

MENTOR TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' NOTICING DURING PRACTICUM

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ABSTRACT

Teacher noticing, understood as the ability to recognize and interpret significant classroom events for suitable educational decisions, is considered as one of the key elements for a teacher's success. To pre-service teachers, this skill is very important because it helps them to make effective pedagogical decisions during their lessons. While many studies have focused on how pre-service teachers develop noticing, little research has examined how mentor teachers, who directly supervise pre-service teachers during practicum at high schools, perceive pre-service teachers' noticing. The qualitative study aims to answer the research question "How do mentor teachers perceive pre-service teachers' ability to notice significant classroom events during practicum?". Data were gathered from six mentor teachers in two high schools through semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that pre-service teachers often focus on surface-level aspects, like classroom management or student participation. They have limited ability to connect observations with teaching principles. The study also highlights both the challenges in fostering noticing during practicum and the critical role of mentor teachers in supporting this process. It suggests that teacher education programs should include structured noticing tasks, guided reflection, and mentor-led discussions to strengthen pre-service teachers' professional vision.

Keyword: *recognize classroom events; interpret classroom events; mentor teachers; pre-service teachers; practicum*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher noticing is a key concept in teacher education research that explains how teachers attend to, interpret, and respond to classroom events. It is closely linked to teachers' professional vision and pedagogical decision-making in complex classroom environments. Sherin and van Es (2002) define teacher noticing as the ability to identify significant classroom events and reason about them using contextual and pedagogical knowledge. Mason (2002) further describes noticing as a disciplined practice that enables teachers to become aware of meaningful events in teaching and learn from them. These perspectives highlight that effective teaching depends not only on subject knowledge but also on teachers' ability to selectively attend to and interpret classroom interactions.

In classroom contexts, teachers are required to process multiple events simultaneously, including student participation, learning difficulties, and instructional progress. Doyle (1977) emphasizes that classroom life is characterized by complexity, unpredictability, and simultaneity, which requires

teachers to continuously make rapid instructional decisions. In such environments, noticing helps teachers focus on pedagogically relevant events rather than surface-level behaviours. Prior research shows that experienced teachers are generally more capable of interpreting student thinking, whereas pre-service teachers often focus on classroom management and observable behaviours (Star & Strickland, 2008; van Es, 2011).

For pre-service teachers, developing noticing skills is particularly important because they are still building teaching experience and pedagogical understanding. Studies have shown that they tend to concentrate on teaching performance rather than students' learning processes (Jacobs et al., 2010; van Es & Sherin, 2008). However, noticing is considered a learnable skill that can be developed through reflection, observation, and structured support in teacher education programs.

The teaching practicum provides a crucial context for developing this skill, as pre-service teachers engage directly in authentic classroom teaching.

However, the practicum is also cognitively demanding, as they must manage instruction, classroom control, and student interaction simultaneously. This may limit their ability to engage in deeper pedagogical noticing. In this process, mentor teachers play an essential role by observing lessons, providing feedback, and guiding reflection. Through these activities, they help pre-service teachers develop more refined professional vision.

Despite the growing body of research on teacher noticing, most studies have focused on pre-service teachers' development, particularly through video-based reflection or classroom observation tasks. Relatively few studies have examined mentor teachers' perspectives on pre-service teachers' noticing during practicum, especially in English language teaching (ELT) contexts. This gap is significant because mentor teachers directly supervise classroom practice and can provide valuable insights into how noticing develops in authentic teaching environments.

Therefore, this study investigates mentor teachers' perceptions of pre-service teachers' noticing during teaching practicum in upper-secondary schools in Thai Nguyen city. Specifically, it addresses the research question: *How do mentor teachers perceive pre-service teachers' ability to notice significant classroom events during practicum?* The study aims to contribute to understanding the role of mentoring in developing teacher noticing and to provide implications for teacher education programs and practicum design in ELT contexts.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore mentor teachers' perceptions of pre-service teachers' noticing during teaching practicum. A qualitative approach was chosen to obtain in-depth insights into participants' experiences and interpretations of classroom events in authentic school contexts (Creswell, 2014). Given the complex and context-dependent nature of teacher noticing, qualitative inquiry allowed for a detailed examination of how mentor teachers evaluate and interpret pre-service teachers' classroom performance.

