

Bridging Theory and Practice: Assessing the Effectiveness of Teaching Practicums in the B.Ed. (Hons) Program at the IER, University of Peshawar

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the teaching practicum at the B.Ed. (Hons) level at the Institute of Education and Research (IER) at the University of Peshawar. Aimed at evaluating how well the practicum prepares future educators for contemporary classrooms, the research focused on students from the 2021-2023 cohort. Utilizing purposive sampling, data was gathered from 130 prospective teachers who had completed their practicum experience. An adapted version of the Extended Practicum Learning Environment Inventory (EPLI) was employed to assess various dimensions of their training, and the data was analyzed using SPSS software. The findings reveal that the practicum significantly enhanced students' pedagogical skills, classroom management abilities, and student interaction capabilities. However, despite these gains, participants indicated that supervision support was insufficient and highlighted a critical need for improvement in this area. Additionally, the practicum's duration was perceived as inadequate, affecting overall satisfaction levels. The study concludes with targeted recommendations aimed at refining supervisory practices and adjusting the practicum duration to better support teacher development and effectiveness in real-world educational settings.

Keywords: Teacher education, prospective, teachers, teaching practicum, pre-service teacher support

Introduction

According to Shah et al., (2022), a successful educational system depends on the development of good teachers, and teacher education programmes are the cornerstone of this process. These courses are designed to give aspiring teachers the knowledge, abilities, and characteristics they'll need to succeed in today's schools and workplaces. The practicum, which gives students supervised, in-school experiences that help them comprehend the full breadth

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of a teacher's responsibility, is a crucial element of these programmes. Many experts contend that in terms of preparing future teachers, practicum experiences are more beneficial than conventional classroom-based courses (Tartavulea et al., 2020).

Brinia and Psoni (2022) stated that a teaching practicum needs to be integrated as a key element of teacher education courses to be successful. This is because teaching practicum is a crucial component of creating competent educators, and the quality of educational systems is only as good as the quality of its teachers. Notwithstanding its significance, there is constant discussion over the caliber of teaching practicum programs around the world among education stakeholders. Hence, all parties involved must understand the importance of teaching practicum and collaborate to raise the standard of teacher preparation.

Background

Prospective teachers can obtain practical professional experience in schools through student teaching practicum, a crucial part of teacher education (Kosar, 2021). This hands-on training enables them to develop key teaching skills and competencies while working under the guidance of more seasoned educators, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and actual classroom settings. Deocampo (2020) revealed that the major objectives of student teaching are to transform educational theories into useful teaching strategies and to raise the standard of instruction as a whole. Student teachers gain a sense of their professional identity as well as knowledge of how to carry out the various duties and obligations that come with being a teacher through this experience.

Contextual Background

The current study is carried out at the Institute of Education and Research at the University of Peshawar. The students of B.Ed. (Hons) were the focus of the study. The B.Ed. (Hons) programme is a slightly new programme which was started in place of B.Ed. (one Year) programme in 2016 with the support of USAID under the pre-step programme.

Review of Literature

The cognitive apprenticeship model of social constructivism serves as the foundation for the teaching practicum exercise. Student-teachers begin the process on the periphery and eventually work their way towards full engagement through supervised experience. Vygotsky believed that effective learning required social engagement with a qualified teacher who gave verbal instructions. In the Teaching practicum setting, the student teacher assumes the role of the apprentice, and the supervisor serves as the mentor who helps them develop their teaching competencies through cooperative discussion, modelling, coaching, and mentoring. According to Brown, learning by doing is more effective than learning about doing, and the four main elements of a typical

apprenticeship are modelling, scaffolding, fading, and mentoring. Students can navigate the Zone of Proximal Development more efficiently by modelling than by experimenting. Student teachers observe their supervisor for a predetermined amount of time in order to imitate their behaviors before teaching in the Teaching practicum setting. With scaffolding, apprentices receive increasing degrees of assistance as they learn a task. This can involve practically doing the assignment for them or giving them sporadic clues. Giving the apprentice more responsibility and progressively lessening this support is known as "fading." In the course of their practicum, student teachers are supervised by mentors who provide feedback on their lesson plans and instruction. The student teacher gradually assumes more accountability for their instruction.

