



Reflection of Prospective Teachers on the Nature of Teaching Practice

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice is a crucial phase in development of the prospective teachers' professional skills. It can be described as a situation in which a prospective teacher teaches a group of students in a training session under supervision. It plays a remarkable role in cultivating hidden potentialities of the prospective teachers. The aim is usually to improve the prospective teachers' pedagogical and professional skills by developing awareness of how students learn. In teaching practice session the prospective teachers are provided a number of opportunities to learn something through teaching practice. The school teacher helps the prospective teachers in the classroom and the supervisor evaluates the performance of prospective teachers. This study was conducted in order to analyze prospective teachers' views on various components of teaching practice. The research focused on prospective teachers' reflections on their experiences. A small sample consisting of 330 prospective teachers (who had gone through the session on teaching practice) of M.A. Education and B.Ed programs of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan including both the sub-campuses of Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan were taken. A questionnaire having different scales according to the nature of the question was administered to the subjects. Data was analyzed by using SPSS 18. The study concluded that prospective teachers appreciated the role of their supervisors in facilitating them through evaluation of teaching practice. The present study also asserted that different aspects of the prospective teachers like their self-confidence, command over the subject matter, their instructional styles and classroom control should be focused accordingly.

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Keywords:

Teaching practice, prospective teachers, pedagogical skills, self-confidence, instructional styles, professionalism

Introduction

Teaching is a noble profession and its nobility lies in commitment and competence of the teacher. A teacher facilitates students in their studies and social training; and therefore, s/he is regarded as an academic leader for students and intellectual of the society to lead in the right direction. Therefore, a teacher is said to play a significant role in socio-economic and geo-political development and sustainability of a nation among the community of nations. A teacher thus transforms his/her nation by developing critical thinking, inculcating futuristic approach and promoting the art of blending vision with wisdom among learners (Hussain and Mahmood 2010).

Pakistan is a developing country where efforts have been made for scaling-up the quality of education particularly teacher education & training since its independence. Teacher education and training consist on pre-service and in-service (continuous professional development) programmes. Pre-service teacher education is initial training of prospective teachers and it is compulsory for embracing teaching as a

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profession at school level. It consists of theoretical (coursework) as well as practical (teaching practice/practicum or internship) components. Hussain & Mahmood (2010) affirmed that pre-service teacher education equips prospective teachers with pedagogical skills as well as professional ethics; and teaching practice is considered essential for developing these competencies among them. Therefore, teaching practice is a process in which prospective teachers are involved actively in school activities under supervision of a teacher educator and a local (school-based) supervisor. In teaching practice, the prospective teachers are provided opportunities of equipping them with pedagogical skills and professional ethics necessary to adopt teaching as a profession (Dillon, 1988) in their lives.

Usually, teaching practice consists of two components namely internal (in-house/ or home-based) and external (school-based) components. Internal teaching practice is initial component organized in-house under supervision teacher educator. Its duration varies but lasts not less than two weeks. A teacher educator helps students in preparing their lesson plans in their respective teaching subject(s) like English, social studies, mathematics and so on. Prospective teachers present their prepared lessons in (school) classroom like situation but in front of their fellows and supervisor. They improve their lesson plans in the light of comments of their fellows and supervisor. It is a preparatory stage to enable them face real situation in schools.

The second phase of teaching practice is conducted in real situation(s) in the schools. It is referred to as external teaching practice during which a school teacher [nominated by school heads] helps and guides the prospective teachers in the classroom in a natural environment and the supervisor evaluates their performance on regular basis (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1991). A facilitative environment is provided to the prospective teachers in schools where they can learn specialized skills (communication skills, action research, and social skills) of the profession through interaction with students and teachers.

Review of the Related Literature

Teaching practice provides prospective teachers an opportunity of putting their theoretical knowledge into practice. Fry (2009) affirmed its significance by explaining that it plays a vital role in developing awareness among prospective teachers about learning of students in schools. It is oriented on developing instructional and/ or teaching skills and their appropriate application. Instructional skills seem to be the essence of any teacher education programme and particularly, teaching practice as its training oriented component. But presentation of effective instructional skills and strategies into behavioral terms needs a lot of passion and practice. The landscape of teaching profession has been changed in 21st century with more emphasize on learning and the needs of learners. Therefore, the association between scholastic theory and instructional practice has also been transformed to inculcate skills rather memorizing the concept. Keeping in view the scenario Pollard & Collins (2005) rightly said that teaching is moving from theory to 'practice-based' professions. Practice is the axis of this outcome based approach. The prospective teachers have to initiate evaluating classroom situation critically and pursuing for their personal experiences to developing professional skills. It essentially helps them coping with their instructional experiences in an effective way (Barton & Haydn, 2006). Teaching practice is a significant component of any teacher education programme. It develops passion for teaching profession among prospective teachers by equipping them with professional through hands-on experience in real situation.