2.2. The context of the study

The study was conducted in two upper-secondary schools in Thai Nguyen city, Vietnam, where pre-service English teachers completed their teaching practicum. During the practicum, mentor teachers observed lessons, provided feedback, and guided reflective discussions. The practicum lasted seven weeks, during which pre-service teachers conducted classroom observations and delivered seven teaching sessions under mentor supervision.

2.3. Participants

Six mentor teachers from the two schools participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used due to their direct involvement in supervising pre-service teachers. All mentor teachers had experience mentoring pre-service English teachers during practicum. They were selected based on the following criteria: (1) having at least three years of teaching experience, (2) having experience supervising pre-service teachers, and (3) willingness to participate in the study. Table 1 presents the participants' background information.

Participant	Gender	Teaching Experience	Mentoring Experience
MT1	Female	12 years	6 years
MT2	Female	10 years	5 years
MT3	Male	15 years	8 years
MT4	Female	9 years	4 years
MT5	Female	14 years	7 years
MT6	Female	8 years	4 years

2.4. Data collection

Data were collected over a two-month practicum period. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six mentor teachers, each lasting 30–45 minutes. Interviews were held individually at convenient times and locations agreed upon by participants. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and audio-recorded with consent. Recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis. In addition, mentor teachers' written assessment reports on pre-service teachers' teaching performance were collected as supplementary data to support triangulation.

2.5. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic approach for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns across qualitative data.

The analysis process involved six steps:

1. Familiarizing with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and assessment reports;
2. Generating initial codes related to mentor teachers' perceptions and challenges;
3. Searching for recurring themes across the data;
4. Reviewing and refining the themes;
5. Defining and naming the themes; and
6. Producing the final interpretation of findings.

The coding process focused particularly on how mentor teachers described pre-service teachers' attention to classroom events and their interpretation of students' learning behaviors.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview transcripts and mentor teachers' assessment reports revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrated limited but developing noticing abilities during practicum.

3.1. Findings

3.1.1 Pre-service teachers mainly focused on surface-level classroom features

All mentor teachers reported that pre-service teachers tended to notice visible and immediate classroom events rather than deeper aspects of student learning. Their attention was primarily directed toward classroom management, students' participation, lesson procedures, and whether activities were completed on time.

Four among six mentor teachers explained that pre-service teachers often evaluated lessons based on students' behavioral responses instead of analyzing students' understanding or engagement with learning tasks. For example, MT1 stated:

"Most student teachers pay attention to whether students are quiet, active, or cooperative. They rarely notice why students misunderstand the lesson or why some activities are ineffective."

Similarly, MT4 commented that pre-service teachers frequently focused on their own teaching performance rather than students' learning processes:

"They are usually worried about finishing the lesson plan correctly. Because of that, they focus more on themselves than on observing students' reactions carefully."

Assessment reports also reflected this tendency. Written comments from mentor teachers often mentioned that pre-service teachers successfully managed classroom activities but lacked deeper observations about learners' needs or difficulties.

These findings suggest that pre-service teachers' noticing remained largely descriptive and procedural. Although they could recognize obvious classroom events, they struggled to interpret the pedagogical significance of those events.

3.1.2. Limited ability to interpret classroom events pedagogically

Another common finding was that pre-service teachers had difficulty connecting classroom observations with teaching principles or instructional decision-making. Mentor teachers noted that pre-service teachers could identify classroom situations but often failed to explain why those situations occurred or how teaching strategies influenced student learning.

MT2 explained:

"They can tell me that students seemed confused, but when I ask why the students were confused, they cannot analyze the reasons clearly."