Mentor Role in Teaching Practicum

Despite the fact that they are sometimes used synonymously, mentoring and coaching are two separate concepts. Through mentoring, a more seasoned person shares their knowledge with a less seasoned person in order to assist them overcome challenges and growing in their careers. Coaching, on the other hand, focuses on monitoring the learner's progress, choosing tasks, offering direction and support, assessing their development, offering feedback and encouragement, and focusing on areas that need improvement (Rupp & Becker, 2021).

While some see coaching as a type of scaffolding, others see coaching as a type of scaffolding, all of these tactics attempt to aid novices in developing competence through practical experiences. The fundamental concept of apprenticeship is that more experienced people mentor less experienced ones, providing structure and serving as role models to help them achieve their goals, which is the main goal of teaching practice.

Competencies Acquired During Teaching Practice

Sasaki et al., (2020) stated that the development of the teaching abilities and competencies of teacher candidates is at the heart of the aims and goals of Teaching Practice. Österling and Christiansen (2022) list these goals as providing students with the chance to gain teaching experience in actual classroom settings under the supervision of an experienced cooperating teacher, demonstrating mastery of the subject matter and teaching methodology, encouraging a positive attitude towards teaching, determining the students' readiness for certification, and assessing the success of the practical components of the teacher education programme.

Writing lesson plans and schemes of work using appropriate concepts, choosing and using instructional strategies and materials to achieve lesson objectives, identifying and addressing learning difficulties, evaluating teaching

effectiveness and student progress, establishing democratic classroom management skills, participating in school activities, and establishing teaching practice are all goals of the course. Moreover, community involvement in activities that advance teacher candidates' professional development is requested (Okolie et al., 2022).

Additionally, Northern Michigan University has specific requirements for teacher candidates in terms of their teaching demeanour. The ability to collaborate with all parties involved in education is one of these expectations, as is the value placed on learning, students, teaching, and schooling. Another is the demonstration of qualities like openness, courtesy, conscientiousness, reliability, caring, and compassion. A professional appearance and demeanour are also expected, as is the understanding of how one's own beliefs and values can affect the way that students are taught.

Responsibilities of the Cooperative Teacher

Podolsky, Kini and Darling-Hammond (2019) stated that to guarantee the effectiveness and calibre of teaching practicum, the role of cooperative teachers is essential. Cooperative Teachers or Supervisors are experienced teachers who are working in practicum sites or schools. The cooperative teacher should assist student teachers in the classroom, provide them with thoughtful criticism, and even partner with them by co-teaching. The cooperative teacher's primary duty at Northern Michigan University is to their pupils. They are supposed to set up a workspace for the student teacher, advise parents that they will have a student teacher in the classroom, and treat the student teacher as a professional colleague. Also, the cooperative teacher must involve the student teacher in specific classroom activities, educate them with pertinent school policies, priorities, and assessment criteria, and set a timeline for gradually increasing responsibilities depending on preparation.

According to Noor, Isa and Mazhar (2020) for a minimum of one day before the first progress report, one week before the mid-term evaluation, and two weeks before the final evaluation, the cooperative teacher needs the student teacher to be completely in charge of planning, preparation, instruction, and evaluation. They assist in understanding and applying evaluation techniques, demonstrate effective teaching methods, guide the student teacher in developing daily lesson plans, unit plans, and tests, approve and critique these plans before they are taught, and evaluate their performance. They also engage in frequent conferences to ensure progress or identify issues, encourage participation in community activities, and help connect theory to practice. The supervising teacher must notify the university supervisor or the director of field experiences of the student teacher's excessive absences or tardiness, and evaluation reports must be prepared and turned in on time.

