between traditional lecture-based instruction and active learning experiences. In this way, they explained, the candidates were able to develop independent and critical thinking and increase their capacity to transfer their knowledge to authentic contexts.

The student-teachers, on the other hand, saw it quite differently. They described the content and coursework as mostly outdated, and the methods of instruction as traditional. When asked to elaborate, they described their instructors' teaching as teacher-centered and not so different from the teaching style they used to experience as students in elementary and secondary classrooms. As one student-teacher commented:

The content is not recent. It's the same material that's been used for several years. And the way they teach us, they just concentrate on lower-level thinking skills.

Moreover, they expressed disappointment at what they saw as a huge gap between the theories and skills they were learning in class and opportunities to actually put them into practice. One student-teacher summed up his frustration:

We see a gap between what the instructors are telling us in class and what teachers face in real life. They teach us something but never provide us with real evidence or chances to try out what we're learning.

The student-teachers also critical of what they described as a lack of supportive learning resources; for example, they pointed out that computer labs were, in their view, inadequate and poorly maintained, and support outside of class from their instructors often fell short of expectations.

3.4. Courses Judged Most Valuable

The gap between theory and practice in teacher education programs is a common problem shown in studies of pre-service teacher education programs [32,33,34]. Not surprisingly, then, both the faculty members and student-teachers in our study regarded practice teaching (i.e., the practicum course) as the most important course in the program, followed closely by courses in teaching methods. Conversely, the more theoretically-based courses such as educational foundations, along with subject-area courses, were viewed as relatively less important by both groups.

It seems hardly surprising then that we heard both groups stress the importance of linking the more academic/theoretical courses with the practicum. The student-teachers in particular explained that methods courses were, in their view, essential for equipping them with the requisite skill sets to be successful teachers. The faculty repeated the same. They explained that the methods courses they taught were providing tools, approaches and experiences the students would need, as one instructor said:

...to select the best teaching methods to suit them as teachers, their students and the classroom environment.

While both groups were somewhat neutral about the practical importance of the more academic oriented courses in educational foundations and curriculum content, the student-teachers tended to dismiss the latter apparently on the assumption that their secondary school education had given them sufficient levels of content knowledge. The problem, in their view, was that the content knowledge being taught in the college of education often seemed outdated, or even irrelevant, to the textbook content in the national school curriculum. As one student-teacher put it:

We need the college of education to align the course content with the school curriculum, and they need to give us the most recent content knowledge in order for us to teach it properly at school.

In the following section, we look at the pedagogical skills the participants considered important for effective teaching and learning.

3.5. Development of Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills

The student-teachers reflected on the quality of their courses that focused on developing their pedagogical knowledge and skills. Our analysis saw their responses fall into two broad categories: (1) competences that they judged well taught and, (2) those that were poorly taught. In the first category, skills that were viewed as well-taught included how to select and implement suitable instructional materials; selecting strategies for motivating students, particularly in regard to classroom engagement; using differentiated instruction to meet varied learning styles; formulating learning objectives; and, writing an effective lesson plan.

Conversely, skills that were deemed less well taught included how to develop activities to encourage critical thinking; diagnose differing learning styles and needs; manage classroom discipline effectively; and develop materials to provide enrichment for advanced students. Furthermore, the candidates also believed that their coursework did not prepare them adequately to collaborate with fellow teachers and did little to explain what kinds of instructional support they might expect from school leadership in dealing with problems of practice.

In sum, the student-teachers appeared mostly satisfied with the academic quality of pedagogical knowledge and competencies they learned in regards to planning outcomes and instructional materials and activities. Yet, they felt inadequately prepared to respond effectively to the kinds of cognitive, developmental, and behavioral factors—both inside and outside a classroom—that can impact student learning. This point is reflected in what one student-teacher described as a flaw in the methods courses:

[My] program concentrates on teaching methods and how to implement instructional materials and manage activities inside the classroom. This is good, but it never takes into consideration student learning as a major dimension in the teaching and learning process.

In other words, the level of training in instructional methods and techniques was viewed as sufficient, but the flip side of that—learning how to assess whether students were actually learning what was being taught—was lacking in the methods courses.

