

Navigating Anxiety in the Teaching Practicum: Insights from Student Teachers' Experiences

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Abstract

This study explored the nature of anxiety experienced by student teachers during their teaching practicum, focusing on its causes and the strategies used to manage it. Conducted as a qualitative case study across various public and private universities in District Peshawar, data were collected through in-depth interviews and reflective journals. The findings revealed that student teacher anxiety is primarily situation-specific, driven by six key factors: unfamiliarity with classroom settings, being observed by mentors or supervisors, perceived lack of teaching competence, pressure to meet expectations, limited English proficiency, and classroom management challenges. To cope with this anxiety, student teachers employed strategies such as adapting to their environment, preparing thoroughly, building strong relationships with mentors and students, boosting self-confidence, practicing positive thinking, and maintaining a calm, enthusiastic attitude. These findings underscore the need for greater support from universities and mentor teachers, recognizing anxiety as a natural part of the practicum experience and crucial to the professional growth of future educators.

Keywords: Student Teachers' Anxiety; Teaching Practicum; Cause Of Anxiety, Anxiety Strategies.

Introduction

The Importance of Teaching Practicum

Prospective teachers gain the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge and pedagogical strategies acquired during their coursework through the teaching practicum. Immersion in a real classroom setting allows student teachers to experience the daily responsibilities, challenges, and rewards of teaching (Li, Xie, & Zeng, 2023). Guided by experienced mentors, student teachers receive

ongoing feedback, support, and constructive criticism, which aids in refining their teaching practices, boosting self-confidence, and enhancing lesson planning skills. Through observation and collaboration with experienced educators, student teachers are able to gain insights into effective teaching practices and learn from both the successes and setbacks of their mentors (Wijaya, 2022).

Building Relationships during Practicum

Moreover, the teaching practicum facilitates relationship-building with students, colleagues, and parents—relationships that are foundational to effective teaching (Alrashidi, 2022). Student teachers learn to identify and respond to the unique learning needs of their students, thereby fostering a more responsive and personalized instructional approach. As Shah et al. (2022) note, these practicum experiences are crucial for preparing student teachers to enter the profession with practical knowledge and relational competence.

Emotional Challenges of the Teaching Practicum

Despite its importance, the teaching practicum can be emotionally taxing. Ibrahim (2019) highlights that prospective teachers face immense pressure to meet the expectations of learners, mentors, school administrators, and cooperating teachers within a short timeframe. Habibi (2020) supports this by noting that student teachers often find the practicum to be the most stressful aspect of teacher training due to their constant need for support and guidance. The high expectations placed upon novice teachers, coupled with limited experience, can lead to performance-related anxieties. Han and Tulgar (2019) further assert that the critical nature of teaching tasks and fear of failure often heighten these stress levels during the practicum.

Anxiety During the Practicum: Definitions and Sources

According to Raza (2018), anxiety is characterized as a complex emotional response involving apprehension, fear, uncertainty, and a sense of incapacity to perform a task. Literature indicates that anxiety remains one of the most prominent challenges student teachers encounter during their practicum experience (Schepers & Young, 2022; Charisma & Nurmallasari, 2020; Permatasari et al., 2019). Intense feelings of nervousness before, during, or after a lesson may reflect the presence of teaching anxiety. Can (2018) specifically identifies foreign language instruction as a significant trigger, where student teachers often doubt their language proficiency and fear being perceived as incompetent by their students. Similarly, González-Calvo, Barba-Martín, Bores-García, and Hortigüela-Alcalá (2022) highlight inexperience,

fear of errors, and misjudgment of language skills as central causes of classroom anxiety. Velásquez, Mendoza, and Nanwani (2022) further suggest that fear of failure and difficulty in transferring theoretical knowledge into classroom practice exacerbate this anxiety. Additionally, unclear instructions during classroom teaching have been identified as another contributor to stress among student teachers.

The Role of Expectations and Support Systems

Al Qasmi (2019) observes that both cooperating teachers and school administrators place high expectations on prospective teachers to demonstrate strong pedagogical abilities and meet student learning needs. However, these demands often outpace the student teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practical experience, placing them in a vulnerable position (González-Calvo et al., 2022; Prilla & Angelina, 2018). Moreover, student teachers often operate in ambiguous circumstances—fulfilling the dual role of both "student" and "teacher"—while receiving insufficient institutional support. According to Coppe, Devos, and Colognesi (2022), this lack of encouragement, combined with their inexperience, often leads to criticism, which in turn intensifies anxiety and stress levels.