Apparently, acquiring professional knowledge and instructional skills through training seems to be problem for prospective teachers; because instructional skill is an art and art needs practice to be learnt. They overcome it by practicing till they become skillful enough to adopt instructional styles (Britten, 1988) even during their training sessions. They can evaluate the situations and proceed for instructional purpose accordingly. Therefore, Husbands and Fosh (1993) asserted evaluation integrated with planning and the aims and objectives of which are specified in advance. However, the questions like what have been learned, how this will affect teaching and what will be planned for subsequent training should be addressed during teaching practice.

Effective teaching practice requires proper monitoring and supervision. A proper mechanism of monitoring provides feedback to reshape programme or some strategies or techniques. Therefore, proper

monitoring and supervision of teaching practice enhances its effectiveness in terms of developing instructional skills among prospective teachers for their productive professional life in future. It should be appropriately organized; planned and executed for better results (Lampert, 1985) otherwise it would be wastage of time.

The usefulness of a teacher training programme lies in what a teacher delivers in the classrooms and how s/he manages other activities related with academic matters in and /or outside the school(s). In other words teacher education programmes need to be skill oriented –pedagogical as well as professional and managerial. That’s why teaching practice is organized in schools’ setting i.e. real situations where performance of the prospective teachers is monitored and evaluated continuously for the entire term of the practice. Usually, evaluation is considered to be a crucial component of all kinds training enterprises and teaching force cannot be an exception rather it is important to achieve the goal of producing competent teachers and addressing the issue of quality instruction (Cohen & Manion, 2004; Johnson & Liber, 2008) in schools. Different personnel like staff members of the school (where teaching practice is organized), prospective teachers (through their portfolios) and supervisors (from teacher education departments/colleges) are involved in evaluation process for the purpose of:

- making improvements in learning professionalism and professional ethics,
- providing feedback to the teacher educators and assisting them in developing proper training activities,
- enabling prospective teachers to enhance their learning by doing,
- making prospective teachers to realize their learning and problems which they faced during entire classroom practice and how they addressed the issues,
- helping them relate theory with practice and search opportunities from the challenges they come across.

Evaluation of the teaching practice helps teacher educators in estimating learning of the prospective teachers and requirements of infrastructure. According to Eisner (1991) evaluation is process which provides information for determining how to utilize resources to meet goals of a programme. Similarly, Howard, McMillen, and Pollio (2003) asserted that the process of evaluation is concerned with execution (of a plan or activities/strategies) and developing an informative portrayal of it to perceive what actually happened. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation of teaching practice (internal as well as external) is crucial for realizing its objective according to the spirit.

Objectives of Study

This study aimed at appraising the views of prospective teachers about implementing teaching practice in department/ college (in case of internal teaching practice and school setting/ real situation (in case of external teaching practice). However, the associated objectives of the study were to:

- a. assessing the views of prospective teachers about duration of the teaching practice,
- b. reviewing the opinions of prospective teachers on the role of supervisors, and
- c. apprising the attitude of prospective teachers about objectives of teaching practice

Method and Procedure of Sample

The population of the study consisted on all prospective teachers (N=330) enrolled in B.Ed and M. A Education (morning) programmes of the academic session 2010-11 and 2009-11 respectively (who had completed their second and 4th/ semesters respectively) at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur including both of the sub-campuses i.e. Bahawalnagar and Rahym Yar Khan. The researchers used convenient sampling technique and collected data from 330 prospective teachers. The detail of sample is from all the campuses and is given below.

Table 1. Sample of the study

Sr. No	Campus Status	Level of students	No of students
1	Bahawalpur Campus	Master of Arts in Education	60
		Bachelor of Education	60
2	Bahawalnagar Campus	Master of Arts in Education	50
		Bachelor of Education	55
3	Rahim Yar Khan Campus	Master of Arts in Education	55
		Bachelor of Education	50
<i>Total</i>			330

Development of Research Instrument, Data Collection and its Analysis

After reviewing the related literature, the researchers developed a questionnaire with descriptive graphic rating scale to elicit the opinions of the prospective teachers who had completed their internal and external teaching practice successfully. The research tool was validated through its pilot testing on a sample of 25 prospective teachers who were excluded from the final survey. The research tool was finalized in the light of the results of the pilot study after making necessary amendments. The researchers personally administered the tool on the samples and collected data.

