

A Case Study on Perceived Problems in the Student Teacher's Spoken Classroom Language through a Supervisor's Feedback

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Abstract

This case study aims at investigating problems of a student teacher's spoken classroom language through a supervisor's feedback. It also aims to find out to what extent the supervisor's feedback raises the student teacher's awareness of her spoken classroom language. The subject of this study was a second-year graduate participant in a master's degree of Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching (ELT) programme at the School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) who enrolled in Teaching Techniques in Practice (LNG611) in the second semester of the 2012 academic year. The instruments for data collection were the supervisor's feedback reports, student teacher's reflection reports and a semi-structured interview. The data were sorted by types of her spoken classroom language problems in each week of the teaching practicum. The results of this study revealed that the student teacher had two main spoken classroom language problems, which were grammar and pronunciation. In addition, the study shows three effects of the supervisor's feedback towards awareness of the student teacher's spoken classroom language: realization of the problems, awareness of her students' language acquisition and strategies to solve the spoken classroom language problems. The paper also provides some suggestions on effective supervisor feedback.

Keywords: *perceived problems, student teacher, spoken classroom language, supervisor's feedback*

1. Background of the study

Teaching Techniques in Practice (LNG611) is one of the compulsory courses in the master's

degree of the Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching (ELT) programme at the School of Liberal Arts, KMUTT. The teaching practicum is conducted for one semester in order to provide a teaching opportunity for the participants of the ELT programme to practise teaching skills as student teachers in an English classroom of the undergraduate students at KMUTT. The student teachers are required to teach undergraduate students of the university. During the teaching practicum, two student teachers have to work together as co-teachers of the EFL classroom. While one of them is teaching, the other has to act as an observer. Moreover, their supervisor also attends their class of the teaching practicum as an observer, taking notes on what is happening in class as well as giving feedback regarding major problems or other matters the student teachers have asked the supervisor to address.

After the end of each class, a supervision session is organized. The supervisor's feedback is immediately given to each student teacher. During the session, both the student teachers and the supervisor discuss the teaching practice in order to indicate strengths and weaknesses of the teaching to find ways to improve the teaching for the next class.

This paper aims at investigating the problems of a student teacher's spoken classroom language during her teaching practicum and the rise of the student teacher's spoken classroom language awareness that resulted from the supervisor's feedback.

2. Literature review

2.1 Problems of student teachers

Having not much teaching experience, student teachers need some practice to sharpen their teaching skills. They may also have some difficulties in fulfilling a teacher's duties and roles. Accordingly, there are many problems that the student teachers and other novice teachers usually encounter. For example, they often fail to connect with students, misunderstand the lesson content, and tend to rely on principles of teaching regardless of student understanding (Hogan & Rabinowitz, 2009). The teachers' language might be one of the most important obstacles that the student teachers have to overcome because, in language teaching, a classroom is a stage where foreign language learners are exposed to the target language (Xiao-yan, 2006). Therefore, the teachers are expected to provide good models of spoken English for the students who are learning English as an international language, in part by monitoring their own speech and writing accuracy in order to be able to achieve effective teaching (Richards, 2011).

2.2 Teacher language awareness

Duval and Wicklund (1972) define self-awareness as the self-reflexive quality of consciousness. People will be aware of any discrepancy between their internal feelings

and beliefs and their external behaviour. Moreover, they probably get some impacts from the environmental stimuli, for example, comments, feedback or interaction from their supervisor and students. Scoping down to teacher language awareness, Thornbury (1997) offers the definition of language awareness of teachers as “the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively” (p. x). It can be implied that the teachers should draw on and enhance their language awareness in order to achieve success in their class. Language awareness can be improved by three competences that English language teachers need: as a language user, language analyst and language teacher. The language teachers are expected to employ and keep improving these three competences that might be overlapped upon each other (Edge, 1988, as cited in Wright & Bolitho, 1993). Wright and Bolitho (1993) also claim that the awareness-raising will be gradually enhanced and then attitudes and beliefs are slowly changed. This can be examined through an observation of teaching behaviour or language competences in the classroom.