MT3 added:

"Student teachers notice what happens in class, but their interpretations are still superficial. They do not always connect classroom events with pedagogy or language teaching theories."

Some mentor teachers believed this limitation stemmed from pre-service teachers' lack of teaching experience. Without sufficient practical knowledge, pre-service teachers found it difficult to interpret complex classroom interactions or

predict students' learning difficulties during lessons.

In several assessment reports, mentor teachers emphasized that pre-service teachers needed to improve their reflective abilities. For example, one report stated that a pre-service teacher "recognized classroom problems but needed more critical reflection on teaching strategies and students' responses."

Overall, mentor teachers perceived that pre-service teachers were able to observe classroom events at a basic level but still lacked the professional vision necessary for deeper pedagogical interpretation.

3.1.3. Noticing improved through feedback and reflection

Despite these limitations, mentor teachers acknowledged that pre-service teachers' noticing abilities gradually improved during practicum, especially when they received guided support and feedback.

All participants emphasized the importance of post-lesson discussions in helping pre-service teachers become more aware of classroom interactions. Through reflective conversations, mentor teachers encouraged pre-service teachers to analyze students' participation, identify learning difficulties, and reconsider instructional choices.

MT5 stated:

"After each lesson observation, we discussed what happened in class together. Over time, the student teachers became more aware of students' reactions and classroom dynamics."

Similarly, MT1 explained:

"At first, they only noticed obvious things, but after several weeks of teaching and reflection, they started paying attention to students' understanding and engagement."

Mentor teachers also reported that questioning strategies played an important role in fostering noticing. Instead of directly providing evaluations, some mentor teachers asked reflective questions such as "Why do you think students lost interest in this activity?" or "What signs showed that students did not understand the instructions?" These discussions helped pre-service teachers

move beyond surface-level observations toward deeper interpretations. The findings indicate that noticing development was a gradual process supported by mentoring, classroom experience, and reflective practice.

Overall, the findings indicate that mentor teachers perceived pre-service teachers' noticing abilities as limited but gradually developing throughout practicum. Pre-service teachers mainly focused on observable classroom behaviors and often struggled to interpret classroom events pedagogically. However, guided reflection, mentoring support, and teaching experience contributed positively to the development of noticing skills.

3.2. Discussion

The present study explored mentor teachers' perspectives on pre-service teachers' noticing during practicum. The findings indicate that pre-service teachers demonstrated limited but gradually developing noticing abilities. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on teacher noticing and provide insights into the role of mentoring in teacher education, particularly in English language teaching (ELT) practicum contexts.

One important finding of the study is that pre-service teachers mainly focused on surface-level classroom features such as classroom management, lesson procedures, and student participation. Mentor teachers reported that pre-service teachers tended to pay attention to observable behaviors rather than deeper aspects of student learning or pedagogical reasoning. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that novice teachers often concentrate on visible classroom events because they lack the experience necessary to interpret more complex instructional interactions. For example, Elizabeth van Es and Miriam Gamoran Sherin (2008) found that novice teachers frequently focused on general classroom behavior instead of analyzing students' thinking or learning processes. Similarly, Star and Strickland (2008) reported that pre-service teachers tended to notice teacher actions and classroom procedures more than student understanding.

The findings may be explained by the cognitive demands faced by pre-service teachers during practicum. Since novice teachers are still learning how to manage lessons, control classroom

activities, and deliver instructional content, much of their attention is directed toward immediate teaching survival rather than deeper pedagogical analysis. As a result, their noticing remains largely descriptive rather than interpretive. This supports the argument that teacher noticing develops progressively through teaching experience and reflective practice rather than emerging automatically during practicum.

