

Teaching Practice in B. Ed: Prospective Teachers' Perception of Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice is the core component of whole teacher training process. This part not only allows prospective teachers to use their skills and enhance their abilities, but it also trains them for future job placement. Here the question arises that does teaching practice help prospective teachers to learn all teaching techniques, which is essential to gain mastery in teaching process or they get caught between the loopholes of theoretical ideal views and constraints of real classroom situations. The purpose of the study was to investigate the gap between theory taught during course-work and practical implementation of that knowledge during teaching practice. Another objective of the study was to assess the competency level of prospective teachers for teaching practice. It was hypothesized that prospective teachers do have sufficient content knowledge, awareness of pedagogical teaching strategies and teaching practice before the commencement of teaching practice. Sixty alumni of B.ED program, who passed out during last five years were randomly selected as samples for the following study. A structured questionnaire consisted of 25 items including content knowledge and understanding, pedagogical content knowledge, and application of gained knowledge and learned skills were designed to gather data. The questionnaire was based on a Lickert scale to gather responses. The data were analyzed by using the percentage method. After analysis of results, it can be recommended that teacher in-charges should also be assessed for their skills to apprise prospective teachers. Furthermore, there should be a comprehensive exam of prospective teachers before the commencement of teaching practice that should be designed and conducted under direct supervision of NACTE or its appointed team. It will be a great step to ensure quality teaching in teacher education programs.

KEYWORDS: Teaching practice, Prospective teachers, Theory, Practice, B. ED program.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of teaching is a cooperative process. It is an activity used to give and deliver information in such a way which helps to inculcate knowledge. Many teachers come into the profession with high ideals and find these soon evaporate; teaching become simply a job, an occupation not a vocation (Cohen, et al, 2007).

Hence the process of teaching is not a profession to think and handle lightly. Therefore, prospective teachers must not be kept under any illusion during the whole time

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period of learning practice. In the real classroom situations, the process of teaching is different in various regions. As per the international rules of teaching practice the prospective teachers have to pay primarily observatory visits before going on the actual teaching practice in at least two different school settings. There are several set standards for the development of professional values and practices, setting targets, monitoring, and assessment, teaching and class management.

The standard of teaching professional values and practice involves a wide range of ideas about treating pupils with respects and consideration, promotion of culturally appropriate behaviour and concerns about the development. During the practice of teaching in the real classroom, prospective teachers face a great number of experiences (Marais, 2004). The phase of real classroom situation brings a sudden shift from theoretical paradigm to the practical domain. This stage helps prospective teachers to gain experience-based learning. The curriculum of teaching practice is designed in such a way that it provides an actual context in which this profession exists. This is the very stage that helps prospective teachers to make the right choice for their career. It is an experience which brings all the complexities of it and filled prospective teachers with the lushness of different capabilities (Kiggundu, & Nayimuli, 2009).

Apparently teaching practice is a very fertile process for the provision of benefits to prospective teachers but if not meet all delivery demands then it can be a nightmare for prospective teachers and easily demoralize them. There is a number of categories have been established in order to run the program smoothly and which are almost same in all the regions with very little differences. There are a few elements which establish fundamentals for the coursework of B. Ed program and by following them any institute can harvest quality teachers for the field. The set of compulsory skills designed as a part of teacher training program involves the coverage of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, lesson planning skills and other important aspects of teaching practice like managing environment and mastery of classroom organization (TNTP, 2011).

The content knowledge includes content related information to sharpen and polish understanding of teacher about all the facts, theories, principles and concepts

which is taught in the course. In other words, it can be described as how well a teacher has grasped the subject matter (Ball, et al, 2008). Fine understanding of content knowledge is easily exhibited from the preparation and delivery of teaching activities. (Ball, Lubienski, & Meborn, 2001). If we see teaching fundamentally as an exchange of ideas, it would seem evident that a teacher's understanding of the topic will impact how the idea is shaped and tailored while presenting in the classroom (Shulman, 1987).

Pedagogical knowledge is an amalgamation of a few aspects; the first one is to obtain certain knowledge, awareness about its process and practices, getting awareness of ways to inculcate learning (Mishra, p. & Koehler, M. J., 2006). The process of pedagogical knowledge contains all the activities in it including planning and implementation of the lesson plan, understanding of subject matter and management of the classroom. Organizing activities as per the level of learners, completion of learning the related task in a specified time slot, and evaluating the introduced learning by using a variety of ways are also included.

