

An Overview of Prospective Teachers Teaching Practicum Challenges in District Peshawar, Pakistan

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This study aimed at analyzing problems and difficulties of prospective teachers during their teaching practicum. The data were collected purposively from 120 prospective teachers enrolled in B.Ed. (Hons) program at the University of Peshawar, Islamia College University Peshawar, and Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar. Data were generated using a standardized tool: Extended Practicum Learning Environment Inventory (EPLI). The findings show that prospective teachers faced several challenges related to their teaching practicum. These included anxiety of facing class, classroom management, school head expectations, assigned responsibilities, lesson planning, absence of triad meetings and seminars, rare supervisory visits, and inadequate evaluation and guidance. Moreover, the other challenges include the limited opportunities in school, freedom of lesson selection, lack of instructional materials, and various restrictions in the school. Given the issues, challenges and problems that prospective teachers encounter and face in their professional development, there is a need for harmonising and instituting processes, procedures, and practices within the teacher training institutes and teaching practicum schools so that concerted efforts are made for supporting the future teachers and leaders in their all-round development.

Keywords: *Prospective Teachers, Practicum, Challenges, Teacher Education, School-Based Training.*

Introduction

Teacher education institutes all over the world are working for quality education and aim at producing professionally trained teachers. These institutes teach theoretical knowledge and train teachers practically to make them skilful, creative, and professional in their practices. In such institutions, every student teacher must pass through a practical teaching course called a teaching practicum. Student teachers get first-hand real classroom teaching experience during teaching practicum, which are supervised by a trained and skilful mentor. Teaching practicum duration may vary from course to course and institution to institution (Heikonen *et al.*, 2017). For teaching practicum, many terminologies are used, which include practice teaching, student teaching, field studies, infield experience, teaching practice, internship, and school-based experience. According to Kabilan *et al.*, (2020), teaching practicum entails an array of practices associated with each other exercised by prospective teachers in a real classroom and school scenario. Teaching practicum may be defined as a time spent by prospective teachers under the supervision of a mentor teacher in order to gain teaching experience in a real classroom setting (Mudra, 2018).

Teaching practicum includes all learning experiences of prospective teachers in school, such as seeking teaching skills, adopting teaching strategies, understanding student psychology, learning the skills of teaching and classroom management, and the application of theory into a natural classroom environment (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018; Trent, 2018). Teaching practice makes prospective teachers ready for effective teaching in actual classroom conditions. Vo, Pang and Lee (2018) express that teaching practice gives prospective teachers a chance to improve their knowledge and teaching skills and prepare them for a natural classroom environment under mentor supervision.

In the context of Pakistan, given that four-year undergraduate teacher education programmes have been introduced during the last one decade, it would appear that all the stakeholders have not gotten used to the process and practice of the course and practicum components of these programmes. It is in this spirit that the current study sought to explore teaching practicum related experiences, challenges and problems of prospective teachers. The knowledge thus gained would not only help in understanding prospective teachers' teaching related problems, they will also provide insights into how to go about and tackle the challenges and problems encountered within teaching practicum related experience of the student teachers in the school or classroom contexts,

Literature Review

Jin, Parr, and Cooley (2020), contend that teaching practice encompasses both positive and negative experiences among prospective teachers and a variety of intimate, psychological, physical, emotional, social, environmental, and financial issues. An expert mentor usually

supervises teaching practicum for guidance and assessment of the prospective teacher (Zhu, Iglesia & Wang, 2020).

Due to its duration, pacing, planning, assessment, coursework, and mentoring, both for prospective teachers and mentors, it is widely assumed that teaching practice is the most complex and troublesome aspect of the course (Abdullah *et al.*, 2020). Aside from gaining interest through teaching experiences, prospective teachers face several teaching practicum challenges, including the uncertain position of prospective teachers in assessing their productivity in their students' eyes, apprehension of teaching for the first time, class supervision, parental participation, and expectations of the school head, social bias, workload, and other issues (Rupp & Becker, 2021).

