TEACHING PRACTICUM: TEACHER-EDUCATORS' AND STUDENT-TEACHERS' VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Kamal Ud Din
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Development,
Karakoram International University, Gilgit Balitstan, Pakistan
kamal@kiu.edu.pk

Dil Angaiz
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Development,
Karakoram International University, Gilgit Balitstan, Pakistan
dilangaiz@kiu.edu.pk

Musarat Jehan
Visiting Lecturer, Department of Educational Development,
Karakoram International University, Gilgit Balitstan, Pakistan
jhn_msrt@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
The present study aimed to assess the complexity of teaching practicum and its effectiveness from both the perspectives of teacher-educators and student-teachers in one of the public sector universities in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews were taken from four teacher-educators and 25 student-teachers. The interview-data were analyzed thematically. Feedback from school mentors and hosting-department supervisor was not available to student-teachers as expected. Student-teachers' excitement to have school experiences of engaging with children was the area of motivation for student-teachers to learn. Teacher-educators felt challenging to provide quality feedback to student teachers due to heavy workload, high number of students as well as the un-interest of student-teachers in their own learning. We recommend introducing a reward system for the school mentors as well as transport facility for hosting-department supervisors to access easily to the student-teachers to address their expectations in a timely and effective manner.
Keywords: Teacher Education; Student-teachers; Practicum; Prospective teachers; Perspectives

INTRODUCTION
Practicum as a course for B. Ed honors is offered in all professional teacher training institutions and universities in Pakistan (Iqbal, Naseem, & Azam, 2020; Khan, Batool, & Deeba, 2021; Ulla, 2016). Ulla (2016, p. 236) emphasized the role of teaching practicum that "Teaching practicum is an integral part of student-teachers' education curriculum as it provides place for student-teachers to use or to apply learned theories in real classroom settings." Teaching practicum is actually an "infield experience" as described by Gujjar et al., 2011, p. 303). Teaching practicum is also named as 'Teaching-Practice' by many teachers which aims to serve the purpose of preparing student-teachers for actual teaching later on when they get opportunity to teach as their professional career (Gujjar et al., 2011).

Teaching practicum serves the said purpose as: (1) It enlightens student teachers with the sensitivity towards the problems related to learners, (2) It familiarizes them with an understanding of how learning takes place, (3) It makes the student teacher to cope with classroom management issues such as disciplinary issues. (4) It develops student-teachers' content knowledge as well pedogical knowledge (Gower, Walters, & Phillip, 1983). The way these goals are accomplished has three key elements at work: student teacher, teacher educator and a mentor at school, who usually works voluntarily with an assigned student teacher to supervise (Aglazor, 2017).

Thus, a mutual cooperation of these three key elements is essential for an effective teacher training or teacher education program. Teaching practicum is considered the most crucial component of the B. Ed. Honors degree at training institutions and universities in Pakistan. It's because the

student-teachers learn different theories, methods and strategies in sessions which they, later on, apply in actual teaching at schools.

In Pakistani context, research studies into teacher education program reveal that teaching practicum is as a key component, however, those studies also indicate various concerns on the effectiveness and quality of teaching practicum or teaching practice (Aglazor, 2017; Ulla, 2016). Iqbal et al., (2020) indicate one such factor that the guidebook, designed to help prospective teachers could not be *implemented* while student teachers worked in the filed for the tasks required as part of the practicum. Theories taught, plans designed earlier than the field practice all depend on what goes on in the field and how the field experiences are perceived, interpreted and coped with for the challenges as it poises. When they (student teachers) visit actual classroom settings; when they read about the actual content or books to teach, only then they get idea how they can encounter with various problems from community, seniors, school management, parents and students. In this connection, problems specific to female prospective teachers are also under limelight as Khan, Butt, Bibi, Malik, & Khattak (2021) indicate that female student-teachers' motivation not being high enough to a full participation in the teaching practicum as they felt unsure about teaching as their career.