Categorization of Anxiety Sources

Robinson et al. (2022) categorize the sources of anxiety into four main areas: evaluation, pedagogy, classroom management, and staff relations. Among these, evaluation-related anxiety is considered the most significant, as it directly impacts academic grading. Classroom management ranks second, followed by pedagogical concerns and staff-related stressors. Dişli (2020) notes that pre-service teachers commonly report stress arising from classroom management, lesson planning, student engagement, and teaching methods. This aligns with Clevenger (2022) and Väisänen et al. (2018), who identify time constraints, unclear instruction, differentiation for diverse student needs, grammar instruction, and assessment as major stress-inducing factors.

Classroom Management and Coping Strategies

Apriliani (2020) classifies classroom management challenges under categories such as time and energy constraints, student maturity, safety concerns, reading and language levels, sequencing, and material organization. Gómez-Domínguez, Navarro-Mateu, Prado-Gascó, and Gómez-Domínguez (2022) argue that unmotivated and disengaged students exacerbate teacher anxiety during lessons. Contributing factors include lack of preparation, insufficient language skills, low confidence, fear of negative evaluations, and underdeveloped instructional

skills.

Persistent Anxiety Throughout the Practicum

Lastly, Wang (2022) identifies prior experiences such as overcrowded classrooms, feelings of inadequacy, being observed or recorded, unfamiliar students, and the use of new teaching strategies as core contributors to persistent anxiety throughout the practicum. These findings suggest that even with extended exposure to practicum settings, anxiety often remains a dominant emotional challenge for student teachers until the conclusion of their training.

Research Interest and the Need for a Supportive Environment

Due to its critical nature, which is shaped by numerous factors—including constraints imposed on prospective teachers, mentors, and colleagues—teaching practicum anxiety has garnered significant research attention in recent years (Shah, Ullah, Raza & Shah, 2024; Hwang & Kim, 2022; Merç, 2015; Permatasari, Mulyono, & Ferawati, 2019). To fulfill the objectives of a successful practicum, it is essential to foster a stress-free and supportive school environment for prospective teachers. This includes cooperation among all stakeholders involved in the practicum phase, such as mentors, cooperating teachers, and students. Understanding the diverse sources of anxiety during teaching practice is crucial for developing an effective, supportive environment that can mitigate the psychological burden experienced by trainee teachers.

The Role of Practicum in Teacher Development

The teaching practicum plays a vital role in preparing pre-service teachers for the realities of the classroom by offering them direct experience in teaching real students in an authentic school environment. It is widely acknowledged that the practicum helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired in teacher education programs and the practical demands of teaching (Richards & Crookes, as cited in Lestari, 2017). Enginarlar (as cited in Barahmeh, 2016) emphasizes that dissatisfaction with the quality of English language instruction is often attributed to the weaknesses in teacher education programs—particularly the practicum component, which plays a central role in shaping teacher competence and confidence.

The Emotional Toll of the Practicum

The core objective of the teaching practicum is to immerse student teachers in the practical realities of the school environment, allowing them to apply various teaching techniques and manage classroom dynamics under the supervision of mentor teachers and university faculty (Lestari, 2017). Through these experiences, student teachers begin to understand the intricacies of the teaching

profession, including the importance of lesson planning, classroom management, and effective communication with students and colleagues.

However, this period is often perceived as both challenging and emotionally taxing. Ngidi and Sibaya (2018) and Marais & Meier (2004) note that teaching practicum can be a source of considerable stress, as student teachers are expected to function as full members of the teaching staff. They must prepare lesson plans, engage in school activities, and meet high expectations set by mentors and supervisors—all of which can contribute to anxiety. Perry (2004) explains that the practicum generates a mix of emotions—excitement, anxiety, apprehension, and doubt—as student teachers face unfamiliar environments, strive to manage learners effectively, and try to build working relationships with mentors.

Understanding Anxiety in the Teaching Context

The concept of anxiety in this context can be understood as a psychological response to uncertain and unfamiliar situations. Ormrod (2011) defines anxiety as a feeling of uneasiness or nervousness in anticipation of an unpredictable outcome. Scovel (as cited in Brown, 2007) relates anxiety to feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and worry, while Hartmann (2014) refers to it as a subjective state of tension in the face of a perceived threat. Such emotional responses are natural, especially when novice teachers are tasked with high-stakes responsibilities without prior experience.