2.3 Effects of teachers’ language upon students

The language produced by teachers plays a dominant role in the EFL classroom. It is served as the source of input of language knowledge, and it can be used to facilitate language communication and instruct classroom activities (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010). Xiao-yan (2006) states that teacher talk should be the model for students to imitate, so ungrammatical speech modifications should not happen in teachers’ language in class. Otherwise, errors in the input might be adopted by students, who are the listeners in class. Krashen (1985) also mentions that two main tasks of the teachers in a language classroom are to offer enough high-quality language input and provide opportunities for the students to use the target language. Otherwise, the students would end up lacking language knowledge due to the inadequate quality of language input.

2.4 Supervision and the supervisor’s feedback

The supervisor’s feedback is arguably one of the crucial elements in the teaching practicum. It has a significant impact to the student teachers and helps them identify their problems during the teaching practicum in order to improve their language and teaching skills. According to Gebhard (1990), supervision is defined as “an ongoing process of teacher education in which the supervisor observes what is going on in the teacher’s classroom with an eye towards the goal of improved instruction” (p. 1). Farr (2011) states that supervision is an essential part of the teacher education process because the supervision permits the supervisors to offer feedback on the student teachers’ performance and support them in finding ways to improve their teaching, as the student teachers lack the experience necessary to be aware of their problems themselves. In agreement, Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995) claim that teaching practice should be done under the

supervision process. The supervisors are a key person in the teaching practice process because they play a dominant role in helping scaffold the student teachers, since the student teachers need such guidance to achieve the goals of teaching. Gebhard (1990) states that the roles of the supervisors include directing or guiding the teachers' teaching, offering suggestions on the best way to teach, providing a model of teaching, advising the teachers and evaluating the teachers' teaching. The supervision session, as part of the teaching practice process, normally enables the supervisors and supervisees to discuss and share ideas to improve their teaching, which could also raise their teaching awareness. The supervisor's feedback "...highlights the crucial points that the student teachers have to make changes...", since they are novice teachers who might not be able to tackle many points at the same time (Gower et al., 1995). However, the supervisors should also consider how often they should treat errors (Watson Todd, 1997). If errors are treated too frequently, the student teachers might become frustrated. On the other hand, according to Brown (1987), if the supervisors ignore errors, the student teachers might interpret them as acceptable. Moreover, a problem of losing face should also be considered in giving feedback; if not, the student teachers might perceive it as embarrassing feedback. The success of a feedback session also depends on personal attributes and behaviour of the supervisors, which have a strong influence upon the supervision session (Farr, 2011).

2.5 Student teachers and their self-reflection

In a teaching practicum course, the supervisor's feedback alone might not inspire the awareness of student teachers, because such feedback may not be the same as their own inner voice, so the student teachers might disagree with the supervisor's opinion or find it unfair.

According to Shulman (1986), teaching involves both action and the thinking that underlies it. To examine the teaching performance of the student teachers, it is also necessary to examine their "thinking". Self-reflection, or thinking about one's own thinking, is a term for revealing the thinking process behind the teaching behaviour (Costa & Kallick, 2000). Self-reflection may also help the student teachers think about their own performance and review their ideas that influence their teaching in class. It will help raise self-awareness, which could lead to ways to enhance their teaching skills.

Normally, the reflection report consists of situational context, strengths and weaknesses of the writer and solutions proposed by the writer himself. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) view reflection in the learning and teaching context as "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations" (p. 19). Jusoh (2013) claims that the teaching practicum is time for the student teachers to prepare and practise teaching in order to make the first few years of the professional teaching more enjoyable and less frustrating. Therefore, using self-reflection in the teaching practicum would help the

student teachers improve their classroom language skills and teaching strategies, and handle different dimensions of language lessons. For these reasons, self-reflection is also a vital element that may help enhance the student teachers' teaching performance.

In this instance, according to the supervisor's feedback reports and the student teacher's reflection reports, one of the researchers found that her co-teacher had some problems with her spoken classroom language that might have had an effect on the students in their class. Hence, a case study to investigate the problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language may help raise her language awareness, and be a guideline for the improvement of her spoken classroom language. The research questions are therefore as follows:

1. What are the problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language during her teaching practicum?
2. To what extent does the supervisor's feedback raise the student teacher's awareness of her spoken classroom language?

