

## The impact of practicum on the professional development of prospective teachers in teacher education programs

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**Abstract:** The success of any nation depends on the effectiveness of teachers. Practicum is a significant component of teacher training programs to create balance in terms of theory and practical. The present study aims to determine the impact of practicum on the professional development of prospective teachers in teacher education programs. All teacher training institutes around the Sindh, Pakistan was the population of the study. Three hundred teacher educators and two hundred prospective teachers were selected as the sample of the research. The technique of random sampling design was executed. Two questionnaires were administered for the collection of data. T-test and chi-test were applied to analyze the data. It is highlighted from the findings that practicum is the sole teacher training program. It enhances motivational, pedagogical, managerial, class management, and other related dimensional skills of prospective teachers in the teaching-learning process. It was also concluded that supervisors and cooperative teachers' play the pivotal role of mentor and guide. In this regard, seminars, triad meetings, observation and reflection on a daily basis leave a positive impact on the personalities of prospective teachers. The findings recommended that orientation sessions for concerned people must be arranged regarding practicum. Rules and regulations must be provided in writing to the school administration to facilitate prospective teachers in the teaching-learning process to make practicum as a quality-oriented part of training programs for the profession of teaching.

**Keywords:** Practicum; Mentoring; Portfolio; Assessment; Quality

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### 1. Introduction

Teachers are considered as key components of any nations. The future of young generations is in their hands, and they cannot perform their tasks effectively if they are not well trained and skilled. Their academic and professional qualification matters a lot. The most significant part of any teacher training program is lying in practicum/teaching practice that is innovative in its nature. It gives several opportunities for students to interact with learners in actual classroom situations. It is strictly emphasized that prospective teachers must practice with a practical situation which is only provided at practicum because effective teaching is not as easier as it is understood. It is an art, which only can be got by experience. Practicum opens new doors of experiences for future teachers to cope with the challenges technically and skillfully in the field of teaching. During practicum time, prospective teachers get the opportunity to enhance their general skills of teaching with enhanced instructional practices to deal day to day classroom routines and procedures (Slattery et al., 2016). They learn the application of different strategies, methods of teaching, classroom routines and procedures, differentiate instructions with especial reference of the psychology of pupils at different levels. At the

level of B.Ed. Honors and Associate Degree in Education (ADE) programs, practicum has great importance where prospective teachers flourish their personalities by enjoying real experiences. Practicum is held in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters as a course first, then prospective teachers are sent for practice in different selected schools (public & private sector) for approximately forty-five days. University/college supervisor is assigned to them for guidance and mentoring. The supervisor takes the help of a senior teacher from a selected school as a co-supervisor. The journey of practicum starts with triad meetings where they share roles and responsibilities (Farrell, 2008; HEC, 2010). Consequently, a positive relationship among the fellows in a triad of practicum provides the maximum chance for getting the desired objective and enhance the competency level of prospective teachers (Whipple et al., 2015). Seminars are also arranged as a platform to share experiences of that journey.

Practicum is a very effective part of a teacher training program, but unfortunately, it cannot get its real essence in our country, Pakistan, especially in Sindh. It happens due to a lack of competent teacher educators and teachers who play the role of supervisor, and co-operative teacher respectively. School administration also a great factor, which often does not cooperate with supervisors or prospective teachers. Co-operative teachers do not

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play any role in mentoring, guidance, and counseling of prospective teachers, even though sometimes they reply they have no time for a practicum activity. One reason behind that is less provision of training for their professional development and no orientation sessions on practicum. Prospective teachers are compelled to obey co-operative teachers who are habitual of traditional teaching methods and not ready to adopt advanced methods of teaching. Mostly, they do not know about the concepts of authentic assessment tools such as portfolio and rubric etc. They are unable to give constructive feedback. They are not interested to understand the main theme behind practicum which is the most significant element of teacher training program and future of our next generations depends on the competencies of teachers; hence their professional development is very important. These factors create a huge gap/ hindrance between theory and practice in the teacher education system.