3.6. Assessment and Evaluation of Students' Progress and Achievement

The views of faculty members and student-teachers on the matter of assessing and evaluating student achievement were strikingly different. The faculty members expressed satisfaction with existing rules, procedures and practices related to the assessment of student performance. They described their selection of assessment methods as showing not only variety but also suitable alignment with the specific learning outcomes for each course. They added that they were conscientious in providing students with immediate verbal or written feedback so that students could correct mistakes or misconceptions. One instructor commented on the use of multiple sources of evidence of student learning at his institution:

We at the college of education implement different assessment methods, including both traditional and

authentic assessments. We use portfolios, oral exams, reports, and presentations.

Course exams, they explained, were designed to assess students' analytical and critical thinking—higher order thinking skills—and not just their ability to remember facts and information they were taught. Lastly the faculty stated that the processes of assessment and evaluation as a whole were fair and objective.

The student-teachers painted a very different picture, however. From their point of view, the assessment criteria and mechanisms were subjective and unfair. They said it was rare to be given formative assessments such as supportive feedback during class instruction or in the form of constructive comments on written assignments. Summative assessments such as quizzes, mid-terms and final exams did not always align with a course's intended learning outcomes. They criticized what they viewed as the instructors' reliance on traditional paper-and-pencil tests that focused mostly on lower-order thinking skills. Whereas the instructors said their courses provided students with multiple sources of assessment, the student-teachers, on the other hand, said that alternative assessments such as projects and research papers were seldom offered, and even when they were, they rarely measured their ability to apply their knowledge in authentic contexts. As one student-teacher observed:

Most of the instructors use paper-and-pencil exams that aren't comprehensive and don't really help students improve their thinking and practical skills that are supposed to be the key learning outcomes in the courses.

3.7. Quality of Instructional Practices and Support

In a study about the teaching styles of instructors in teacher education programs, Koster, et al. [35] define a teacher educator as someone who provides "instruction or who gives guidance and support to student teachers, and who thus renders a substantial contribution to the development of students into competent teachers" (p. 157). In other words, an effective teacher educator tries to model the same competencies that she expects her student-teachers to emulate once they become teachers. And this is what we heard the faculty members say about themselves. One instructor summed it up this way:

When it comes to my teaching, I use different methods to fit the learning outcomes of the course I'm teaching. And I do my best to demonstrate a variety of approaches that my students can use as resources for their own teaching.

The use of demonstration, or modeling, and the conscious selection of suitable teaching methods were viewed as important in developing their students' pedagogical skills. When students needed extra support, the faculty members said they were available during office hours. Ironically, when asked about the quality of their own professional development, the faculty members criticized their institutions for overburdening them with heavy course loads and not providing them with sufficient opportunities to attend workshops, conferences or to conduct research.

For their part, the student-teachers praised their instructors' theoretical knowledge as academics in their respective fields of education. At the same time, however,

judged their instructors' teaching styles to have serious shortcomings. The delivery of course content was described as predominantly lecture-based, and this, in their view, was problematic in two major respects. Firstly, not only was there little variety in how content and learning goals were delivered and assessed, but whenever the instructors did employ other methods, for example using question techniques or making PowerPoint presentations, it was poorly suited to the curriculum or offered little value, pedagogically speaking, to their learning. Secondly, the reliance on lecturing meant that students spent most of their time listening passively to instructors as they covered information already available in their textbooks and other readings. In other words, the curriculum was not linked sufficiently to the candidates' real-world experiences as pre-service teachers doing their practicum.

Furthermore, the students also explained that the heavy amount of homework assigned during a semester, combined with large class sizes, hindered their instructors from offering timely and meaningful feedback on assignments or to engage students in substantive classroom discussion. On this particular point, one student-teacher commented:

Instructors use lecturing methods to cover as much content as they can. So what happens sometimes is that they don't allow discussion because they think it wastes time they need to spend on lecturing. And because classes are so big, they don't feel that asking questions is worth their time, time that they need to finish their lectures.

The student-teachers also expressed disappointment about quality of faculty advisement and institutional resources. Outside of classroom interaction, they described their instructors as often unavailable during office hours, or when they were in, the quality of advisement was not always as helpful as they would have liked. As one student-teacher explained:

Yes, there is a schedule of office hours on the professor's office door, but I can't tell you how many times I've gone there to get help and he wasn't there.