Khan *et al.*, (2016) identified a number of problematic areas in teaching practicum that need to be addressed by the organization and mentor. This includes lack of triad meeting between prospective teachers, mentors, and school teachers, meetings at various intervals during the teaching practicum period to review the on-going process, a lack of workshops to discuss student issues, supervisory visits to schools that are infrequent, and improper assessment and instruction of prospective teachers.

Abbas and Lu (2015) found in their research that a majority of prospective teachers are not satisfied with the existing teaching practicum model due to its short duration. The research also reveals that the prospective teacher's role in practicing school is ambiguous and unclear because they cannot teach the class confidently. High expectations and lack of experience keep them constantly under pressure. Similarly, Karagöz and Rüzgar (2020) uncovered that for effective training, teaching practice should be flexible in time, course content, teaching methods, and teaching, for which the current model of teaching practice is not flexible enough for prospective teachers.

Kabilan *et al.*, (2020) found that teaching practicum influences prospective teacher's decision to choose teaching as a profession. They face various challenges like inadequate training, terrestrial distance, little and weak degree of teaching skills, non-existence of resources and discipline, their unclear role in the school. These challenges should be overcome for making teaching practicum more advantageous and improving prospective teachers' professional capabilities.

Jin, Parr and Hui (2020) found that prospective teachers complain about the shortage of teaching aids and laboratory equipment, which create hurdles in subject teaching; lack of experience also creates issues for teaching to lower classes. Despite all the good and bad experiences, teaching practicum to make them confident, learned, experienced and professionally grown teachers. Adam, Bekoe, and Poatob (2018) highlighted the issues of teaching practicum length and timings. The short duration of teaching practicum influenced

prospective teachers' proper training, while inappropriate teaching practicum timing should be revised to facilitate student teachers.

Inarsih, Seli and Syafitri (2021) found that selection of practicing school, non-readiness of student teacher for teaching, lack of knowledge and training, mentor favoritism in assessment marking, and unawareness of mentorship skills are some challenges that may lead the teaching practicum program towards failure to achieve its goals. Similarly, Shah, Ahmad and Raza (2020) reveal the challenges that prospective teachers experience during their practical teaching phase, such as short duration, limited opportunity for teaching all subjects, negligence of choice while assigning lessons, unequal time allocation for theory and practice, and unaccountability. Prospective teachers should be provided the opportunity to demonstrate a lesson in various subjects to different students' levels to get sufficient experience and knowledge (Van *et al.*, 2020).

Rupp and Becker (2021) indicated that prospective teachers, regardless of their sex and program, experience anxiety during their teaching practice. Due to the exciting and challenging nature of teaching practicum, there is a need to address various concerns that student teachers face during their teaching practicum phase. These include anxieties about evaluation, class control, inadequate professional preparation, relation with host school staff, first-time teaching, the expectation of host school, remarks of the supervisor. Therefore it is important to train prospective teachers for any unfavorable and uncertain condition that may happen during their teaching practice.

Kamila (2021) reveals the strength teaching practicum including students dealing, classroom management, applying theories into practice, bonding a relation and support with their peer, critical thinking skills, etc. while poor management, supervision, assessment and evaluation, the improper linkage between university and school, lack of interest, etc. are some of the weaknesses of teaching practicum program. He suggests developing the teaching practicum program with all stakeholders' collaboration to make it more beneficial for students.

Amor *et al.* (2020) indicated the importance of lesson plans and its related challenges. Teaching method, time management, delivering of the lesson, and specifying the education objectives are some issues that need to be solved. Deocampo (2020) suggests that prospective teachers can overcome the challenges of lesson planning and teaching practice by acquiring knowledge in seminars, providing first-hand experiences of the classroom, relaxation in teaching without lesson plans, and making some judgments among lessons with and without lesson plans.