The study was executed to determine the impact of practicum on the professional development of prospective teachers in teacher education programs in Sindh, Pakistan. Teacher educators and prospective teachers in teacher training institutions in Sindh, Pakistan were included in the scope of the study.

The current study is guiding the following research questions:

1. Is teaching practice/practicum effective in teacher training institutes?
2. What are the challenges faced by teacher educators and prospective teachers in the process of practicum?

## 2. Literature review

The sole of teacher education program is hidden in teaching practice, nowadays known as a practicum. It is effective for prospective teachers as it has many factors that create attitude and behavior of teaching along with skills significantly required to fulfill the requirement of the teaching profession at work. Dimensional professional growth happens due to practicum (Bullock, S.M. 2012). The major theme behind practicum is brought theoretical knowledge

into practice. Prospective teachers apply all skills such as pedagogical skills, motivational skills and managerial strategies in classroom settings in the natural atmosphere of school to get objectives to be a professional teacher. Prospective teachers are indulged at the time of practicum to practice pedagogical skills, execute the role of the teacher in natural classroom settings, and to get a real range of experiences in school culture; and found practical features of the curriculum. Thus, practicum plays a significant role to enable the prospective teacher to meet the global challenges and standards in the field of education.

A teacher is a skeleton of the education system, his professional development has great importance because the future of generations is in his hand (National Education Policy, 1998-2010). Therefore, his content knowledge and expectation affect highly learners' progress as well as the personality of the child (Gore, et al., 2016). Though, sometimes at practicum students cannot be benefited due to lack of mentoring and less cooperation of administration of the selected school for practice (Ayala et al., 2017). Approximately one hundred eighty-four organizations of education emphasized only on theory instead of practical work. In this connection, when a major shift came in teacher education in 2008, practicum was introduced which is a shared enterprise of three parties (Farrell, 2008).

In this triad/pyramid, the opinion of each and every member has great importance. They have to play different roles and responsibilities to achieve the desired outcomes. If these roles and responsibilities are clear and understood by each member than it gives the fruitful results. Here, the university/college supervisor has a leading role as a pilot, a mentor, as a facilitator. He/She guides prospective teachers regarding all levels of practicum such as observation, lesson planning, learning experiences, constructive feedback, and assessment techniques. During the practicum, often prospective teachers share their experiences with the supervisor at the time of the seminar. With the guidance of a supervisor, the co-supervisor also assists prospective teachers by introducing him to the culture of the school. He/She also gives him the opportunity for co-teaching/teaching.

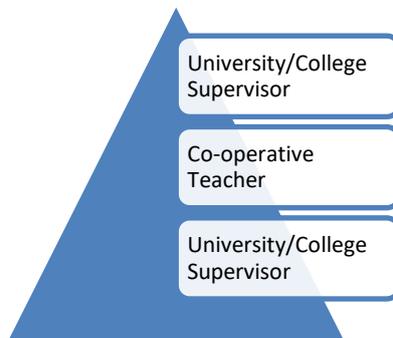
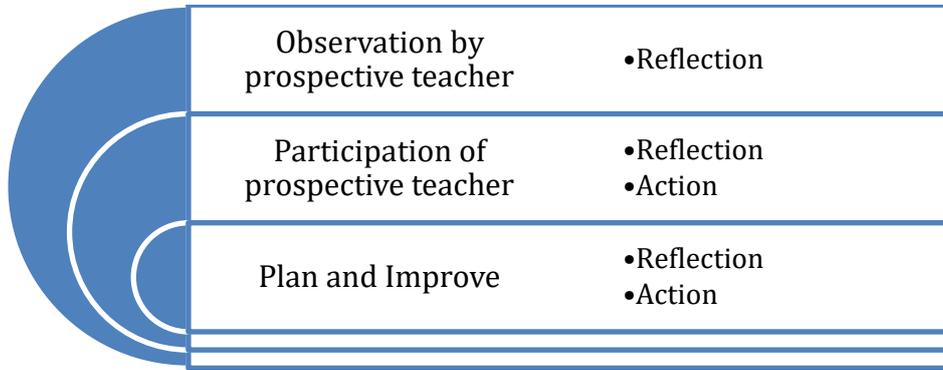