3. Methodology

3.1 Subject

The subject of this study was a second-year graduate participant in the master's degree of the Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching (ELT) programme at the School of Liberal Arts, KMUTT. She was a student teacher who enrolled in Teaching Techniques in Practice (LNG611) in the second semester of the 2012 academic year. Prior to participating in the ELT programme, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in a scientific field from a university in Thailand and a certificate in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) from a language institute in Australia. She also had a short-term experience in teaching English at a private school in Thailand. During taking the practicum course, she was trained as a teacher trainee for 15 weeks between January and May. She taught an English course called 'Remedial English' to a group of 11 freshmen from the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology, KMUTT. She taught for one and a half hours every week sharing the class with her co-teacher who taught the other half of the 3-hour class.

3.2 Instruments

Three research instruments used in this study were the supervisor's feedback reports, student teacher's reflection reports and a semi-structured interview.

3.2.1 Supervisor's feedback reports

The supervisor used her laptop computer to take notes during her observation of the teaching practicum class, and gave a report to the student teacher in every supervision session after teaching. Each feedback report consisted of what the student teacher did

during the teaching, along with her strengths and weaknesses, including guidelines for improvement. The supervisor also highlighted grammatical and pronunciation mistakes.

For grammatical mistakes, the supervisor made a note of the incorrect sentences at the time that the student teacher spoke, then copied all the incorrect sentences and pasted them at the end of the report under the heading 'Weak Points' without making any corrections for the student teacher. Only a few suggestions were provided, such as 'Check the word order of *could*', and 'Check V. to do'. Examples of the grammatical feedback are shown below:

Weak points

Where is Mike come from?

Why you think they didn't know each other?

What 'just a moment' mean?

How much he pay for phone?

Why you think they didn't know each other?

For pronunciation mistakes, at the time that the student teacher mispronounced any words while teaching, the supervisor immediately typed the mispronounced words of the student teacher and pasted the correct phonetic spellings of the words from an online dictionary. Finally, the supervisor copied all the mistakes and the correct phonetic symbols at the end of the report under the heading 'Weak Points' as the examples show below:

Weak points

Monthly	/monly/	☞	/'mʌnt.θli/
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clothes	/clots/	☞	/kləʊðz/
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match	/mat/	☞	/mætʃ/
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All of the supervisor's feedback reports (9 reports) were used in this study to examine the problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language and the changes noted during the teaching practicum.

3.2.2 Student teacher's reflection reports

Student teacher's reflection reports were employed to gain an insight into the subject's experience and her conscious response towards her teaching and the supervisor's feedback. After the supervision session, the student teacher was asked to reflect upon her feelings and opinions about her teaching in the form of a reflection report, which consisted of a couple of pages of free writing revealing her strengths, weaknesses and improvements as well as her response to the supervisor's feedback. The reflection report was submitted to the supervisor before the next teaching. All of the reflection reports (9 reports) of the student teacher were used in this study.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview, which was done in English and transcribed, was employed to probe into details of the student teacher's reflection reports. The four questions included problems of the spoken classroom language of the student teacher, causes of the problems, opinions of the student teacher towards the supervisor's feedback on her spoken classroom language, and strategies she used for improvement. As a cross-check, the interview was done at the end of the teaching practicum in order to verify the subject's language awareness.

3.2.4 Data analysis

Content analysis was used to find out the answers to the two research questions. The data from the nine supervisor's feedback reports were divided into two sets, the data from weeks 1-5 and weeks 6-9, in order to see any changes of the student teacher's spoken classroom language. The data from the two sets were listed and grouped into categories, showing the problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language. The data from the student teacher's reflection reports were examined and listed to find out how much the supervisor's feedback raised the awareness of the student teacher's spoken classroom language. The in-depth data from the interview on problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language, causes of the problems, opinions of the student teacher towards the supervisor's feedback, and strategies she used to solve the problems were also interpreted and reported upon in order to confirm the data from the student teacher's reflection reports.