Spiritual Perspectives on Anxiety

The Holy Qur'an also addresses emotional well-being and offers spiritual comfort in the face of anxiety. As stated in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:112): "Yes, (on the contrary), whoever submits his face (i.e., self) in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." This verse reminds believers of the importance of faith and inner peace when confronting life's challenges, including those encountered in professional training.

Previous Studies on Sources of Anxiety

Numerous studies have investigated the specific causes of anxiety during the practicum period. Aydin and Bahçe (2001) identified classroom management as the most frequently cited source of anxiety among student teachers, accounting for 43% of responses. Other reported causes included difficulties in the teaching process, strained relationships with students, and insecurity about their role. Similarly, Shah, Ullah, Raza & Shah (2024) and Merç (2011) found that unfamiliar classroom situations, students' disinterest, language proficiency

issues, and pressure from observation and evaluation were significant stressors. Naltan Lampadan's (2014) study at a faith-based university in Thailand categorized sources of practicum anxiety into three areas: preparation, classroom management, and interpersonal relationships. Coping strategies were also grouped into adaptation, preparation, attitude adjustment, and relationship-building. Mosaddaq and Barahmeh (2016) and Shah, Ahmad, & Raza (2020) further highlighted factors such as time management, lesson planning, language fluency, and the fear of being observed as major contributors to anxiety. These findings are echoed by Gursay (2013), who emphasized the practicum's essential role in teacher development while acknowledging the emotional toll it can take.

Significance of the Study

Teaching practicum, particularly at the undergraduate level, is widely regarded as one of the most pivotal components of any teacher education program. Its importance lies in its realistic and experiential nature, offering prospective teachers the opportunity to translate theoretical knowledge into practical application. Numerous scholars have acknowledged the value of practicum teaching, emphasizing that it has a significant impact on shaping the future teaching careers of student teachers.

Despite substantial global research on different dimensions of practicum teaching, there remains a gap in understanding how prospective teachers *perceive* and *emotionally experience* practicum teaching, particularly within the context of Pakistan. In particular, very few studies have explored the sources of teaching anxiety specifically among B.Ed. (Hons) students. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the unique challenges and stressors faced by these future educators during their practicum experiences in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the nature and types of anxiety experienced by student teachers during their teaching practicum.
2. To investigate the causes contributing to anxiety among student teachers during their practicum.
3. To identify and analyze the strategies adopted by student teachers to manage anxiety during the practicum.

Research Questions

1. What are the different types of anxiety experienced by student teachers during their teaching practicum?

2. What are the primary causes of anxiety faced by student teachers during their practicum?
3. What strategies do student teachers use to cope with and manage anxiety during their teaching practicum?

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the anxiety experienced by student teachers during their teaching practicum. As Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) explain, qualitative research is especially suited for examining social phenomena from the perspectives of individuals, enabling researchers to gain deep insights into lived experiences. The case study method allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of specific individuals in a particular context, making it an appropriate choice for investigating practicum-related anxiety.

The participants of the study were 05 female and 05 Male student teachers enrolled in B.Ed (Hons) education program. All participants completed their teaching practicum. The selection of participants was purposive, focusing on individuals who had recently completed their practicum and were willing to reflect on their experiences in detail.

To collect data, the researcher used two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and weekly reflective journals. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions aimed at understanding the situations that triggered anxiety, the underlying causes of that anxiety, and the strategies employed by student teachers to cope with it. The flexible format of the interviews allowed participants to express their thoughts freely while ensuring that key themes were addressed.

In addition to the interviews, participants were asked to maintain weekly journals throughout the four-week practicum period. These journals served as written reflections, capturing the student teachers' thoughts, emotions, and reactions to events in the classroom. The journals also provided insights into the factors contributing to their anxiety and the coping mechanisms they employed.

The interview responses were transcribed, translated (where necessary), and thematically analyzed. Excerpts from the interviews were used in the findings to illustrate key themes and perspectives. The reflective journals were also analyzed to triangulate data from the interviews and to provide a richer, more comprehensive picture of the student teachers' experiences and coping strategies.

Results and Discussion

The data collected through interviews and weekly journals from student teachers revealed the types of anxiety they encountered during their teaching practicum, the contributing factors, and the strategies they used to cope with that anxiety. The findings are organized into three key sections: (1) Types of Anxiety, (2) Contributing Factors, and (3) Coping Strategies.