Supervisors and their Roles

In practice teaching, supervisors play a crucial role since they serve as student teachers' consultants, judges, and supporters. To ensure quality, university supervisors must collaborate closely with professors and make frequent site visits. In order to make the experience more goal-oriented, Garzon and Mu (2018) advise university supervisors to work with experienced teachers, education specialists, and school head teachers in addition to evaluating teaching practice lessons. Student instructors should attend introductory lectures to learn about lesson planning and assigned assignments before they start observing in classrooms. Supervisors have a responsibility to oversee lessons and activities, offer guidance and counselling, and provide feedback to student teachers to assist them develop their teaching abilities. According to Widayat (2022) university supervisors also act as a point of contact between schools and the university, collaborate with school staff, suggest potential supervising teachers, suggest assignments for student teachers, and start conferences to raise the standard of the student teaching programme.

Duration of Teaching Practice

Depending on the institution or nation, teaching practice duration can vary greatly. While some programmes only require brief placements, others require a year-long internship that includes regular teaching responsibilities. For instance, the National Commission for Colleges of Education in Delta State, Nigeria, recommends a 12-week teaching practice time, while the University of Puerto Rico requires a minimum of 300 clinical experience hours in one semester. In Pakistan, a typical teaching practicum consists of 60 to 75 teaching sessions throughout 4 to 8 weeks. Depending on the university, practicums can be blocks or one day a week. The practicum at Laurentian University in Canada is broken up into three sections, totalling 120 hours: pre-practicum placement, initial placement, and professional year practicum. The University of Glasgow offers a more thorough practicum structure, where students attend schools for varied lengths of time and concentrate on particular disciplines, claim Lu and Manzar-Abbas (2013), who researched practicums in nine universities around the world.

Depending on the institution and nation, teaching practicum programmes can have a wide range in duration and structure. While the National Commission for Colleges of Education in Delta State, Nigeria recommends a 12-week teaching practice period, which is frequently implemented across many Colleges of Education in the nation, the University of Puerto Rico requires its students to complete at least 300 hours of clinical experience within a single semester. The University of Glasgow in the United Kingdom, in contrast, offers an integrated practicum structure that consists of multiple practicum periods

spaced out across the programme, when students visit schools for varying lengths of time with distinct foci on particular disciplines. Students can obtain practical experience while simultaneously improving their theoretical knowledge and comprehension of teaching approaches thanks to this more integrated approach to the teaching practicum (Lu & Manzar-Abbas, 2013).

Moreover, the universities of Edinburgh and Brunei Darussalam have distinctive practicum programmes. The programme at the University of Edinburgh is divided into four phases: a five-week experience in a nursery school in the second semester of the first year; a six-week experience in a school for young children in the second semester of the second year; a ten-week practicum for older children in the first semester of the third year; and an eleven-week experience at a school of the student-choice teachers in the final semester of the programme. The University of Brunei Darussalam, meanwhile, offers a developmental practicum structure that consists of Teaching Practice-1, a teaching assistantship for three weeks in the second semester of the second year, Teaching Practice-2 for seven weeks in the second semester of the third year, and Teaching Practice-3 for fourteen weeks in the second semester of the fourth year (Lu & Manzar-Abbas, 2013).

Teaching Practice-i, which lasts three weeks in the second year, Teaching Practice-2, which lasts eight weeks in the third year, and Teaching Practice-3, which lasts eight weeks in the fourth year, are the three different practicum experiences that the University of Hong Kong offers students during their programme. On the other hand, practicum experience is typically provided in most Chinese Universities during the seventh semester, which is the start of the fourth year, and the programme typically lasts between 8 and 10 weeks (Lu & Manzar-Abbas, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Pre-service teachers require hands-on experience in real classrooms to become effective educators. Teaching Practice is a key part of teacher preparation, and it ought to be the main focus of professional development. The top teacher preparation programmes offer several chances for students to obtain real-world experience while being guided by knowledgeable mentors. When teaching practice is conducted concurrently with academic courses, some institutions do not provide enough support for new instructors. In these circumstances, students might only have a short amount of time, supervision, and opportunity to pick up the skills they need, which ultimately affects the caliber of instruction given (Shah et al., 2022). Since the newly introduced B.Ed. (Hons) teaching practice model may have a considerable impact on the caliber of pre-service teacher education, it is crucial to assess its success. The purpose of this study is to lay the groundwork for enhancing the programme.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the teaching practice model of the teacher education programme of B.Ed. (Hons) level at Institute of Education and Research, University of Peshawar.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study:

- i. Do practicum helpful for prospective teachers in learning pedagogical skills?
- ii. Is the role of the supervisor effective during teaching practicum?
- iii. Time span for teaching practicum is adequate?

Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of the teaching practicum at the institute of Education and Research, University of Peshawar a descriptive survey was conducted. The study included 140 prospective teachers who had gone through their teaching practices experiences during the academic session of the 2021-2023 academic year. The survey consisted of an adapted tool of extended practicum learning environment inventory (EPELI) containing 130 closed-ended questions. Participants were asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with any statement scoring 2.5 or above considered positive. The questions were grouped according to research objectives, and the mean of all responses was used to address and discuss the research questions.

Findings and Discussions

Research Question 1: *Do practicum helpful for prospective teachers in learning pedagogical skills?*

Practicum is helpful converting theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge.	132	1.00	4.00	3.7955
Practicum experiences helpful adopting new situation.	133	1.00	4.00	3.1955
Practicum help me learning in course content	133	1.00	4.00	3.2256
I learned various teaching skills	130	1.00	4.00	3.7846
I learn how to use AV aids	130	1.00	4.00	3.3428
I learn Classroom management skills	133	1.00	4.00	3.4962
I participated in classroom activities	133	1.00	4.00	3.2391
I learn how to handle problematic students	130	1.00	4.00	2.8946
GLOBAL MEAN	3.3717			

Table 1: Pedagogical Competencies Acquired from Teaching Practice

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the Teaching Practice program has been effective in helping students acquire the necessary competencies. The minimum score obtained for items 1-8 was 3, except for item 8 which scored 2.8964, resulting in a global mean of 3.3717. These findings suggest that the

program has been successful in enabling students to gain practical skills and experience in a classroom setting.

Bourgonje and Tromp (2011) have emphasized the importance of implementing competence standards in teacher education to ensure high quality. While the University of Peshawar has a good track record in producing high-quality teachers, there are still some aspects of the Teaching Practice model that require improvement to enhance the acquisition of pedagogic competencies. Specifically, item 16 highlights the inadequacy of university supervision during the teaching practice, indicating that this area requires attention and improvement.

Overall, the results suggest that the Teaching Practice program has been successful in enabling students to acquire the necessary competencies for becoming effective teachers. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in the area of university supervision during teaching practice, to ensure that the program continues to provide high-quality training and produces competent and effective teachers.

Research Question 2: *Is there effective supervision of students during teaching practice?*

Cooperative teacher support in lesson preparation.	131	1.00	4.00	3.1756
Cooperative teacher support in lesson presentation.	131	1.00	4.00	2.8244
Cooperative teacher support in classroom management.	135	1.00	4.00	1.9185
Cooperative teacher support in teaching style.	133	1.00	4.00	2.0526
Cooperative teacher to overcome pedagogical challenges.	133	1.00	4.00	2.8120
Cooperative teacher support in preparation of teaching aids.	89	1.00	4.00	3.0562
Cooperative teacher support in overall improvement.	92	1.00	4.00	2.8913
Cooperative teacher support in non-teaching tasks.	91	1.00	4.00	2.0989
Cooperative teacher support in teaching style.	135	1.00	4.00	2.6926
Global mean	2.6135			

Table 2: Supervision of Teaching Practice

Table 2 presents the results of an evaluation of the effectiveness of supervision during Teaching Practice. Items 9-17 were used for this purpose, and the results indicate that six items obtained a positive mean, while three items (11, 12, 16) had a negative mean. Items 11 and 12 showed that students were allowed to

teach without their cooperating teachers, and item 16 indicated that university supervisors did not make often visits. The global mean of 2.6135 suggests that the supervision of teaching practice is moderately effective but needs improvement.

A closer examination of the results reveals that the supervision provided by cooperating teachers is more effective than that provided by university supervisors, although there is a need for them to be more present in the classroom (item 11). It is crucial to observe student-teachers as they teach because this is essential for coaching and mentoring. The regulations require university supervisors to see student-teachers twice, but the results show that this is not always the case (item 16).