The need of detecting and erasing loopholes between theory and practice of B. Ed program has been increased, and most suitable perspectives which really count as authentic in this process of identification are those who had been passed through this phase. Therefore, the following study is designed to figure out the perception of the alumni of this program. The essence of the following study is to analyze the quality of teaching practice procedure with a special focus on content and pedagogical content knowledge and their applications in genuine settings.

Research Question

The following research question was designed for the study:

Whether the prospective teachers were sufficiently trained in terms of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and their application in actual teaching scenario?

Hypotheses:

1. Sufficient knowledge and understanding of content are developed prior to teaching practice.
2. A variety of teaching strategies is taught before teaching practice.
3. Prospective teachers are sufficiently trained for teaching practice.

2. METHODOLOGY

Design

The quantitative survey approach was used in the following study. Along with the factors related to the research question, information related to other demographical factors like experience, the institute where participants were enrolled in the B. Ed program and other qualification were also collected.

Participants

60 alumni of B. Ed program who had passed out during last five years were randomly selected from one public and one private sector higher education institute.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of instrumentation, a structured questionnaire was designed. To measure the responses of prospective teachers, the questionnaire was designed on five points Lickert scale. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items measuring content knowledge, teaching techniques, and lesson planning skills.

Procedure and Analysis

The questionnaire was e-mailed to all the alumni of B.Ed. They were asked to fill and mark on all those responses about which they thought represented their experiences during B. Ed course-work and teaching practice. After completing the form the respondents were required to email it back to the researchers. The researchers then tabulated and analyzed the data by using the percentage method.

Findings

Table I					
Description	SD	D	N	A	SA
Focus on content knowledge	9%	66%	4%	21%	-
The practice of teaching strategies before the commencement of actual teaching practice	7%	22%	-	71%	
Allowed to use different teaching strategies	5%	35%	-	60%	-
Ask to use teaching strategies specified by the school	-	33%	14%	53%	-
Provided sufficient technological support	39%	58%	-	3%	-
Provided opportunities to practice with different technologies used to teach your coursework	15%	39%	35%	11%	-
Concept-related teaching techniques were taught during coursework	20%	48%	14%	18%	-

A technique to teach a certain concept was taught during coursework	-	25%	4%	56%	15%
Use of multiple techniques for teaching single topic taught during your coursework	15%	34%	31%	20%	-
No advice was given to tackle the needs of different learning styles	-	50%	18%	22%	10%
Inculcated with sufficient practice to formulate learning objectives	7%	17%	25%	51%	-
Practice lesson planning before actual teaching practice	13%	34%	-	53%	-
Taught formative evaluation techniques during course work	-	50%	20%	27%	3%
Practice to develop worksheets and activities during coursework for formative evaluation	7%	65%	4%	18%	6%
Were asked to do a formative evaluation of learners during your teaching practice	-	13%	9%	63%	15%
use lesson exercises as the only formative evaluation tool during teaching practice	11%	50%	-	29%	10%
Were required to develop activities and worksheet as an assessment tool during teaching practice	-	15%	-	63%	22%
Were asked to use interactive teaching strategies during your teaching practice	-	27%	-	73%	-
Stress was placed on teacher-centered or passive teaching strategies during teaching practice	-	68%	-	32%	-
The lesson was regularly evaluated by in-charge during teaching practice	-	18%	45%	37%	-
Provision of prompt/ feedback on your lesson plan by a supervisor during teaching practice	-	31%	40%	29%	-
Nobody observes you during teaching practice except the final lesson	18%	34%	36%	12%	-
Lesson plans were signed by a supervisor without any feedback comments	8%	27%	44%	21%	-
You were regularly observing during teaching practice	-	28%	43%	29%	-
You were prepared for teaching practice before its commencement	9%	22%	21%	48%	-

The analysis of results revealed that:

- 66% respondents showed disagreement and 9% were strongly disagree that they were taught to focus on content knowledge. 21% showed agreement, while 4% remained neutral.