1. Types of Anxiety Encountered by Student Teachers

The analysis indicated that the anxiety experienced by student teachers was largely situation-specific. This form of anxiety is triggered by particular teaching conditions, such as delivering lessons in English or being observed by mentors. These activities heightened their nervousness and self-consciousness, especially in front of real students in a classroom setting. The student teachers reported increased stress during teaching observations, which aligned with prior research indicating that such high-stakes scenarios can amplify performance-related anxiety (Scovel, in Brown, 2007; Perry, 2004).

2. Factors Contributing to Student Teachers' Anxiety

a. Unfamiliar Classroom Environment

One of the most prominent factors was unfamiliarity with the classroom context. Unlike microteaching sessions where peers simulate students and instructors act as mentors, real classroom settings presented unpredictable dynamics. Participants expressed that managing real students with varying behaviors and learning abilities was overwhelming, leading to nervousness and fear (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003; Marais & Meier, 2004).

b. Being Observed by Mentors

Both student teachers felt significantly anxious when their teaching sessions were monitored by mentors. The pressure of being evaluated in real-time created a sense of vulnerability. This aligns with findings by Mosaddaq and Barahmeh (2016), where the fear of negative feedback was a dominant source of practicum-related anxiety.

c. Perceived Incompetence in Teaching

Inexperience in delivering content effectively and choosing suitable teaching strategies—especially under the 2013 Curriculum—fueled anxiety. Participants feared making errors or not meeting pedagogical goals, which reflected feelings of self-doubt, as also reported by Scovel (in Brown, 2007) and Ormrod (2011).

d. Mismatch Between Objectives and Outcomes

Despite extensive planning, real classroom events often diverged from expectations. Lessons occasionally did not proceed as intended, resulting in frustration and heightened anxiety, particularly when learning objectives were not achieved.

e. Limited English Proficiency

Delivering lessons in English further intensified anxiety. The student teachers expressed insecurity regarding their fluency and grammatical accuracy, particularly under observation. This supports the findings of Aydın and Bahçe (2001), who reported language proficiency as a major anxiety trigger among EFL student teachers.

f. Classroom Management Challenges

Managing large, heterogeneous classes proved to be a daunting task. Issues such as lack of student engagement, behavioral disruptions, and uncompleted assignments contributed to elevated stress levels, echoing findings from Merç (2011) and Lampadan (2014).

3. Strategies to Overcome Anxiety**a. Adaptation to the Classroom Environment**

Both participants emphasized the importance of adaptation. Understanding the classroom culture, adjusting expectations, and learning students' behavioral patterns helped reduce initial anxiety and build resilience.

b. Adequate Preparation

Preparation emerged as a critical strategy. Creating detailed lesson plans, expanding vocabulary, watching instructional videos, and consulting peers or mentors helped the participants feel more confident and in control.

c. Building Positive Relationships

Developing strong, supportive relationships with mentors and students proved beneficial. Open communication with mentors about challenges and forming a bond with students helped create a more conducive and less threatening classroom atmosphere (Richards & Crookes, in Lestari, 2017).

d. Boosting Self-Confidence

Self-confidence was repeatedly cited as a vital internal strategy. Believing in their own capabilities allowed student teachers to take on challenges with greater poise and reduced their fear of failure.

e. Maintaining Positive Thinking

In line with Lampadan (2014), both student teachers highlighted the power of maintaining a positive mindset. Focusing on growth rather than perfection enabled them to face setbacks constructively.

f. Staying Calm and Relaxed

Remaining calm and composed was another key coping mechanism. The participants reported that staying mentally relaxed allowed them to better handle unpredictable classroom situations and maintain a professional demeanor.

These findings resonate with previous studies such as those by Mosaddaq and Barahmeh (2016), Lampadan (2014), and Merç (2011), reinforcing that teaching practicum anxiety stems from a complex interplay of situational, psychological, and contextual factors. However, when supported with targeted coping strategies and adequate mentorship, student teachers can gradually adapt and thrive in real classroom settings.

Conclusion

Student teachers encountered several factors contributing to anxiety during their teaching practicum. These included situation-specific challenges that differed significantly from the structured environment of micro-teaching. The presence of mentors or supervisors during classroom instruction further intensified their anxiety. Additionally, unfamiliarity with the classroom setting, diverse student profiles, difficulties in classroom management, and limited teaching experience all contributed to feelings of stress and unease.

To cope with these challenges, student teachers adopted various strategies aimed at reducing anxiety. These included cultivating self-confidence, thorough lesson preparation, establishing positive relationships with mentors and students, and maintaining a positive mindset throughout the practicum. Among these, the ability to remain calm and adapt to unexpected circumstances proved especially valuable in promoting resilience and professional growth.

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