4. Findings and interpretations

4.1 Student teacher's problems of her spoken classroom language

According to the data collected from the nine entries of the supervisor's feedback reports, two types of problems of spoken classroom language of the student teacher were found. They were grammatical and pronunciation problems. Table 1 below shows types of grammatical problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language, the mistakes and their frequency of occurrence.

Table 1: Grammatical problems and frequency of occurrence

Types of grammatical problems	Mistakes	Frequency of occurrence	
		Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9
1. Auxiliary verb in the interrogative form	1. Where is Mike come from? 2. Why.....you think they didn't know each other? 3. What.....'just a moment' mean? 4. How much.....he pay for phone? 5. Why.....you think they didn't know each other? 6. What about if he.....not there? 7. How much.....he pay for phone? 8. Where you could find used goods? 9. What.....the number that you got?	9	0
	10. What.....giving advice mean? 11. What.....advice mean? 12. What.....the name of the unit? 13. What.....other advice?	0	4
2. S/V agreement	1. He don't understand what I speak. 2. What he do ? 3. The guy know the two women. 4. He want to talk to Cynthia. 5. She live in Kuala Lumpur? 6. Who invite who? 7. Who call who?	7	0
	8. Who go to work by motorcycle?	0	1
3. Verb tense	1. When you meeting people at the first time, 2. When I.....at first time in USA, 3. Time to practice what you learned	3	0
	4. Are you finish?	0	1
4. Possessive adjective	1. She name is Lucy. 2. She name is Mameaw. 3. Let Wannachai talk about your wife.	3	0

Note: = The student teacher omitted V. to do / V. to be

Table 1 shows four grammatical problems of the student teacher's spoken classroom language: auxiliary verb in the interrogative form, subject-verb agreement, verb tense and possessive adjectives. It can be seen that the major problem of the student teacher's spoken classroom language is the auxiliary verb in the interrogative form. The problems are mostly due to missing auxiliary verbs (11 out of 13 mistakes), as well as the mistakes of using the wrong auxiliary verb, and word order between the auxiliary verb and the subject. Although it is clearly seen that the primary mistake of subject-verb agreement, which the student teacher made during her teaching practicum, was using the plural form of verbs with the singular subjects of the statements, the table shows that she also made

a mistake of subject-verb agreement in the ‘who’ question which requires a singular form of the verb. For verb tense, the only mistake that she made was with the present perfect form. The student teacher’s least-frequent mistake is about possessive adjectives. The table shows that she used subject pronouns instead of possessive adjectives, together with using the wrong possessive adjective.

It can be seen that the student teacher had grammatical problems of her spoken classroom language, especially during the first half of the teaching practicum. However, all categories of the student teacher’s grammatical problems reduced during the second half of the teaching practicum.

Table 2 shows two categories of pronunciation problems of the student teacher’s spoken classroom language, which are final sounds and vowel sounds.

According to Table 2, apart from grammatical problems, the student teacher also had pronunciation problems. The table shows that her major pronunciation problem is final sounds. It can be seen that she had the final-sound problems of one-syllable words such as /t/, /ðz/, /θ/ and /tʃ/ in the words ‘right’, ‘clothes’, ‘with’ and ‘match’, respectively. She also had the final-sound problems of the first and the second syllable of the multi-syllabic words such as /θ/, /t/ and /s/ in the words ‘monthly’, ‘recently’ and ‘pronounce’. Vowel sounds are the other type of her pronunciation problems. It is found that she did not pronounce /eə/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, and /ə/ in the words ‘there’, ‘raise’, ‘clothes’ and ‘husband’, respectively. However, the data in Table 2 reveals that the two types of the pronunciation problems of the student teacher’s spoken classroom language decreased in the second half of the teaching practicum.

