# The Pedagogical Instructor: Traits Preferred by Students vs. Traits Predicting Success in Practical Work

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## Abstract

Dissatisfaction with the conventional methods of teacher training is reflective of social changes transpiring in the Western world in general and in Israel in particular. Teacher quality has been viewed as the factor most critical to student achievement. Therefore, a key question would be what is the quality of the pedagogical instructor that is predictive of student-teacher success? This study focused on both the teacher trainee preferences and well as the actual factors that influence their achievement. Findings indicated that while teacher trainees valued the importance of receiving *feedback*, the factor influencing the students’ success was in fact the pedagogic instructors’ *professionalism*, supported by other aspects: empowerment, counseling, and feedback. Since the pedagogical instructor’s professionalism is the only factor that was shown to directly predict student achievement, it is essential to raise the level of professionalism among pedagogical instructors, while considering the student’s declared preference––the pedagogical instructor function of providing feedback to their students.

*Keywords*: pedagogical instructor, professionalism, student's achievements, professional identity, personal advice, reflection.

# The Pedagogical Instructor: Traits Preferred by Students vs. Traits Predicting Success in the Practical Work

A recent goal of many Western countries has been to improve the quality of teachers and consequently, the level of their students’ achievements. Global changes, such as postmodernism, multiculturalism, wide exposure to media, and rapid changes of knowledge bases have led to a lack of satisfaction with teacher training in these countries. The dissatisfaction in Israel with the level of the teachers and teaching is further reinforced by the poor student scores in international tests (e.g., PISA, PIRL, TIMSS) and in national tests (e.g., high school matriculation examinations, Meytzav). It has been recognized that the most influential reforms implemented in the school system had resulted from public discussions, thus, public pressure for change should be viewed in a positive light. In the professional literature, pedagogical instruction is defined as an ongoing interpersonal process during which the skilled person (pedagogical instructor) helps the less skilled person (the teaching trainee) to develop the behavior and professional identity of a teacher (Yogev & Zozovsky, 2011).

The pedagogical instructor role is to support their teacher trainee students during their academic studies and to relate theory to what is performed in the field (Zeichner, 2010). Some functions of the pedagogical instructor reflect obligatory instructional tasks that require evaluation of teacher trainee performance in the various training programs (Wang, & Odell, 2002).

The pedagogical instructional standards are as follows: Pedagogical instructors are responsible for their students’ cognitive, social, and linguistic development. They must recognize differences within the community of learners and ensure inclusive learning environments which enable each learner to meet high standards. Pedagogical instructors must support individual and collaborative learning, encourage social interaction, and raise self-motivation. Instructors must understand the central topics, tools, and structure of the discipline they teach and create learning experiences that make the discipline accessible and meaningful for the learners. They must connect concepts and use different perspectives to engage learners in creativity, collaborative problem solving, and critical thinking. Pedagogical instructor must use multiple methods of assessment and plan instructions that support each student. They must use a wide variety of instructional strategies to facilitate learners to develop a deep understanding of content areas and to develop the necessary skills. Pedagogical instructors must collaborate with learners, colleagues, and professionals, as well as other community members to ensure learners' development and growth. These standards for teaching should be manifested in every training program (Wang, & Odell, 2002).

The role and functioning of the pedagogical instructor can be examined from three perspectives (Emanuel, 2005):

1. *The socio-psychological aspect.* This aspect is related to the pedagogical instructors’ support of choosing teaching as a profession. Instructors possesses the ability to help the trainees examine the value-oriented meaning inherent in their choice of the teaching profession and to understand the constellation of roles and expectations innate in an occupation with a social mission (Wang & Odell, 2002). It is expected that the pedagogical instructor create a caring and supportive environment for the trainees to broaden their perspective of the social and cultural system, and to help them examine the expectations and types of requirements and pressures exerted on the factors operating in the institutional system.
2. *The functional professional aspect*. This aspect addresses the elements of knowledge, skills, and abilities that pedagogical instructors must cultivate in their students, so that they will accomplish the work of teaching with all its complexity in a professional and appropriate manner (Zilberstein, 2002).
3. *The assessment, reflection, and feedback aspect*- Pedagogical instructors help promote teacher trainees’ knowledge, teaching skills, and student evaluation skills. pedagogical instructors provide feedback regarding trainees’ teaching skills performance and regarding their learning process, evaluating them constructively and critically (De Jong, Korthagen, & Wubbles, 1996; Korthagen, & Russell, 1995).