According to Dilshad (2010, p. 88), "Teacher education in Pakistan is undergoing serious problems impeding its overall performance and effectiveness." In Khan, Deeba & Batool's (2021) words, "changing culture of teacher education in Pakistan seem to redefine and reinterpret teacher educators' roles in transforming prospective teachers' beliefs" (p. 545). Enough studies have been conducted to highlight teacher educators' and student- teachers' experiences from the field, however, there is a need to find out about a continuous update how field experiences of teacher educators and student teachers impede teaching quality. It is more so, as teacher education program in Pakistan are going through newly designed curriculum and thus are in their formative phases (Khan, Deeba, & Batool, 2021; Iqbal et al., (2021). Khan et al., (2021) even indicates that the area of teaching practicum being overlooked by researchers. Thus, the present study attempts to have a more elaborative approach to explore student-teachers pedagogical and content-based teaching practicum experiences. The understanding of student-teachers' and teacher educators' lived experiences and perspectives will bring forth the factors contributing to either effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the course. The findings of the study will help making better decisions regarding managing teaching practicum not only in the sampled university but also other teacher education programs to keep in mind the factors that may contribute to the effectiveness of teaching practicum.

Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To assess the expectations of teacher-educators and student-teachers from Teaching Practicum Course implemented as part of teacher education program.
2. To elaborate the challenges and difficulties students' teachers and teacher educators face during teaching practicum for B. Ed (Hons) students in the selected site of the study (Gilgit-Baltistan).
3. To describe key suggestions by teacher educators and student teachers in order to make teaching practicum more effective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Quality teacher as rising concerns in Pakistan

Quality teacher in Pakistan as indicated in all national education policies (e.g., Government of Pakistan, 2017) has been a matter of concern for decades. Teachers being responsible for the quality of teaching process are subjected to external pressures in order to define and refine teaching methods and approaches and courses of action (International Crisis Group, 2014; Riasat et al., 2018). In the modern era of technology and its use in the field of education has increased demands for teacher training (Ahmed et al., 2014). Therefore, the very concept of teaching is shifting from a 'traditional' to 'modern' definitions—which mostly translated into 'transfer of knowledge' to 'transformational' role of teaching (Khan, Hussain, & Khan, 2016). According to traditional concept, teaching consisted of teacher presentation of knowledge and demonstration of teaching aids, whereas, in modern concept of teaching involves active involvement of learners in the creation and restructuring of knowledge (Rajagopalan, 2019; Recine, 2018). The traditional competitive views of teaching as either 'art' or

'science' has also been subsided and many believe it to be both (Ahmad, et al, 2016). As an art teaching means the use of imaginative and artistic abilities to create a worthwhile classroom learning environment; and teaching as a 'science' means the use of logical, scientific, systematic and mechanical or procedural steps for the attainment of teaching goals (Recine, 2018).

Teaching practicum as a key component of all teacher education programs are also redefined in alignment with the modern teaching concepts. Literature review provides three key connotations for teaching practicum: (1) Development of teaching necessary for quality teaching (2) Understanding the nature of experiences within school setting including interaction with learners. (3) Supporting to linking theory and practice (Gujjar et al., 2011). Teaching practice as course of study also involves provision of opportunities to use and nurture their skills before they apply their professional knowledge in actual school setting (Nigidi & Sibaya, 2003).

Major factors affecting quality teaching

There are a number of factors involved that affect teaching quality in the whole country which are classified in broad categories into social, political, religious, cultural and economic related issues (Din, Javed, & Altaf, 2018; ICG, 2014; Mahmood, 2014). We studied problems specific to teacher-training related in the literature so as to narrow down the range of problems. We found that a number of such factors namely (1) Teachers having a culture of focus more on paper work than practice, (2) Lack of motivation, interest and student-teacher's commitment (Government of Pakistan, 2009, 2017) (3) lack of support from the supervisors (Gujjar et al., 2011) (4) and inadequate time for teaching practicum (Gujjar et al, 2011, Din et al., 2018). Moreover, during teaching practice student-teachers are restricted only to classroom teaching, that is, they are not fully allowed to see how a school system works as a whole social unit. Studies also indicate that school environment is another key factor which is not often welcoming to internee teachers (Ulla, 2016).