Table 2: Pronunciation problems and frequency of occurrence

Types of problems		Words	Correct pronunciation	Student teacher’s pronunciation	Problems	Frequency of occurrence	
						Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9
1. Final sound	One-syllable words	1. right	[raɪt]	[<u>rai</u>]	/t/	3	0
		2. gift	[ɡɪft]	[ɡɪ <u>f</u>]	/t/		
		3. clothes	[kləʊðz]	[klə <u>ɪ</u> :t]	/ðz/		
		4. with	[wɪð]	[wɪ <u>t</u>]	/ð/	0	2
		5. match	[mætʃ]	[mæ <u>t</u>]	/tʃ/		
	1 st Syllable of multi-syllabic word	1. monthly	[mʌn.θli]	[mʌ <u>n</u> li]	/θ/	3	0
	2 nd Syllable of multi-syllabic words	2. recently	[ˈri:.sənt.li]	[ri:.sə <u>n</u> .li]	/t/		
		3. pronounce	[prəˈnaʊns]	[ˈprəʊ. <u>naʊn</u>]	/s/		

Types of problems	Words	Correct pronunciation	Student teacher's pronunciation	Problems	Frequency of occurrence	
					Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9
2. Vowel Sound	1. there	[ðeər]	[ðeɪ]	/eə/	4	0
	2. raise	[reɪz]	[raɪs]	/eɪ/		
	3. clothes	[kləʊðz]	[klɔ:t]	/əʊ/		
	4. husband	[ˈhʌz.bənd]	[hʌz.bənd]	/ə/		
	5. reason	[ri:zən]	[ri:zʌn]	/ə/	0	1

4.2 Effects of the supervisor's feedback towards awareness of the student teacher's spoken classroom language

According to the data collected from the student teacher's reflection reports and the semi-structured interview, it can be clearly seen that there were three effects of the supervisor's feedback on the student teacher's spoken classroom language awareness.

4.2.1 Realization of the problems

The data from the student teacher's first reflection reports and the interview show that the student teacher agreed with the supervisor's feedback on her spoken classroom language problems, both grammar and pronunciation, as shown in the extracts below:

"In addition, I said 'Where is Mike come from?' instead of 'Where is Mike from?' Moreover, I made a mistake while I said 'She name is Mameaw and she name is Lucy.' I should focus on my language more than this class." (From the student's first reflection report)

"Well, I made a lot of mistakes on final sounds." (From the student's fourth reflection report)

"I found my pronunciation on final sounds getting better, but for some words such as monthly, clothes, and recently are still poor." (From the student's fifth reflection report)

"I agree with the supervisor's comments." (From the interview)

"I remember that I made mistakes about possessive adjective. That is a terrible thing I did in class." (From the interview)

Although the student teacher realized the problems of her spoken classroom language mentioned in the supervisor's feedback, she gave some reasons in order to defend herself against her lack of knowledge on grammar and pronunciation as can be seen from the extracts below:

"Moreover, I made a mistake while I said 'She name is Mameaw and she name is Lucy'. I thought at that time I spoke too fast and I did not have time to think about

that. It seems that the words just slipped out of my tongue.” (From the student’s first reflection report)

“I found my pronunciation on final sounds getting better, but some for words such as monthly, clothes, and recently, are still poor. Also, when I spoke too fast I was not careful about them.” (From the student’s fifth reflection report)

“The wrong sentences just slipped out of my tongue because I spoke too fast. I was more worried about what I was teaching and what I would do to make the teaching interesting.” (From the interview)

“I remember that I made mistakes about possessive adjective. That is a terrible thing I did in class. I spoke so fast until I was not careful” (From the interview)

4.2.2 Awareness of her students’ language acquisition

The student teacher not only realized her problems of her spoken classroom language but also estimated the effects on her students’ language acquisition that may have resulted from her error inputs as shown in the extracts below:

“I should focus on my language more than this class. If not, students might learn and remember wrong sentences.” (From the student’s first reflection report)

“Well, I made a lot of mistakes on final sounds. I should be aware and solve these problems as much as I can. If students learn and use them in the wrong way, it is not good. As I work as a teacher, I should provide correct pronunciation models for them.” (From the student’s fourth reflection report)

4.2.3 Strategies to solve spoken classroom language problems

The data from the student teacher’s reflection reports and the interview below reveal that although the student teacher tried to defend herself against her lack of knowledge of grammar and pronunciation, she accepted that the supervisor’s feedback inspired her to explore strategies to solve the problems. The data also show that the student teacher used two strategies to solve the problems of her spoken classroom language: studying grammar and pronunciation from a grammar book and an online dictionary, and practising her pronunciation through radio and television, including talking to her friends, teachers and native speakers.