Another significant finding is that pre-service teachers experienced difficulty interpreting classroom events pedagogically. Although they could identify classroom situations such as student confusion or low participation, they often struggled to explain the causes of these situations or connect them to instructional decisions. This finding is consistent with Jacobs et al. (2010), who argued that professional noticing requires not only attending to classroom events but also interpreting those events using pedagogical knowledge. Similarly, van Es (2011) emphasized that effective noticing involves reasoning about students' learning in ways that inform instructional responses.

The limited interpretive ability demonstrated by pre-service teachers may reflect the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired in university courses and practical classroom application during practicum. While pre-service teachers may understand pedagogical theories conceptually, they may not yet possess the practical experience necessary to apply these theories in dynamic classroom environments. In ELT classrooms specifically, the complexity of language interaction, learner participation, and communicative activities may further increase the difficulty of interpreting classroom events meaningfully. Therefore, the findings suggest that teacher education programs should provide more structured opportunities for pre-service teachers to connect theoretical knowledge with authentic classroom observation and analysis.

Despite these limitations, the study found that pre-service teachers' noticing abilities improved gradually through mentor feedback and reflective discussions. Mentor teachers emphasized that post-lesson conferences and guided questioning helped pre-service teachers become more aware of students' learning processes and classroom interactions. This finding supports sociocultural perspectives on teacher learning, which emphasize the importance of social interaction

and scaffolding in professional development. Through reflective dialogue, mentor teachers acted as more experienced professionals who guided pre-service teachers toward deeper interpretations of classroom events.

This finding is also consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of mentoring and reflection in developing teacher noticing. For instance, van Es and Sherin (2002) suggested that guided discussions can scaffold teachers' interpretations of classroom interactions, while Hobson et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of mentoring conversations in teacher professional growth. The present study extends this literature by showing that mentor teachers in practicum settings play a crucial role in shaping how pre-service teachers learn to observe and interpret classroom events in ELT contexts.

Overall, the study reinforces the view that teacher noticing is a developmental and socially mediated professional skill. Pre-service teachers do not automatically acquire noticing abilities through teaching experience alone; rather, these abilities need to be explicitly supported through guided reflection, mentoring, and structured observation activities. The findings further emphasize the important role of mentor teachers in shaping pre-service teachers' professional vision during practicum. Consequently, teacher education programs should consider integrating more systematic noticing-focused activities, including video analysis, reflective journals, mentor-guided discussions, and observation tasks, to support the development of deeper pedagogical noticing among pre-service teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated mentor teachers' perspectives on pre-service teachers' noticing during practicum in high school ELT contexts. The findings revealed that pre-service teachers generally demonstrated limited noticing abilities during practicum. They tended to focus primarily on surface-level classroom features such as classroom management, lesson procedures, and student participation, while showing difficulty interpreting classroom events in deeper pedagogical ways. In particular, mentor teachers observed that pre-service teachers often struggled to connect classroom observations with instructional principles, students' learning

processes, and appropriate pedagogical responses.

Despite these limitations, the study also showed that pre-service teachers' noticing abilities gradually improved through teaching experience, mentor feedback, and reflective discussions. Mentor teachers played an essential role in scaffolding pre-service teachers' professional vision by encouraging reflection, asking guiding questions, and helping them analyze classroom interactions more critically. These findings reinforce the view that teacher noticing is not an automatic skill but a developmental process that requires systematic support and guided practice.

Based on these findings, the study has several implications for teacher education programs. First, noticing should be treated as an explicit component of teacher preparation rather than an incidental outcome of practicum experience. Teacher education programs should therefore incorporate structured noticing activities such as video analysis, guided classroom observation, reflective journals, and mentor-led discussions to help pre-service teachers learn how to attend to and interpret significant classroom events.

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of mentor teachers in supporting the development of pre-service teachers' noticing during practicum. Since noticing is closely connected to effective teaching and professional decision-making, fostering this skill should become a central goal of teacher education programs. By providing structured mentoring and reflective opportunities, teacher education institutions can better prepare pre-service teachers to interpret classroom events critically and respond to students' learning needs more effectively.

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