Li (2016) indicated that teaching practice length should be long and distributed among several phases. Assessment and evaluation should be clearly criterion base to get the actual picture of prospective teacher's progress.

Abdullah *et al.* (2020) reveal the challenges that prospective teachers experience during their practical teaching phase, such as short duration, limited opportunity for teaching all subjects, negligence of choice while assigning lessons, unequal time allocation for theory and practice, and unaccountability. Prospective teachers should be provided an opportunity to demonstrate a lesson in various subjects to different students' levels so they can get sufficient experience and knowledge.

Prospective teachers during their teaching practicum face various challenges of controlling, disciplining, and managing in the real classroom environment (Mudra, 2018). Prospective teachers sometimes have to handle parents, which they are not trained for, dealing with the parents of students who visit the school and investigate their children's progress or any other issue which parents want to discuss with teachers create a lot of confusion for prospective teachers (Kamila, 2021).

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of all student teachers enrolled in various B.Ed. programmes (B.Ed. Hons., B.Ed. 1.5 and B.Ed. 2.5) and were those that had gone through teaching practicum experiences. A sample of 120 out of 147 student teachers was selected purposively from Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, University of Peshawar, and Islamia College University Peshawar.

Instrument and Data Collection

The data were collected through an adapted form of the Extended Practicum Learning Environment Inventory (Kennedy, 2006) from respondents. Consisting of 100 items, the tool relied on a five point Likert scale for gathering responses of the respondents.

Data Analysis

The data were collected, arranged, and analysed through simple percentages as the standard measure of statistics.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the problems prospective teachers faced during teaching practice. The information gathered from this study may lead to restructuring how teaching practice is organized and delivered to student teachers and to take measures to resolve the issues prospective teachers face during teaching practicum.

Statement of the Problem

Bringing quality in education rests on the content knowledge and teaching skills of teachers. In training prospective teachers, the transition from theoretical aspects to practical teaching is a critical phase in which the trainee teachers face many challenges regarding teaching. Moreover, subject knowledge and mastery over modern teaching techniques are also

essential, which need support from mentors and administration. Several studies have been conducted on the vital issue of strengthening the teacher education programs, which involve capacity building of the prospective teachers. The current study aimed at highlighting and exploring the problems of the prospective teachers during their practical teaching.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore the challenges of prospective teachers during teaching practicum.
- Analyse the needed support prospective teachers get during their teaching practicum.
- Suggest measures for improving teaching practicum.

Research Questions

The study sought to explore the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of student teachers regarding teaching practicum?
- What problems do prospective teachers face during teaching practicum?

Results and Discussion

Table-1: Personal Problems and Challenges

| S# | Attribute | SUIT | | ICU | | U O P | | Average | |
|----|--------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | |
| | | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low |
| 1 | High Anxiety | 73 | 27 | 60 | 40 | 56 | 44 | 63 | 37 |
| 3 | Expectations | 76 | 24 | 48 | 52 | 89 | 11 | 71 | 29 |
| 4 | Work Load | 55 | 45 | 80 | 20 | 53 | 47 | 63 | 37 |
| 5 | Unclear Role | 62 | 38 | 74 | 26 | 45 | 55 | 60 | 40 |

Table 1 indicates high anxiety (63%) among prospective teachers during teaching practicum, which includes teaching for the first time and feeling of being observed. The majority of prospective teachers (71%) were unaware of the school head and staff members' expectations. School head and other staff expect them to perform like an experienced teacher, but a lack of experience and skills affect their performance. 63% of the prospective teachers complained about the heavy workload that consisted of preparing AVv aids, writing lesson plans and teaching classes. 60% of the prospective teachers reported their ambiguous role as a teacher. Pupils knew that they were not their real teachers; therefore, they were ignored; prospective teachers observed a clear autonomy difference.