Fig. 1: Pyramid in teaching practice/practicum



**Fig. 2:** Overview of three phases of practicum activity

Teaching has multidimensional tasks, at a time teacher plays different roles of controlling the class in different assignments though that assignments deal with in-class or out-class activities. In this connection, learning happens at maximum level and prospective teachers are benefitted fully, but it develops pressure for prospective teachers and sometimes they experience few problems such as how to control class, how to prepare lesson plan, deliverance of lesson plan, arrangement and sequence of learning experiences, school rules and regulations, school time-table, timely feedback of supervisor and co-operative teacher are highlighted factors. Only effective teachers can bring revolution in history with adequate infrastructure with impressive leadership. Thus, it is a dire need of time that prospective teachers must be provided the proper benefit from practicum and it is can be done with sincere shared efforts of triad participants and administration of schools as well as universities/college side (Ergul et al., 2013).

**3. Methodology**

The present study follows a mixed method in nature. Numerical and non-numerical approaches are used altogether in a single research study (Creswell, 2015). The qualitative data collected through an interview can be analyzed dealing with thematic analysis procedures. The research was conducted in teacher training institutes situated in Sindh, province of Pakistan. Two categories on the basis of allocation of the institute such as rural and urban were followed, as the situation varies on the basis of the locality. Mainly, the researcher has focused on public sector institutions.

**3.1. Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the opinion of teacher educators and prospective teachers that practicum is an important part of teacher training programs in Teacher Training Institutes in the province of Sindh.

**3.2. Sample**

A sample is comprised of five hundred and one (two hundred and one prospective teachers enrolled

in ADE & B.Ed. (Hons.) programs, three hundred teacher educators and an interview of fifteen principals/HODs/chairperson were executed for data collection.

Table 1 presents the allocation of teacher educators in teacher training institutes according to sex. Of the 300 teacher educators 56.6% were male and 43.3 % female.

**Table 1:** Allocation of teacher educators in teacher training institutes according to sex

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Male	170	56.6
Female	130	43.4
Total	300	100

**3.3. Instruments**

Two different questionnaires were administrated personally by the researcher to get the responses of teacher educators and prospective teachers who have gone through the complete process of practicum. The first section was close-ended and section II was open-ended dealing with different themes regarding the quality of teacher education programs. An interview protocol was also developed of ten items to know the perception of principals/HODs/chairperson of the organization in depth.

**3.4. Data collection**

The survey was followed as an overall strategy in the present study, dealing with the rule-based classification of demographic variables. Data was collected from teacher training institutions situated in Sindh, province of Pakistan. Two different questionnaires and interviews were administrated personally by the researcher to get the responses of students who have completed the process of practicum. The interview was also conducted from heads of institutions to get the data in depth

**3.5. Data analysis**

Stratified sampling was adopted as the strategy. Statistical procedures were used for data analysis such as t-test and chi-test. Frequencies and percentages are presented in tabular form to

describe the data. The interview was analyzed through qualitative technique and findings were elaborated in the chronicle scheme.

#### 4. Findings

The data analysis of the current study has proved that practicum provides significant opportunities to the prospective teachers to put theoretical knowledge into practice, which enhances their multiple skills to perform the task of teaching with enthusiasm. The results in the response of the first research question reveal that practicum plays a significant role in the professional development of prospective teachers in training programs of teacher education around the globe. Students get a bundle of opportunities to maximize their learning in process of practicum because it is a source of putting theoretical knowledge into practice. Results indicates in the response of second question that teacher educators and prospective teachers face several challenges in practicum process such as no orientation on practicum, lack of cooperation from administration of selected school, unavailability of a clear policy regarding practicum in black and white, traditional ways of lesson planning and practice, less interaction among triad members, and week process of evaluation etc. t-test was applied to analyze the collected data.