Literature review implies a grand shift in conceptualizing teaching process itself due to perpetually changing demands on education. Various research studies report and suggest that filed studies which could bring forth factors that are hidden and directly affect teachers who are working in the field (Din et al., 2018). The study has further justification as both teacher educators and student-teachers in various training and degree awarding institutions face a number of challenges (Gujjar et al., 2011) due to recently brought about reforms in the overall structures and curriculum of TE in Pakistani. Hence, the present study takes up this dimension of assessing the effectiveness of teacher education program by studying student teachers, and teacher educators live experiences in the field.

METHODS

According to Cresswell (2005) qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem related to human life and their experiences that take place in natural settings. Thus, following a qualitative case study approach we selected a university department running pre-service teacher education program (B. Ed Honors) in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan.

Sampling

Using purposive sampling technique, four teacher-educators and a whole class of last semester student-teachers (25) were accessed to take an informed consent to participate in the present study. Faculty members were senior lectures, PhDs with at least ten years teaching experiences in the education department of the selected public sector university. They faculty member interviewed had also been involved in supervising practicum course.

Data Collection Tool: Semi Structured-Interviews

Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with both the faculty members as well as the student-teachers under teaching practicum. The contents of the interviews were taken in local language (Urdu) — a translated version later on were showed to the participants for confirmation of the views they were represented in the translated version of the interview. Various themes were identified after going through the process of coding and recoding of the contents of the interviews multiple times. These themes were described in detail with the help of participants' provided text or content.

Data Analysis

We studied the 'meaning' of practicum for teacher educator and student-teachers to assess its effectiveness. We used constant comparison principle to combine teacher educators and student-teachers views in order to find similarities and gaps between their perspectives using the four-point

model by Strauss and Corbin (1967, p. 105): "(1) Comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory".

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Common themes emerged from the interview discussion were about the necessary help (lack of required support) student teachers reported was (1) that they expected full cooperation from their supervisors which was not met (2) School level supervisors did not care much how they taught and what challenges they faced (3) Students-teachers were not sure whether they were doing right or wrong as timely feedback on their progress was not provided. (4) Some problems were specific to female student-teachers that they were demotivated as it was uncertain whether their parents would allow them to go for teaching career or not; they seemed to do that activity just to complete their degrees and do something other than teaching. (5) The school staff, supervisors, teachers and managers, where student teachers were practicing, showed lack of support. (6) For these problems, the key reason seemed to be the fact that the school management had to entertain a high number of student-teachers at a time. (7) For the school management, it became a perpetual managerial issue to handle new student teachers every semester. (8) It was also because there was no proper orientation and introduction of student-teachers into the school staff and other related personal. It was discussed with teacher educators who reported that (9) they had 'too much to do' at the department. They admitted that they could not reach every student teacher individually. (10) They reported that they had to send the prospective teachers for practice to those schools which are nearest and easy to monitor, however it increases the risk of overburdening school supervisors with higher number of students. (11) There was no provision of transport facility to the faculty supervisors to reach to students timely. These keys identified themes are further discussed below.

DISCUSSION

Student-teacher's realization that they needed feedback is a good gesture in terms of their motivation to learn teaching skills however their expectation of a timely feedback from their supervisors was not satisfied. Feedback as teaching and training process is thought to be an essential component for quality teaching. However, some experts see the ambivalent role of feedback (e. g., Mory, 2004; Murphy, 2006). On the other hands other experts believe that giving feedback is better than not giving feedback at all (Thalheimer, 2008). Agudo and Dios theorize the way feedback impacts on learners is subject to the quality of feedback as only quality feedback provided by mentor teachers during practicum can contribute student-teachers' identity as teachers and perception about teaching (Agudo & Dios, 2016).