Tabel-2: Academic Problems and Challenges

| S# | Attribute | SUIT | | ICU | | U O P | | Average | |
|----|----------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | |
| | | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low |
| 1 | Lesson Planning | 87 | 13 | 90 | 10 | 67 | 33 | 81 | 18 |
| 2 | Class Control | 78 | 22 | 69 | 31 | 63 | 37 | 70 | 30 |
| 3 | Opportunities | 64 | 36 | 74 | 26 | 50 | 50 | 62 | 37 |
| 4 | Choice of Lesson Selection | 90 | 10 | 84 | 16 | 66 | 34 | 80 | 20 |

Table 2 shows prospective teachers' academic problems during teaching practicum, among which lesson planning was a burning issue for a high number (81%) of the student teachers. Writing a lesson plan and applying it accordingly was a very challenging experience for prospective teachers, and they found it difficult to teach exactly according to the lesson plan. 70% of the respondents recorded that class control was a tough task for them. They faced behavioral and discipline issues from pupils in the classroom. Many prospective teachers (62%) did not participate in co-curricular activities, administration-related tasks, and practical work of different school records. Lack of such opportunities deprived them of rich experiences. Choice of lesson selection was not given to prospective teachers. They were instructed to complete and follow the course syllabus.

Table-3: Problems and Challenges related with Mentor and Cooperative Teacher

| S# | Attribute | SUIT | | ICU | | U o P | | Average | |
|----|--------------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | | Percent Severity | |
| | | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low |
| 1 | Rare visits | 80 | 20 | 90 | 10 | 70 | 30 | 80 | 20 |
| 2 | Meeting | 82 | 18 | 90 | 10 | 65 | 35 | 79 | 21 |
| 3 | Seminars | 51 | 49 | 72 | 28 | 56 | 44 | 60 | 40 |
| 4 | Improper Evaluation | 59 | 41 | 87 | 13 | 53 | 47 | 66 | 34 |
| 5 | Cooperative teachers' Guidance | 60 | 40 | 75 | 25 | 55 | 45 | 63 | 37 |

Mentors play a key role in teaching practicum and in prospective teachers' learning and acquiring knowledge and experience; however, prospective teachers experienced various problems pertaining to mentors. Most prospective teachers (80%) responded

that their mentors and faculty members paid very few visits to their practicum schools and the visits that they did were for a short time, which were not productive in feedback and solution of their teaching practicum related queries and problems. Most (i.e. 79%) of the respondents were revealed about lack of triad meetings amongst prospective teachers, cooperative teachers, and university mentor teachers for evaluating the progress and addressing the shortcomings in teaching practicum. 60% of prospective teachers did not attend any seminars regarding teaching practicum. They were not aware of the objectives of practicum and the expectation of university teachers. Improper evaluation, marking, and lack of proper guidance were reported by 66% of respondents. 63% of prospective teachers responded about the lack of cooperation and guidance of cooperative teachers in classroom management and pedagogical support.

Table-4: Administrative Problems and Challenges

| S# | Attribute | SUIT | | ICU | | U o P | | Average | |
|----|--------------------------|----------|-----|----------|-----|----------|-----|----------|-----|
| | | Percent | | Percent | | Percent | | Percent | |
| | | Severity | | Severity | | Severity | | Severity | |
| | | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low | High | Low |
| 1 | Parental Involvement | 78 | 22 | 64 | 36 | 55 | 45 | 65 | 34 |
| 2 | Limited Opportunities | 76 | 24 | 81 | 19 | 59 | 41 | 72 | 28 |
| 3 | Lack of Resources | 80 | 20 | 90 | 10 | 60 | 40 | 76 | 23 |
| 4 | Restrictions | 67 | 33 | 75 | 25 | 56 | 44 | 66 | 34 |
| 5 | Social Bias and Attitude | 63 | 37 | 69 | 31 | 65 | 35 | 65 | 34 |

Table 4 shows problems of the prospective teachers encountered during teaching practicum from the administration side. Thus, prospective teachers faced challenges in involving parents in the ongoing learning process of their children. 65% of the student teachers experience lack of parental involvement and a communication gap between prospective teachers and parents. A high ratio of 72% of prospective teachers complained about limited opportunities provided by school administration which include involvement of prospective teachers in administration work, school meetings and co-curricular activities. Prospective teachers were limited only to accomplishing their teaching practicum phase; moreover, they were discouraged from using innovative teaching methods. The majority of prospective teachers (76%) complained of supporting materials in the schools required for their instructional needs, which included stationery, AV aids, Internet, and printing and copying.