- 71% respondents were agreed that during coursework they did learn to use different teaching strategies. 22% disagreed with this while 7% were strongly disagreed.
- 60% respondents were agreed that they were allowed to use different teaching strategies during teaching practice, while 35% disagreed and 5% were strongly disagreed with this.
- 53% prospective teachers marked that their school teachers specified some teaching strategies to them for teaching during their teaching practice. 33% disagreed with that and 14% stayed neutral.
- 58% respondents disagree that, they were provided technical support in the school they were placed in teaching practice. 39% marked strongly disagree and only 3% accepted that they were provided with technical support in schools they were placed.
- 39% disagreed that they were provided opportunities to practice techniques to use in the teaching during their coursework. 15% strongly disagreed. 35% stayed neutral, and only 11% accepted that they did practice with teaching technology during their coursework.
- 48% respondents disagreed that concept-based teaching techniques were taught to them during coursework. 20% were strongly disagreed with the same. 18% admitted that they did learn techniques, while 14% provided a neutral response.
- 56% showed agreement with the concept related teaching.
- 34% disagreed that they were taught multiple teaching techniques to adjust with different learning styles of learners. 15% strongly disagreed. 31% stayed neutral and 20% agreed that they were taught the same.
- 50% disagreed that they were taught nothing about the usage of different activities to adjust lessons with learners. 22% agree and 10% strongly agreed with the description, while 18% marked neutral.
- 51% prospective teachers agreed that they did sufficient practice during their coursework to formulate lesson objectives. 17% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed with the idea. 25% marked neutral.
- 53% agreed that they did practice to design lesson plans before going on actual teaching practice. 34% disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed.
- 50% disagreed that they were taught formative evaluation techniques during their coursework. 27% agreed and 3% strongly agreed with the description. 20% marked neutral.
- 65% respondent disagreed that they practiced to design worksheets and activities for formative evaluation during their coursework. 7% strongly disagreed. 18% agreed and 6% strongly agreed with the description. 4% marked neutral.
- 63% prospective teacher marked agree that during teaching practice they were asked to perform formative evaluation for learners, and 15% marked strongly agree with

this. 13% disagreed with the description while 9% marked neutral.

- 50% respondents disagreed that they used only chapters' exercises for formative evaluation during their teaching practice, 11% strongly disagreed with the same. 29% agreed and 10% strongly agreed with the same description.
- 63% respondents agreed that during their teaching practice they were required to develop worksheets and activities for assessment purpose, 22% were strongly agreed while 15% disagreed.
- 73% respondents agreed that during their teaching practice they were asked to use interactive teaching strategies, while 27% disagreed with the same.
- 68% respondents disagreed that they were required to use teacher centred strategies during their teaching practice, while 32% agreed with the same.
- 48% respondents marked neutral on the description that their lesson plans were evaluated regularly by in-charge teachers. While 37% agreed and 18% disagreed with the same.
- 40% respondents marked neutral on the description that feedback was provided by supervisors on their lesson plans. 31% disagreed and 29% agreed with the same.
- 36% respondents marked neutral on the description that no one had observed their lessons except their final lessons. 34% disagreed and 18% strongly disagreed with the same idea. 12% marked agree.
- 44% marked neutral on statement that lesson plans were signed by supervisors without any feedback. 27% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed with the same. 21% marked agreed.
- 43% respondents marked neutral on the description that they were observed regularly during teaching practice. 29% marked agree with this while 28% marked disagreed with this.
- 48% respondents marked agree with the description that they were prepared for teaching practice before its commencement. 22% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed with this, while 21% respondents marked neutral for the same.

3. DISCUSSION

The following study was carried out to explore perspectives of those teachers, about teaching practice, who passed their B. Ed in last five years. The study was focused on their perspectives about three aspects of teaching practice. First area was the attainment of sufficient knowledge and understanding of content (of the optional subjects offered) and teaching strategies to teach that content knowledge. The purpose was to measure the perspective of trainee teachers about it. Second area of concern was that prospective teachers' opinion about their knowledge and understanding in using different teaching

strategies to teach the content efficiently to learners with diversified backgrounds and different learning styles.

The third area of concerns was if the prospective teachers got ample training about teaching practice before its commencement? What was their overall impression of their preparedness for teaching practice? Teaching practice is the time to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the coursework of B. Ed (Furlong, Hirst & Pocklington, 1988). It is the time to integrate theory with practice. Whatever that had been learned during coursework is being applied and tested during teaching practice (Kennedy, 2016). Prospective teachers do need feedback from their teaching practice in-charge (Ahea, et. al., 2016). The third aspect was focusing on this area too as it helps to ensure the quality of teacher education (Gibson & Shobana, 2016).