Effective supervision is critical for enhancing the acquisition of competencies by student-teachers. Although the results suggest that the program is successful in enabling students to acquire competencies, without sufficient coaching and mentoring, this cannot be achieved. Therefore, university supervisors should work closely with cooperating teachers, collaborate with school staff to improve the partnership between the school system and the university, suggest potential supervising teachers, suggest assignments for student-teachers, schedule meetings with student-teachers, supervising teachers, and others concerned with the student's progress. Live teaching supervision is essential to obtain valid information on the performance of student-teachers. University supervisors must collaborate closely with associate teachers, support student-teachers, and frequently visit school sites to enhance the continued growth and quality of the student-teaching program.

Research Question 3: *Is the duration of teaching practice adequate for students to acquire competencies?*

Adequate number of classes assigned	91	1.00	4.00	3.0330
Provided proper time for teaching a class.	92	1.00	4.00	1.7500
Sometime I was assigned irreverent subjects to teach	92	1.00	4.00	1.8370
The duration of the teaching practicum was adequate.	91	1.00	4.00	1.8242
Sometime the number of assigned classes reduced.	92	1.00	4.00	3.0326
Global mean	2.2953			

Table 3: Duration of Teaching Practice The results of items 18-22, which aimed to evaluate the duration of the Teaching Practice exercise, are presented in Table 3. All five items had negative connotations, with items 18 and 22 having highly positive means, indicating negative responses, and items 19, 20, and 21 having negative means, suggesting positive responses. The overall mean of

2.2953 was negative, indicating that the duration of the Teaching Practice exercise at the University of Peshawar is not sufficient. Although the University of Peshawar's 24 weeks (two placements of 12 weeks each) is relatively long compared to other teacher education institutions, a minimum number of hours a student is required to teach should be established to enhance the quality of each placement. This is because students can negotiate the number of hours they teach, which could lead to inconsistencies in teaching duration per student and affect the acquisition of competencies and quality.

Conclusion

Implications for Pre-service Teacher Education

The teaching practice program's many components must be taken into account from a systems perspective to ensure its efficacy. The strengths and weaknesses of practicum programmes have been previously studied by Munna and Kalam (2021), while Burroughs et al., (2019) have emphasized the importance of supervision, including the caliber of the supervisor's coaching and monitoring, for a successful clinical experience. The teacher candidate, mentors, or institutions may be impacted by both positive and negative features of supervisory monitoring. Cooperation between all parties and effective supervisor assignment based on workload can raise the standard of supervision. The consensus is that longer practicum experiences are preferable since they permit a deeper examination of the teacher's position, collaboration with other instructors, and design and involvement in specialized educational programmes (Hobbiss & Allen, 2021). Additionally, the utilization of evidence-based teaching techniques and active practical learning chances is made possible by a practicum that is long enough, pre-service teacher education must include both time and supervision (Simonson, Earl & Frary, 2022).

Recommendations

The University of Peshawar's Teaching Practice approach has some effectiveness, but there is still potential for development. It is commonly understood that a key factor in determining a teacher's quality is the practical component of their certification. The study identified several elements that may reduce teaching practice's efficacy and offer suggestions for improvement. It is recommended that university supervisors visit student teachers at least twice during their practicum in partner schools, offer advice and comments, and interact with teachers and school administrators to improve the effectiveness of the teaching practice. The scheduling of university classes and Teaching Practice exercises at the same time is a significant difficulty for university supervisors. It might be easier for teachers and students to concentrate on the exercise if the Faculty of Education can redesign the Teaching Practice exercise to include teaching subjects offered by the faculty. To avoid overcrowding in

neighbourhood schools, it is also advised that a minimum number of teaching hours be created for student-teachers and that they be assigned to institutions outside the municipality of Peshawar. If there are too many student-teachers at a cooperating school, they might not have as many opportunities to instruct. To solve this problem, nearby towns' schools might participate in the Teaching Practice exercise for a set length of time, freeing up students and university supervisors to focus entirely on the practicum rather than juggling it with their other classes.

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