To make matters worse, they said the university libraries had few useful reference materials and it was often difficult to find and borrow books and other media. A student-teacher observed:

Whenever a professor assigns or recommends books for us to read, you can't find them in the college library.

Likewise, computer labs were described as poorly equipped and maintained, making it difficult for the students to use technology on campus to support their coursework and complete assignments.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

We began this paper with the understanding that quality assurance in higher education is best seen as a constellation of concepts, strategies, instruments, beliefs, and practices that work in concert to meet a learner's needs and expectations for acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to their lives in the real world [36]. The vastly differing perceptions of the faculty members and their students on the quality of teacher education programs suggest that, to borrow from the Deming paradigm of

quality assurance [37], "customer satisfaction" among the student-teachers is out of step with the integration of management (program administration) and production (the work of teacher educators). In other words, if we take at face value the adage that the "customer is always right," our study suggests that university leadership needs to give serious attention toward investigating gaps in both the quality and level of institutional support afforded to academic programs and the teacher educators who deliver them. In this regard, our study points to three key areas in Palestine's teacher education programs needing improvement: (1) the quality of teaching; (2) the quality of learning opportunities for both the students and the teacher educators who teach them; and, (3) the quality of program administration.

The quality of instructional practices for teacher educators would benefit from being framed as performance standards. In particular, standards should reflect the same learner-centered competencies that teachers in public schools are expected to know and be able to use. Similarly, standards relating to student assessment ought to incorporate not only summative evaluations of student performance (i.e., midterm and final exams), but also formative and alternative assessments that would allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in situations that simulate the kinds of classroom contexts they would experience as real teachers. In short, the incorporation of learner-centered performance standards for teacher educators would, we believe, enhance the professionalization of student-teachers and go a long way to help close the perennial gap between theory and practice.

Movement in that direction, however, is going to require that both teacher educators and those they teach to have greater access to opportunities and resources for professional learning. For faculty members, this means opportunities and incentives, such as professional development credit towards promotion, to encourage participation in activities to develop their skills in pedagogical skills, including the integration of technology into their teaching. Opportunities come in many forms, including and workshops, action research, professional conferences, and portfolios of professional practice. For students, this would include upgrading library and computer resources, as well as improving the availability of faculty members in providing academic advisement.

For sustainable improvement to happen in the quality of teaching practices and the quality of professional learning opportunities for both teacher educators and student-teachers, the role played by administrators is essential. As implied by the differing and often contradictory perceptions on program quality among faculty and student-teachers, administrative leaders would be wise to develop more effective mechanisms to engage a diversity of perspectives and voices that includes both faculty and students in strategic planning. In this way, policy decisions on improving academic programming and resources for both instructors and students will reflect a shared vision of academic leadership that represents a broader spectrum of institutional stakeholders in discourses and decisions on improving program quality.

In closing, a major purpose of this study has been to respond to the need for research on the quality of teacher education programs in Palestine's higher education

institutions. By presenting findings based on qualitative data, our goal has been to stimulate critical discussion on matters of quality assurance with the aim of supporting the development of high quality teacher educators and teacher education programs, and to inform policy decisions to support improvement. Findings from our study beg for further research to investigate more deeply the array of issues and questions we have raised, and to encourage academic leadership to explore innovative approaches toward improving quality assurance of teacher education programs in Palestine.