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{SE_{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}}$$

**Table 2:** Application of t-test

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	df
Teacher educators	300	300.74	23.17	7.81	498
Prospective teachers	201	118.64	328.74		

By observing Table 2, the presented value of  $t = 7.81$  with  $df = 498$  at  $\alpha = 0.05$ , greater than the computed value of  $t = 1.96$ . Henceforth, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that teacher educators and prospective teachers have not the same opinion regarding the importance of practicum in teacher training institutes, province of Sindh, Pakistan.

#### 4.1. Results of qualitative data

It was concluded from the qualitative data that innovative change is better initiative and in the favor of students to meet the global standards in teacher education programs. The duration is extended. The curriculum is updated and according to the needs of society. Foundation and professional courses are introduced to increase the knowledge of novice teachers. Few teacher educators were of the opinion that some courses are lengthy in terms of allocated time. Progressive methods are used despite traditional ones. Practicum is a good omen to create

a balance between theoretical knowledge and practice. Authentic assessment is used to evaluate students' performance. Teacher educators are competent in their fields. In the connection of physical aspects, the situation was not satisfactory.

#### 5. Discussion

The main objective of the current study was to analyze the impact of practicum on the professional development of prospective teachers in teacher education programs in Sindh, Pakistan. People who fulfill their duties skillfully with sincerity and devotion are called professionals (Awan, 2015). That sense of devotion indicates high success in a profession that they have adopted. The results of the study supported that students get a chance at the maximum level to interact in the community and the concept of interaction and socialization is encouraged during practicum. Prospective teachers get the spirit of collaboration, coordination, and team teaching. They use critical thinking and their sense of observation is enriched.

They prepare a lesson plan and make sure the active involvement of pupils in learning experiences. While the duration of practicum novice teachers also learn control of class because a class has different students with different potential and capabilities. They also use additional material to maximize the learning process. Observations, reflections, co-teaching, seminars for practicum discussing issues faced by prospective teachers flourish the personality of the trainee. At the time of practicum, the teachers of the future learn the management of the class, lesson planning, dealing with different pupils with diverse backgrounds, disciplinary issues, and other related dimensions of the teaching-learning process. Supervisor and cooperative teacher, both have to take efforts for fruitful results of this significant part of curricula. A research study conducted by Aponte et al. (2015) also favored findings of current research that through mentoring and guidance students are encouraged and give a notable performance.

A healthy relationship of mentoring among prospective teachers and supervisors brings effective results in the practicum process. It enhances the skills of teaching among future teachers. During the practicum, the novice teacher and supervisor share their thoughts, values, strategies, and techniques for improvement. It is also indicated through findings that if from the members of triad any one member could not play the assigned role fully the desired outcomes are not achieved. The results also show the great concern of students for the less cooperation of supervision and monitoring in a few cases. They feel a burden in terms of increased paperwork despite practice because schools have a traditional system of teaching. The attitude of pupils and different learning styles is a challenge for new beginners in the teaching field.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

It is concluded on the basis of findings that practicum has a great impact on the professional development of prospective teachers in teacher education programs. It enhances motivational, pedagogical, professional, managerial, and ICT skills among prospective teachers.

In view of the findings of the current study, the following recommendations are anticipated to get the set outcomes of the practicum:

- Before sending prospective teachers for practicum, roles and regulations must be set by teacher training institute and selected school for the activity
- Senior teachers must be selected as a cooperative teacher for mentoring and guidance of trainees as the trainees may get the benefit of their experience
- Workshops or orientation sessions must be conducted for cooperative teachers by university/college supervisors to give them a briefing about the practicum which is really sole of teacher training.
- Rubric for the evaluation of practicum activity must be shared with prospective teachers
- Schools must provide basic facilities to facilitate prospective teachers in a teaching-learning atmosphere
- Supervisors must facilitate prospective teachers in terms of lesson planning, managerial skills, and assessment tools
- Supervisors and cooperative teachers must give timely and constructive feedback to the students

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