Pedagogical instructors have a key role in the teachers’ training process. They bridge teaching theory and practice. They create a congruence between theoretical pedagogical knowledege acquired in the various courses of each discipline and the students’ applied activities, guiding them toward the development of reflective self-evaluation skills (Cohn & Gellman, 1988; Gold, 1996; Zahorik, 1988).

## Rationale

This study comprised three objectives: (1) to determine what pedagogical instructor behaviors do teacher trainees prefer for their training; (2) to determine which factors demonstrated had a greater impact on the teacher trainees’ achievements in their third and final year of study; the final objective was to compare the trainees’ declared preferred factors with the actual influential factors.

## Method

To determine what type of pedagogical instructor do teacher trainees prefer, a preliminary qualitative investigation was needed to construct the instruments for the quantitative research. The construction of the instruments included two preliminary stages: First, unstructured interviews were conducted, in which respondents, teacher trainees, freely reported their thoughts regarding the roles of the pedagogical instructor. Second, the responses presented in the unstructured interview were used to formulate closed questions for the quantitative measure to elicit the trainees’ perceptions of the role of the pedagogical instructor. Subsequently, a factor analysis was carried out to determine the major factor comprising the questionnaire. Groups were determined according to the students’ preferences regarding the type of preferred pedagogical instructor. An analysis of variance was computed to indicate the students’ preferred aspects of the pedagogical instructor’s role. Additionally, Pearson correlations between the revealed factors were computed. The questionnaire items were grouped into five relatively strong factors, explaining 55.33% of the variance.

To examine the relationships and factors of the research variables, a path analysis was carried out, as well as structural equation model (SEM) analysis. The SEM is based on the assumption of causality between the research variables and that the factors and their outcomes in the researched field can be identified. The path analysis examines the influence of independent variables on dependent variables while examining the influence of latent mediating variables. To examine the compatibility of the model, a chi-square test was performed with degrees of freedom equal to the difference between the number of known relationships and number of unknown indices. The non-significant chi-square test index confirmed the assumption that this model fits with the empirical data. The significant chi-square test index showed no proof that the model is correct.

## Results

An analysis of variance to examine the differences between the various expectations was performed, indicating significant differences between each one of the examined aspects, aside from the expectation for counseling and communication, which were found to be relatively low.

*Figure 1.* Means of Expectations from the pedagogical instructor’s role.

The findings showed that feedback is perceived by teacher trainees as the most important component of desired pedagogical instructor qualities, and then, in descending order: empowerment, professionalism, communication, and personal advice. These findings support a similar study that investigated the characteristics of the work of teacher mentors in which the pedagogical instructors ranked the instructors' role according to their level of importance. Those findings indicate that a feedback session following a lesson given by the trainee, is the most appreciated instructor function (Ziv et al.*,* 1995).

The path analysis produced the following results:



*Figure 2*: Findings of the research model of the entire sample.

The research model shows that the main factor predicting trainee achievement in applied work is professionalism, B=.32. However, the model also explains how two other factors significantly influence instructor’s professionalism: student enhancement (B=.42) and the communication with students (B=.49). The enhancement factor is predicted by feedback (B=.15), by communication (B=.54), and by counseling (B=.32). Counseling is influenced by feedback (B = .40), and feedback is influenced by communication (B=.45).

Comparison of the ranking Between the pedagogical Instructors traits preferred by student teachers and pedagogical instructor's traits that predict success in the practical work.

## Discussion

The first research objective was to identify which factors students in teacher training perceive as most associated with effective pedagogical instructors. Furthermore, these preferences were compared with the standard functions of pedagogical instructors, as reflected in the relevant professional literature. and which of these factors have preferences from the students' point of view. The second research objective was to identify which factors predict achievements in the teacher trainees’ practical work. In addition, the factors that the students preferred and the factors that influence their practical achievement were compared.