Student-teachers' filed learning experiences

A participant enlisted what they learned from their first-time field experiences: (1) to handle disruptive students, (2) to select the most adequate method to teach, (3) applied their ideas (4) observed others teacher. Participant 5 said, "I liked engaging students in practical works during teaching practicum". Respondent 1 said, "I liked to do the most the small hands-on activities with students ... I also liked to do discussions with students." Respondent 10 said, "I liked the discussion with students on different topics." Three other respondents reported to have enjoyed understanding children. Student-teachers' participants were of the view that their speaking skills were enhanced during practicum.

One last but not least point was regarding problem, student-teachers reported, that they were not provided the chance to teach the subject of their interest in schools. When we look at previous studies, we found similar findings as some studies count teaching practicum as an opportunity to provide 'real life' experiences to the student (Saifi, Sherzaman, Shah, Idrees, & Zaman, 2013). Classroom field experiences, in view of Dueck, Altmann, Haslett, & Latimer (1984, as cited in Gallego, 2001, p. 313), "provide prospective teachers with occasion to explore teaching as a potential career, practice teaching skills, and become socialized into the teacher role." Previous studies also report teaching practicum as (1) As an opportunity to apply theory (2) sources of revising knowledge in real life situation (Saifi, Sherzaman, Shah, Idrees, & Zaman, 2013).

Student-teacher's expectations from the course and teacher educators

Meeting student's expectations is a good indicative of the effectiveness of teacher education program. Some students said that they did not expect much. However, a significant majority seemed to lack

feedback from their supervisor teachers. In views of a participant, teaching practicum must create an opportunity for a student teacher to be a *good teacher*. Participant 3 said, "My expectation from this course of teaching practicum is that it should enable me to learn new methods of teaching and must help me out in to be a *good teacher*. Other participants seemed to be complaining about the limited exposure provided to them. In response to a question, which was intended to know the student-teachers' perceptions whether their expectations from teaching practicum were met or not. Respondent 9 said, "Yes, there were some expectations fulfilled such as: to make good lesson plans, to manage classroom, to use best methodologies." These perceptions of student teachers were however context dependent. According to Lawson et al., (2015) teaching practicum provides a context to shape the beliefs of student-teachers (Borup, Brown, Konrad, & Van Lente, 2006).

Teacher educators' expectations from the course and student-teachers

Teacher educators seemed to have expectation in form of complaints against student teachers as one participant (teacher educator) said, "Students show no seriousness in practical work", and "........they do not try to overcome any misunderstanding in concepts that they learn during class." Besides, teacher educators or supervisor-teachers seemed to rely more on school supervisors which seemed unrealistic. While a student respondent said, "In Pakistani school context, it is hard to apply the knowledge practically because the education setup hinders due to its rigidity." Teacher educator cum supervisor recognized that there was not system to officially recognize and reward the school supervisors.

Student-teachers' expectations were discussed with the teacher educators regarding the course of their choice. Again, they blamed school supervisor to have not cooperated with them in the matter. Teacher educators reported that the school supervisors assign course of those teachers who remain absent. There is no mechanism to meet this expectation [that student teacher be given the choice to teach the subject of their choice). Reflecting on the current situation of schools in Pakistan Gujjar et al. (2011) stated that the schools where teaching practicum is conducted are doing nothing but only pass time during teaching practicum and thus it is taken not seriously (Ababio, 2013; Ali, 2011).

Challenges during practicum

In views of student-teachers, various types of challenging were reported: First, school supervisors, in order to monitor student teachers, are usually appointed by the teacher education institution on voluntary basis. In case of high number of students, such supervisors fail to guide student teachers at school due to their own scheduled activities and responsibilities. From teacher educators, one reported that they cannot force schoolteachers to fulfil such a huge responsibility without any incentives. Another respondent who was student teacher said, "I found it challenging as the school staff was not cooperative. The school staff treated us like strangers and did not provide us the required information about teachers, timetable and classroom location. They did not offer even where to sit in free time". Other student teachers also reported that the mentor teachers didn't cooperate at all. Another respondent said, "Yes, teaching practicum was challenging, it included managing time, dealt with students of different mentality in limited time." Overall, the responses from the respondents implied that the prescribed time for teaching practicum was not sufficient, which deprived them to be fully engaged in and for lasting time to teaching practice (Ababio, 2013; Ali, 2011).