“After getting feedback, I read the grammar book ‘Essential Grammar in Use’. It helped a lot. I used it to review and brush up my English before teaching in class.” (From the interview)

“I learned to pronounce by imitating the pronunciation from a radio, a television, my friends and teachers who had English as their mother tongue. After getting the supervisor’s feedback, I tried to practise my pronunciation and study linguistic

symbols with the help of ‘Cambridge Online Dictionary’. I feel that my pronunciation gets better, but there were still some unfamiliar words I struggled against.” (From the interview)

“I still used the same strategies as I thought they worked well. I listened to the radio, watched a television and talked to native speakers. I still practised pronouncing the words I was not familiar with especially from the online dictionary website.” (From the interview)

5. Conclusions and discussion

5.1 Spoken classroom language problems of the student teacher

According to the findings, the student teacher in this study had grammar and pronunciation problems with her spoken classroom language. The major problem of grammar was the auxiliary verb in the interrogative form. The major problem of her pronunciation was the final sounds of the first and second syllable of single- and multi-syllabic words. However, all the problems decreased during the second half of the teaching practicum.

5.2 Effects of the supervisor’s feedback

It can be concluded from the findings that the supervisor’s feedback enabled the student teacher to gain an insight into her spoken classroom language problems in both grammar and pronunciation. After the realization, she could estimate the negative effects on her students’ language acquisition resulting from her error inputs. Therefore, she started exploring some useful strategies to solve her language problems. The two strategies she employed were studying grammar and pronunciation from a grammar book and an online dictionary, and practising her pronunciation through radio and television, including talking to her friends, her teachers, and native speakers.

The realization of the student teacher on her spoken classroom language problems after receiving the supervisor’s feedback and the way she tried to find and implement some useful methods to solve her problems in order to avoid causing problems for her students’ language acquisition show that the supervisor’s feedback has a crucial influence on the student teacher’s awareness. Accordingly, it can inspire the student teacher to try to improve her spoken classroom language. Although the student teacher sounded a little defensive about her knowledge on grammar and pronunciation, she kept on studying grammar and pronunciation to improve her spoken classroom language.

5.2 Pedagogical implications

5.2.1 Immediate feedback

Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004) mention that several studies have found that more

immediate feedback is better in terms of a faster rate of acquisition of effective teaching behaviour. The findings in this study can confirm the previous studies mentioned above. Since the supervisor's feedback in this study was given to the student teacher at the end of each class, she could immediately realise her spoken classroom language problems that might cause difficulties for her students' language acquisition. Accordingly, it encouraged her to find some strategies to solve the problems speedily.

5.2.2 Written feedback

The prior research of Watson Todd, Mills, Palard, and Khamcharoen (2011) reveals that student teachers prefer receiving written feedback through journal correspondence of supervisors in the form of suggestions or added information. Hence, it is recommended that supervisors should group student teachers' problems into categories and also write comments, including suggestions in the supervisors' feedback reports in order that student teachers can review them later on and not miss any points of the comments. The student teachers can then have very clear ideas about what their problems are, similar to the experience of the student teacher in this study; therefore, they could think of what they need to do to improve their weaknesses.

5.2.3 Advantages of technology

Taking notes on a laptop computer and accessing the Internet during the observation enabled the supervisor in this study to provide the student teacher with more immediate feedback and highly accurate suggestions because the supervisor could come up with information from an online dictionary. Therefore, it shows that technology is one of the essential tools that can be employed to make the supervisor's feedback more reliable and accurate.

5.2.4 Individual differences

Each student teacher is different in terms of background knowledge and experience. Therefore, supervisors should tailor the approach of giving feedback to suit each student teacher. Apart from giving feedback, the supervisors should let their supervisees write reflection reports to explore and expose their inner feeling and awareness towards their teaching as Randall and Thornton (2001) indicate that effective advice has to be 'owned' by the teachers themselves and not merely imposed from the outside, and the most effective changes originate from an individual's inner feeling.

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