The respondents participated in the survey on voluntarily basis. The researchers collected data from respondents in groups after a briefing session on the objective of the survey and process of filling in the questionnaire according to their level of agreement. The items of the questionnaire consisted of two to nine options and the respondents marked one according to their choice. The average score of each item was calculated. It presented a general picture of the reflection of prospective teachers on teaching practice. A brief description of the results is given with their tabular presentation in the succeeding section.

Results of the Study

All the items included in the questionnaire were analyzed separately. The results of the study are given concisely and presented in tabular form below.

Table 2. Opinions of prospective teachers about the role of supervisors and school teacher

Statements	<i>(n=330)</i>			
	Yes	%	No	%
Should the supervisor check performance daily?	272	82.42%	58	17.57%
Should class/school teachers' comments be included while marking the final lesson?	213	64.54%	117	35.4%

The data given in the table-2 presented opinion of prospective teachers about the role of their supervisors during the teaching practice. The data affirmed that majority of the respondents (83%) were of the view that supervisors should check their performance on a daily basis. However, 65% of the prospective teachers suggested that the comments of school teachers (who performed as internal supervisors) should be taken into account and valued while marking the final lesson for summative evaluation and grading.

Tale-3 expressed opinions of prospective teachers about the duration and time allocation for internal as well as external teaching practice. The data indicated diversified opinions of the prospective teachers about the duration of internal teaching practice ranging from 48. 18% (favoring two weeks) to 32.12% (supporting four weeks); however, 19.69% preferred three weeks' internal teaching practice. In overall it is obvious from the data that prospective teachers wished the duration of internal teaching practice to be two to four weeks appropriate. Similarly, their views on external teaching practice were also varied and ranged from four weeks (61.21%) to eight weeks (28.78%) with a little voice (only 10%) for six weeks. Apparently, the

respondents recommended the entire duration of external teaching practice neither less than four weeks nor more than eight week.

Table 3. Opinions of prospective teachers about the duration and time allocation for teaching practice

		(n=330)		
Statement		Options		
What should be the duration of internal teaching practice?		Two weeks	Three weeks	Four weeks
Number of Responses		159	65	106
Percentage		48.18%	19.69%	32.12%
What should be the duration of external teaching practice?		Four weeks	Six weeks	Eight weeks
Number of Responses		202	33	95
Percentage		61.21%	10%	28.78%
How many lectures a prospective teacher should teach every day?		Two	Three	Four
Number of Responses		98	145	87
Percentage		29.69%	43.93%	26.36%
Teaching practice should be?		After 1 st semester	During 2 nd semester	After final semester
Number of Responses		115	91	124
Percentage		34.84%	27.57%	37.57%

During external teaching practice a prospective teachers has to prepare audio and visual aids in addition to the formal lesson planning. In spite of these, s/he also has to organize or participate in different curricular and co-curricular activities of the school(s) which require time and effort. That's why a prospective teacher has to work a lot for learning professionalism and professional ethics during school practice days. The data given in the table-3 portrayed mixed inclination of prospective teachers about their teaching workload during school based external teaching practice. Their views ranged from two (26.69%) to four (26.36%) periods daily; however, 43.93% of them suggested teaching three periods daily. Likewise, they reflected diversified preferences about the offering of the school based external teaching practice during teacher education programme(s). According to the results of the data 34.84% and 27.57% of the prospective teachers preferred teaching practice offering after the first and second semester respectively; however, 37.57% suggested its offering/ execution after the final semester which seems more logical according to the spirit of the teacher education programme(s).

Table 4. Opinion of the prospective teachers about the role of supervisors of teaching practice

		(n=330)		
Statement		Options		
What should be the supervisor' role?	To help prepare lesson	To observe critically	To give feedback	To evaluate performance
Number of responses	47	68	79	136
Percentage	14.24%	20.60%	23.93%	41.21%
Which aspect of teaching practice should be focused?	Contents	Teaching method	Personality development	Lesson planning
Number of Responses	58	111	44	87
Percentage	17.57%	33.63%	13.33%	26.36%

A supervisor plays an important role in effective teaching practice supervisors by facilitating the prospective teachers in designing their lessons, selecting appropriate teaching aids and managing time

properly. A supervisor evaluates lessons and participation of prospective teachers in curricular and co-curricular activities in the school and provides feedback for improvement accordingly. The results of the data analysis given in table-4 revealed opinion of prospective teachers about the role of supervisors of teaching practice. It affirmed that prospective teachers wished multiple roles of their supervisors during teaching practice according to their needs. According to the data 14.24% and 20.60% of the prospective teachers desired the help of their supervisors in preparing their lesson plans and observe the same critically in classroom to provide guidance for improvement respectively; and nonetheless 41.21% and 23.93% of them were of the view that their supervisors should assess their actual performance in classroom & school environment and provide feedback for encouragement respectively.