Respondent 10 also said, "Overwhelming strength of students in a classroom, lack of background knowledge about students' were the challenges." Other challenges included (1) lack of support from school supervisor, (2) lack of support from school staff in helping with necessary information about time table, classrooms and school timings (3) dealing with difficult students in class, (4) rude or unfriendly behavior of teacher in schools (the problems was more obvious with female teachers) (5) insufficient time frame (6) in appropriate time for school based practices and finally both student-teachers and teacher educator reported that recently practicum had become even more challenging due to frequent closing and opening of schools due to the Covid-19 situation.

Suggestions for the improvement

Questions regarding the improvement of the program were asked from both the student-teachers and teacher educators. From the student teachers it was suggested that (1) the time during of practicum should be increased (2) Teacher educators should be given enough time to guide them in teaching activities (3) teacher educators should provide them with timely feedback on their work (4) their subject of choice be given to teach in order to maintain their motivation (5) School staff and school-

based supervisor's support should be ensured by the university department. Table 1 shows summary of the major themes discussed above.

Table No. 1 Summary of findings: Significant Themes

Key Findings	Perspectives	
Categories	Teacher educators	Students' teachers
Experiences	(1) Lacking time to visit schools (2) No mechanism to monitor progress	Exciting as new experience, (2) Enjoyable interaction with school kids, (3) Observation of other teachers teaching
Expectations	(1) Students become self-learners, (2) Students to be serious and self-motivated, (3) overcome no-serious attitude	(1) Expected full support from school supervisors, (2) Expected timely and quality feedback from hosting department supervisors, (3) Opportunity to teach the subject of their choice, (4) Information about school culture and functioning
Challenges	(1) cannot guide individual students properly (2), overloaded office work, (3) unavailability of transport facility to visit schools	(1) Lack of support from school supervisors, (2) Lack of support from school staff, (3) Lack of feedback from hosting department, (4) No access to school related information: e. g. information about as timetable, location, class, subject, (5) Difficult to handle disruptive students, (6) Lack of motivation, specifically by females
Suggestions	(1) Reward to school supervisors	(1) Manage time to reach individual student, (2) Communication between school supervisor and hosting department supervisors

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We aimed to understand factors that either enhance or hamper the effectiveness of teaching practicum as a course at B. Ed honors in one of the university departments (Education) from Pakistan. We conclude with highlighting key findings: a key strength is students' motivation and excitement as new experience of interacting with school kids. Student-teacher's awareness of learning from other teachers experiences at school were the positive side which can be utilized as strengths and motivating tools for the effectiveness of the program. A second approach is to address the challenges faced by student-teachers. They face challenges to get familiarized with the functioning, timing and culture and norms within school. They need a mechanism to be properly and formerly introduced to the school staff so that they could take all relevant person into confidence and that's how student teachers would be more motivated and in case of any help needed they could access school staff. Their 'strangeness' at school should be overcome with full cooperation and care. A significant need emerged is to develop a mechanism of reward system for school supervisors. They serve freely due to which the hosting department (university) faculty and both student-teachers seemed to be obliged to them and cannot confidently seek their support in time. Besides, university department should be authorized to use transport system in order to reach student teachers timely to address their issues and guide and provide them necessary or required feedback. It will enhance their motivation as well as save their time and energy. The university supervisors may provide proper guidance on the subject of practicum before sending students on practicum as an alternative strategy if they fail to find time to give direct feedback. Since the school supervisors have to spare a lot of time to monitor, guide and support student teachers, they should be provided certain incentives, if not rewarded in cash or so, so that they should not feel that they are giving time, energy and guidance for free to so many student-teachers. Researcher can investigate into the present study problem with a quantitative methodology in order to bring more generalizable results to enhance its applicability.

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