The quantitative research provided clear answers to the research questions. The description of the pedagogical instructor's role comprises five main factors, according to the initial objective of the research study. These factors are described below:

### Professionalism

The pedagogical instructor contributes to the ideological development of the perception of training for teaching and enhancing education and teaching in the field. The pedagogical instructors are responsible for establishing an ideological infrastructure of the college–field partnership and for outlining ways to promote the partnership (Emanuel, 2005). This work entails the management of an instrumental dialog with all the partners––teaching students, mentors, school faculty, and peers––to find solutions to problems arising from the field. In addition, pedagogical instructors must work to facilitate the students’ personal and professional growth as well as their personal development (Zilberstein, 2002; Zilberstein, 2005). These processes require abilities, skills, and knowledge in a wide variety of areas. Pedagogical instructors must be able to perform diverse actions. They must support the students, encourage them to seek the counsel of additional experts, observe student lessons, and provide both feedback and guidance (Ariav & Emanuel, 2006). They must also help the students integrate different types of knowledge: content knowledge, knowledge of the teaching of the knowledge field, analysis of different situations, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical learner knowledge, knowledge of educational context, and knowledge of educational needs (Panso, 1995; Shulman, 1987). Pedagogical instructors must be responsible for designing individual student programs at both the macro and micro levels for student advancement. They must design unique programs to provide diverse experiences in different learning environments where different kinds of knowledge are to be applied (Eraut & Hirsh, 2007). The knowledge types that pedagogical instructors must acquire are diverse (Dror, 2009). They must remain updated in the innovations in all pedagogical fields, as well as participate in different professional development formats in the framework of a learning community.

### Communication

Communication constitutes a key and integral element in meeting with students for the purpose of teaching and in providing feedback. Salomon stated that effective instruction requires various communication skills, such as attributing meanings and intentions to behaviors and to events. The emphasis is on the way that the trainee will implement their instructors’ lessons (Salomon, 1987). It was found that the instructors’ interpersonal traits and their interpersonal relations with their trainees are crucial to the quality of the instruction (Od-Cohen, 2004). Furthermore, the impact of the interpersonal dimension is equivalent to that the disciplinary knowledge regarding the component of teaching. Without solid interpersonal relations between the instructor and the instructed individual, the knowledge is not perceived as useful (Od-Cohen, 2004).

### Empowerment

Burk (1991) delineated five processes of empowerment. These include providing a direction, arousal (including intellectual, cognitive, and emotional stimulation), external rewards, internal rewards, development, and an appeal to the followers' needs.

### Advice

Pedagogical instructors must help the guided individual find solutions to personal and interpersonal conflicts that sabotage the learning process, to facilitate relations with the environment, to help develop skills of self-awareness and of independent thinking, and to provide social psychological support. This process might also influence the students’ ability to support the future population of students (Amir, & Vaknin, 1988; De Jong, Korthagen, & Wubbles, 1996; Irwin, 1997; Korthagen & Russell, 1995).

### Feedback

Pedagogical instructors are required to provide feedback regarding the practical experience and the learning process of the instructed population, to strengthen the learners, to evaluate them critically and constructively, and to filter out candidates who are unsuited for teaching (De Jong, Korthagen, & Wubbles, 1996; Korthagen & Russell, 1995; Koster, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 1998; Rubin, 1991). The supervisory interaction between the instructor and the instructed individual can be divided into three main stages, which are mutually related and mutually beneficial. The *pre-active stage* includes a session in preparation of the lesson the instructed individual is about to perform. The *active stage* includes observation by the instructor. The *post-active stage* includes a feedback session between trainee and instructor and further comments. The feedback session provides an interpretation of the various teaching situations that the instructor has observed and the instructed individual has performed (Acherson & Gall, 1980). Feedback sessions expose the supervised individual to insights derived from didactic events transpiring during the teaching. Reconstructing classroom events during the feedback session enables the supervised individual to judge and control the experience while accessing the achievements of the performance, and making rational and ethical decisions (Goodman, 1985; Russell, 1989).