To analyze the results, all items of the questionnaire were grouped in three categories to explore perspectives of trainee teachers, that is, content and pedagogical content knowledge, application of teaching strategies and overall impression of prospective teachers about teaching practice. Research findings support that teaching practice is perceived as an integral component of teacher education program and it may cause a significant amount of stress and anxiety in trainee teachers (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003). These anxieties may be related to content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical skills and their applications in actual settings (Quick & Sieborgen, 2005). Curriculum of teacher education program is aimed to provide the required training to prospective teachers in all relevant domains (TNTP, 2011). Teaching practice provides the opportunity to apply learned concepts and skills in actual settings (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). It provides ample opportunities for prospective teachers to not only evaluate their own level of learning and competence in the actual setting of school but also to refine and polish those skills. But at the same time, it may be frightening if the student teachers find and/or feel unable to cope with the demands of teaching practice (Kasanda, 1995).

In the following study, the teachers were asked to express their opinion regarding their learning about content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. According to the first hypothesis of the study, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion

that they were taught about content and pedagogical skills (about 71% or more). But when they were asked to express about imparting knowledge during teaching practice, their opinion was different. Some expressed openly by rating the related items in agreement or disagreement. But some were reluctant in expressing their views. They choose to be 'neutral' instead of giving their perspectives.

After analysis of results for the second hypothesis of the study, it appeared that similar were the findings of lesson planning element. Majority of the respondents agreed that they were taught how to plan a lesson. But were they provided enough opportunities to practice of formulating lesson objectives and developing lesson plans before the commencement of teaching practice? The response gathered was fifty-fifty, i.e. almost half of the respondents agreed while remaining half had the opposite opinion. It was also noted that prospective teachers were asked to use interactive teaching strategies during teaching practice, but they were not so sure which technique to use and how. Findings of doing formative evaluations during teaching practice also revealed the similar perspective with a twist. They were taught about evaluation techniques during their coursework but only to knowledge level. How to develop an evaluation tool for coursework? This area of the questionnaire was either left blank or very limited information was provided. On the other hand, the prospective teachers were frequently asked to use worksheets or other formative evaluation procedures during teaching practice which might cause problems for them.

In the light of the results related to the third hypothesis of the study, a different set of notions revealed on the items that were about the supervisory role and guiding practice. Around forty percent or more of the respondents preferred to be 'neutral', when they were asked about the supervisors' role and guiding practices of those who were in charge of teaching practice, instead of clearly expressing their perspectives. Such behavior of respondents instigates further discussion. Multiple explanations can be given for such responses where the participants preferred to remain silent. Perceived fears in the minds of respondents about effects of filling up the questionnaire might be one of the points. In Pakistan, research culture is in developing phase (Lodhi, 2012). People may be afraid of giving responses or participating in any research as what if might be used

against them? Such fears may inhibit them from participating in a research or expressing any opinion. Another perspective may be that people opt to remain silent or neutral when their opinion or experiences differ in a certain situation. They feel perplexed whether to express their true opinion or not? The questions like what would be the consequences? Would it have influence(s) their career? Grow in them and prohibit them to respond truthfully. To put themselves in a more compromising position, the respondents rated their overall teaching practice as 'satisfactory' which itself was contradictory to their earlier views about their preparation for and experiences during teaching practice. Many types of research revealed that feedback in teaching practice helps the trainee teachers to improve their practices and concepts (Bulger, Mohr & Walls, 2002). It appeared in the results that respondents hesitate to express their true opinion about their supervisor's roles, which makes it critical and raise questions about the quality of teacher education program itself.

4. CONCLUSION

After the analysis of results, it can be concluded that teaching practice is worked as the basic part of teacher education program. It not only helps to produce teachers for the field but also determines the quality of teacher education program itself. The results revealed that situation of all elements of teaching practice is almost equal at all level, a number of agreed and disagreed respondents were almost same. But it also appears that alumni of the program marked on the neutral category in a great amount which gives the sign of confusion in either the provision of theoretical knowledge and experiences during coursework or the account of totally different scenario during practical settings.

Recommendations

1. Teachers sent as in-charge of teaching practice should know about all its pre-requisites for prospective teachers.
2. In-charges of teaching practice should also be evaluated for their lesson-planning skills for secondary grades because it can be radically different from a lesson prepared for university students.
3. Teacher in-charges should also be assessed for their skills to apprise prospective teachers.
4. There should be a comprehensive exam of prospective teachers before the commencement of teaching practice that should be designed and conducted

under direct supervision of NACTE or its appointed team. It will be a great step to ensure quality teaching.

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