References

- [1] Enders, J. (2004). Higher education, internationalisation, and the nation-state: Recent developments and challenges to governance theory. *Higher Education*, 47(3), 361-382.
- [2] Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*: John Wiley & Sons.
- [3] Ramahi, R.J, *The reality of teaching science based on quality assurance standards*, unpublished thesis, 2008.
- [4] Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of teacher education*, 57(3), 300-314.
- [5] Wubbels, T., Korthagen, F., & Brekelmans, M. (1997). Developing theory from practice in teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 75-90.
- [6] Hashweh, M. (2005). Teacher pedagogical constructions: A reconfiguration of pedagogical content knowledge. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 11 (3), 273-292.
- [7] Darling-Hammond, L. (2006).
- [8] Thomas, A. M., & Loadman, W. E. (2001). Evaluating teacher education programs using a national survey. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(4), 195-206.
- [9] Schwarz, S., & Westerheijden, D. F. (2004). *Accreditation and evaluation in the European higher education area* (Vol. 5): Springer Science & Business Media.
- [10] Dooris, M. J., Kelley, J. M., & Trainer, J. F. (2004). Strategic planning in higher education. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2004(123), 5-11.
- [11] QAA. Quality Assurance Agency. Retrieved on 8/10/2014 from internetwww.qaa.ac.uk.
- [12] Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining Quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9-34.
- [13] Navaratnam, K., & O'Connor, R. (1993). Quality assurance in vocational education: meeting the needs of the nineties. *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, 45(2), 113-122.
- [14] Asif, M., & Raouf, A. (2013). Setting the course for quality assurance in higher education. *Quality and Quantity*, 47(4), 2009-2024.
- [15] Lagrosen, S., Seyyed-Hashemi, R., & Leitner, M. (2004). Examination of the dimensions of quality in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 12(2), 61-69.
- [16] Tsutsui, W. M. (1996). W. Edwards Deming and the origins of quality control in Japan. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 295-325.
- [17] Fadel, M.A, Taei, Y.G. (2004). *Quality management from consumer to consumer*. Jordan: Waraq Publishers.
- [18] Ahmad, H., Hafez, M. (2003). *Educational Institutes Management*. Egypt. Al Kutub Publishers.
- [19] Mousari, N. (2003). Developing instruments to measure quality assurance at higher education institutes. *Educational Journal*, (67)17, 89-118.
- [20] QAA. Quality Assurance Agency. Retrieved on 8/10/2014 from: www.qaa.ac.uk.
- [21] El-Khawas, E. (1998). *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Progress; Challenges Ahead*. Paper presented at the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris (Washington, World Bank).
- [22] Materu, P. N. (2007). *Higher education quality assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa: status, challenges, opportunities and promising practices*: World Bank Publications.
- [23] Harbi, M. (2005). Developing Universities' performance according to quality assurance standards", *Modern Education Journal*, 50(15), 125-165.
- [24] Abassy, O. (2004). *Education System at Al-Quds University according to quality assurance standards*. Unpublished MA thesis. Alquds University, Jerusalem, Palestine.
- [25] Mitri, E. (2004). *Quality Assurance Management at Birzeit University*. Unpublished MA thesis.
- [26] Abu Daqa, S., Lolo, F. (2007). Assessment study of the teacher education program at Islamic University, Gaza. *Islamic University Journal*, 15(1), 465-488.
- [27] Cristillo, L. (2009). *National study of undergraduate teaching practices in Palestine*. Ramallah: AMIDEAST Palestinian Faculty Development Program.
- [28] Paulhus, D. L. (2002). Socially desirable responding: The evolution of a construct. In H. I. Braun & D. N. Jackson (Eds.), *The role of constructs in psychological and educational measurement* (pp. 49-69). NJment: Erlbaum.
- [29] Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. *Quality & Quantity*, 47(4), 2025-2047.
- [30] Ulusoy, M. (2015). Pre-Service Teachers' Retrospective and Prospective Evaluations: Program, Self, and Teaching Profession. [Case Study]. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 11(Issue 1), 59-72.
- [31] Flores, M. A., Santos, P., Pereira, D., & Fernandes, S. (2014). Pre-service Teachers' Views of Their Training: Key Issues to Sustain Quality Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 16(2), 39-53.
- [32] Elstad, E., & Elstad, E. (2010). University-based teacher education in the field of tension between the academic world and practical experience in school: a Norwegian case. *European journal of teacher education*, 33(4), 361-374.
- [33] Flores, M. A., Santos, P., Pereira, D., & Fernandes, S. (2014). Pre-service Teachers' Views of Their Training: Key Issues to Sustain Quality Teacher Education. [Article]. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 16(2), 39-53.
- [34] Rasmussen, J., & Rash-Christensen, A. (2015). How to improve the relationship between theory and practice in teacher education. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 14(3), 213-230.
- [35] Koster, B., Brekelmans, M., Korthagen, F., & Wubbels, T. (2005). Quality requirements for teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(2), 157-176.
- [36] Navaratnam, K., & O'Connor, R. (1993).
- [37] Tsutsui, W. M. (1996).