Following the identification of the five factors, this research turned its attention to the students’ preferences. The findings indicated that feedback was perceived by students as the most important component for effective pedagogical instruction, followed in descending order by empowerment, professionalism, communication, and feedback. These findings support previous research in which the pedagogical instructors ranked the instructor's roles according to their level of importance. The findings also indicate that the feedback session is the most important role assigned to the instructor (Ziv et al., 1995).

This research has also shown that the prediction of the achievements is primarily related to professionalism, whereas the other factors intensify and strengthen the main factor.

Discrepancies between the students’ preferences regarding the pedagogical instructor's roles and the actual instructor factors comprising antecedents of the students’ practical work can be determined from the data. While the students find feedback to be the most important instructor factor, the research shows that the prediction of the achievements is primarily related to the pedagogical instructor’s factor of professionalism whereas other factors, including feedback, merely support and strengthen the main factor.

## Conclusions

The research reflects the existing gap between the roles of the pedagogical instructor as factors of success in the trainees’ practical work and the instructor functions most valued by the students. This gap is expressed in the preference that the students give to the feedback function, while the success in the students’ practical work relies on the professionalism of the pedagogical instructor. Based on these findings, the following action program can be offered as a practical step:

1. The gap between the students’ preference and the actual factors that predict success can be bridged if the findings of this research are presented to pedagogical instructors before being accepted into the instruction role and to the students before they begin their practical work, so that all participants can prepare for their respective role. Thus, both professionalism and feedback need to be valued by all participants.
2. Pedagogical instructor have a key role in the training of teachers. They are the key figures in the training process and in the process of transforming the student into a beginning teacher who assumes the management of a class. The findings indicated that the student-teachers’ achievement in their classroom work depends on the pedagogical instructor's professionalism. Surprisingly, the role of the pedagogical instructor does not require formal training. For the most part, veteran teachers who have succeeded in their work as expert teachers and hold a Master’s degree in education are accepted to the role of a pedagogical instructor. Based on this research, we recommend considering the population of pedagogical instructors to be a primary target for the empowerment through formal training by teacher training institutions, academic supervisory bodies, and the Ministry of Education. We also recommend considering the profession of pedagogical instructor as any other profession requiring specialization. Accordingly, the role of a pedagogical instructor should be upgraded to the status of pedagogical specialist.
3. The analysis of the research enables to delineate the components needed in order to improve the level of professionalism of the pedagogical instructor.
4. There must be coordination of expectations of the instructor and the instructed individual. It is necessary to have a process of clarification of the coordination of expectations between the instructors and the students especially regarding the qualities of a good teacher and what tools need to be acquired in order to achieve optimal teaching in the 21st century.
5. *The professionalism component***–** During the specialization studies of thepedagogical instructor, it is vital to address topics related to the following subjects: what makes a teacher a good teacher, how can the teaching process be enhanced. It is also necessary to become familiar with styles of instruction as well as the instruction process and instruction models.
6. *The communication component*– The students do not only comprise the supervised individuals, but are also partners on a long, mutual journey. As the pedagogical instructor extends the relevant knowledge related to the population of students in personal, theoretical, and practical aspects, there are more opportunities of the pedagogical instructor to manage proper communication, productive conversations and instructions aimed at facilitating the personal growth of every student.
7. *The empowerment component* - It is necessary to search for ways to empower the students and to increase their involvement in the learning process.
8. *The counseling component*– The pedagogical instructor is called upon to support students in integrating their studies. Thus, it is important for the pedagogical instructor to be engaged in issues, such as the characteristics of the adult learner, the learning process itself, the viewpoints of the instructors versus the viewpoints of the instructed in various topics and skills.
9. *The feedback component*– Feedback is an essential tool which helps the pedagogical instructor enhance student performance following each pedagogical instruction activity. The development of instruction abilities and feedback skills will help the pedagogical instructor in forming the students from a reflective point of view.

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