Prospective teachers also face a lack of infrastructural resources like useable washrooms, open access to use library and computer lab and staffroom. 66% of prospective teachers were restricted only to their class; they had no chance of informal discussion with students other than their class and school teachers. Prospective teachers were restricted from continuing the running syllabus and accomplishment of the work. Similarly, prospective teachers complained about the attitude of the school head, which exemplified a master-slave transaction. 65% of the prospective teachers faced social biasness and attitude problems from school staff, administration, and students due to their lack of experience and maturity; they constantly failed to observe school rules and regulations and code of conduct which lead to the harsh attitude.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, prospective teachers faced identity issues and their students did not accept them as their teachers. They were not familiar with school teaching and non-teaching staff. They were nervous while facing, teaching and evaluating the class. The length of the teaching practicum was not enough for the acquisition of knowledge. Lack of planning for various activities and proper briefing about the teaching practicum process was observed. The teachers were not involved in school meetings and in co-curricular activities. They were not well prepared for lesson planning. Preparing A.V aids for the lesson was a difficult task for prospective teachers.

Prospective teachers reported issues in the timetable and complained about heavy workload and choice in subjects and class selection, which affected their teaching practicum and learning. There was no seminar and regular triad meeting to address their problems. The supervisor was not present all the time in the school to evaluate and guide them. Lesson planning was not regularly and properly checked by supervisors. Prospective teachers were not aware of the school's basic facilities, including washrooms, canteen, staff room, etc. The computer and science laboratory and library were not accessible for them. Classroom management and student discipline remained a constant problem for the majority of the prospective teachers. Student behavioral problems and lack of prospective teacher's skill to handle it was reported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prospective teachers should be properly guided before they go for teaching practicum; they should be aware of the host school head, teachers, and pupils' expectations. Their duties in the school should be mentioned to them, and they must be aware of their parent department's expectations.
- The practicum school head, teaching staff, and other administrative staff should be guided appropriately about prospective teachers' strengths and areas of improvement to help them in teaching and other activities properly.

- Prospective teachers should be provided a chance to work on various school registers and should be given a chance in school administration.
- Prospective teachers should be provided a chance to sit in school meetings and engaged in various activities of school.
- Prospective teachers should be treated like school teachers; they should be given full teacher's status; proper involvement in co-curricular activities can boost their courage and provide a chance of self-identity as a teacher.
- Proper transport facilities should be provided to ensure on-time arrival of student teachers to their school. Moreover, proper arrangement of refreshment in break may also be provided to them.
- Prospective teachers should be provided remuneration for their teaching practicum, which can decrease their financial problems and help them motivate towards their profession.
- Proper practice over lesson plans and A.V aids should be provided to reduce the chances of errors.
- Prospective teachers should be given the freedom of not using lesson plan in special cases.
- Those schools should be selected for teaching practicum where proper infrastructure and facilities are available.
- A pleasant, supportive and friendly environment should be provided to prospective teachers to share and discuss with cooperative teachers.
- Prospective teachers should be provided needed materials for the teaching.
- Prospective teachers should be given freedom of subject, lesson, and class selection; moreover, freedom of sitting in a class other than their own and permission of peer teaching observation should be given.
- Proper guidance and instruction should be given about pupils' behavioral and discipline problems.
- A relaxed and soft target should be provided to student teachers; too much pressure, workload and restriction should be avoided.



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