There are different aspects of teaching practice leading toward professional development of prospective teachers. It aims at inculcating includes mastery over the contents, developing lesson planning skills and their presentation style; and personality development of prospective teachers. The data analysis presented a mixed picture of the aspirations of prospective teachers in this regard –as 17.5% expected mastery over content matter through teaching practice, 26.36% wished to learn the art of lesson planning, 33.63% wanted to learn appropriate instructional method(s) and skills/ styles according to the nature of the contents; however, 13.33% of them were of the view that there should be ample activities in teaching practice to help them develop their personalities according to the demand of teaching profession.

Table 5. Opinion of the prospective teachers about the objectives of teaching practice

		(n=330)	
Statement	Options	Respondents	% age
What should be the objectives of teaching practice?	a). To develop teaching techniques	165	50
	b). To learn teaching methods	81	24.54
	c).To identify factors affecting students' learning	75	22.72
	d). To cover the contents	93	28.18
	e). To gain confidence	132	40
Which of the following aspects of prospective teachers should be observed?	a) White Board Writing	120	36.36
	b) Class Control	102	30.90
	c) Confidence	159	48.18
	d) Knowledge	126	38.18
	e) Lesson Planning	81	24.54
	f) Preparation of A/V aids	59	17.87
	g) Teaching methods	76	23.03
	h) Behavior	66	20
	i) Punctuality	91	27.57

Like other trades, teaching is a profession and teaching practice prepares novice prospective teachers into skilled professionals (Hussain, 2008). Teaching practice aims at equipping prospective teachers with all skills required for productive professional life. Professional development of novice teachers is one of the basic aims of teaching practice. The data analysis given in the table-5 portrayed aspirations of prospective teachers about objectives of teaching practice. The data analysis presented a blend of the opinions of the prospective teachers about the objectives of teaching practice. They (74.24%) wished the objectives of teaching practice to be of such nature necessary for developing pedagogical skills and /or instructional styles among them. Similarly, 28.18% and 22.72% of them desired the objectives of teaching practice to making prospective teachers covering the contents & getting mastery over them and identifying factors affecting students' learning in the schools respectively. However, 40% were of the opinion that developing confidence among prospective teachers should be the objective of teaching practice.

Teaching practice consists of different activities and each requiring be monitoring and supervising for getting a level of proficiency and expertise. The data indicated that 36.36% and 30.90% of the prospective

teachers were of the belief that their supervisors should observe the art & style of their writing on whiteboards and control over the class during their teaching or lesson in the class. Similarly, 38.18% and 24.54% supported that their subject knowledge and the art of lesson planning should be evaluated in the class respectively. Even so, 17.87% and 23.03% affirmed that their audio-visual aids along with their preparation and instructional methods must be assessed respectively. However, 48.18%, 20% and 27.57% of the prospective teachers were of the belief that their confidence, behavior and punctuality respectively are necessary for teaching profession and these ought to be critically observed during teaching practice and developed among them by offering appropriate activities to them.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is apparent from the results of the study that prospective teachers appreciated the role of their supervisors in facilitating them through evaluation of teaching practice. They were of the opinion that supervisors should evaluate their actual performance on regular basis. Moreover, they stated that the comments of school teachers (who observed them throughout the teaching practice) should be valued in awarding grades and marks to them. The study of Cohen and Manion (2004) also revealed the similar results by affirming that the performance of the prospective teachers can be improved only through regular evaluation by their supervisors.

The prospective teachers were of their views that teaching practice should pay more focus on the instructional methodology rather on theory. Almost same results were drawn by Haydn and Barton (2007) in their research as majority of the respondents (90%) affirmed that the developing teaching techniques and building up confidence among prospective teachers should be focused more than other elements in the teaching practice. These results corresponded to the findings of the present study that confidence, knowledge, white board writing and class control of the prospective teachers should be given more weightage during the evaluation. Likewise, the findings of of the studies conducted by Avis, Bathmaker, and Parsons (2002); and De Freitas, Oliver, Mee and Mayes (2008) appeared to be relating to the findings of the present study by portraying that the different aspects of the prospective teachers like their self-confidence, command over the subject matter, their instructional styles and classroom control should be focused accordingly.

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