

Observations of Prospective Teachers' Experience and Challenges Faced During Teaching Practicum-1

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Abstract

This paper investigates the provision of insights and comments based on observations made by fifteen prospective teachers throughout their sixteen-week teaching practicum-1 experience in an elementary school. The paper explores, evaluates, and details the professional growth experiences of these fifteen prospective teachers throughout their teaching practicum-1 observation phase using qualitative data from an interview procedure and SWOT analysis. A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was used for the current study. Samples participated on a volunteer basis. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed. The instrument was developed with the help of a literature review and it was validated by the field experts. Thematic SWOT analysis was used. The findings show that the students found this experience significant for their professional development and that they gained a lot from it. The paper also discusses several difficulties and constraints that were faced during their teaching practicum 1. However, this study underscores the importance of hands-on teaching experience in the development of skills and proficiencies of prospective teachers. Thus, this paper provides recommendations based on the outcomes and difficulties experienced during the practicum to help improve the preparation and assistance for future teachers. This work pays much attention to the concept of reflection and practice-based learning in teacher training and development and calls for improvement in the approach to training teachers in the field of education.

Keywords: Challenges and Observations, Prospective Teachers, SWOT Analysis, Practicum-1.

Introduction

Teacher education involves a cooperative effort between faculties and schools. The objective of this collaboration is to prepare prospective teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address teaching challenges. As, prospective teachers are provided with opportunities to assess their teaching abilities through observation and practical application in school settings. This collaborative approach is implemented through school experience courses within teacher training programs. These courses are highly regarded as they offer comprehensive exposure to various aspects of the teaching profession, making them crucial in the early stages of teacher education (Yalcin, 2019). Prospective educators have the opportunity to teach one or two classes under the guidance of an experienced instructor, actively participating in all educational

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activities. This allows them to gain valuable teaching experience within educational institutions. This experience in schools helps enhance the knowledge and skills of most prospective teachers. Educational institutions arrange their curriculum to provide aspiring teachers with the necessary skills during their teaching practice (Fatmawati, 2021).

The teaching practicum holds immense significance in teacher education as it allows prospective teachers to put into practice the theoretical knowledge acquired in their courses within actual classroom environments (Sjøen, 2023). Research conducted on prospective teachers' observations during their last years of teaching preparation reveals that the process of acquiring teaching skills is complex. It is shaped by environmental elements like the goals and direction provided by mentors and course instructors, as well as individual ones like the earlier beliefs about teaching and learning held by prospective teachers (Mena et al., 2023). Therefore, many people who work in the educational system, including mentors or cooperating teachers and course instructors, have important roles to play in helping prospective teachers learn.

Enhancing teaching abilities, giving students real-world experience in classroom settings, evaluating course materials, tracking student progress, encouraging learning through the sharing of experiences and viewpoints among prospective teachers, and fostering collaboration with mentors and supervisors are the goals of the Teaching Practicum-1 (Matengu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, prospective teachers participate in a range of instructional activities.

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted to explore different aspects of the Practicum-1 observations, focusing on prospective teachers' attitudes, opinions, and expectations regarding the course and their elementary school experience. The studies explored during the literature review focus on the Prospective teacher's skill development and challenges faced by prospective teachers during their teaching practicum or teacher training. Teaching practicum-1 develops the professional skills of prospective teachers.

Prospective teachers are trained to develop positive attitudes which leads to effective learning of students. The study by Lautenbach and Heyder (2019) indicates that changing attitudes helps prospective teachers to gain interest in teaching. The article is about how the attitudes of prospective teachers are changed by structured intervention. The interventions were based on the field experience and information. The purpose of this study was to develop a sense of inclusion in the prospective teachers. Inclusion is an important part of teacher training as it develops collaboration skills among prospective teachers. Working in an inclusive environment leads to a positive influence on prospective teacher's attitudes.

The research by Tondeur et al. (2020) shows the importance of technological pedagogies for prospective teachers, about the role of technology in education. A teacher's education program was introduced for prospective teacher's development of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). The teacher education program was based on the utilization of technology by prospective teachers during content selection, collaboration, or providing feedback. The author identifies that following the trends and making education interesting by using technology builds a positive relationship between teacher and student. The study focused on the strategies a prospective teacher can develop in a teacher education program (Tondeur et al., 2020).

Professional development programs or training workshops are to upgrade the teaching skills for effective teaching. The work by Dhani (2020) indicates that the professional development of teachers (prospective service or in-service) is an important part of their training. In professional development, new opportunities and enhancement of skills are focused for teachers. The study also

described the characteristics of training programs for teachers which are focused around the world. Professionally developed teachers are more efficient and effective during their teaching in the classroom. The research also identified that few professional development programs for teachers have effectively high results.

Motivation of teachers during teaching leads to creating an effective classroom climate. Research work by Shaukat et al. (2023) studies the motivation of prospective teachers during their career choice. The article states the importance of teaching programs which leads to improving the quality of teaching and focuses on teaching programs in Pakistan arguing that teacher's education should be improved by advanced approaches and practices which enhances the motivation of prospective teachers. Further, the research says that the government of Pakistan should develop guidelines and teaching programs by understanding the initial motivation and knowledge of the prospective teachers. Recognition of PSTs (Prospective teachers) motivation leads to advancement in the quality of teacher training. The researcher also studied the reason behind the initial motivation of PSTs.

Education is the progress based on a successful world and this progress is because of teachers. The article by (Siddiqui et al., 2021) argues that several teachers' training programs are implemented across Pakistan but the desired outcome has not been achieved. The study is based on Pakistan's educational policies about teacher training and planning. The focus of this research was on the issues in teacher training and how they can be fixed. A few issues are discussed in the article which is 1) poor induction 2) low level of education 3) infrequent and inadequate training sessions 4) lack of resources 5) lack of motivation 6) ineffective distribution of teachers 7) dual training system. Prospective teachers are trained to work in complex settings. Teacher's training provides opportunities for prospective teachers. A study by Flores (2020) focuses on the planning of teaching training. The teacher training programs should be according to the curriculum. In this research, the analysis of teaching practicum is discussed. The findings of this article say that the prospective teachers have limited experience and activities on a broad range which reduces the potential of learning. The study relates to the enhancement of nature and reflection on the professional development of prospective teachers.

Understanding the challenges a prospective teacher will face in teaching practicum is important. In 2023, Pakpahan aims to investigate the challenges faced by PSTs (prospective teachers). The study discussed two important factors that influence prospective teachers during teaching practicum. The external difficulties the PSTs face come from the classroom, schools, and resources such as lack of student motivation, lack of facilities, and student behavior. The internal challenges faced by the PSTs are classroom managing strategies, professionalism in teaching, and teaching methodology. PSTs face different challenges because they don't have previous experience which leads to difficult circumstances and reduces the growth of pre-service teachers. The study by Botha (2020) focuses on the experiences and the powerful impact on teachers. The study shows that prospective teachers develop their own professional identity by observing their surroundings. The author argues that the observations are the explanation of the prospective teacher's perception of teaching. The finding of this study identifies the purpose of observation by prospective teachers which is to enhance their perception of teaching on boarder scale.

Reflection is an important factor in teaching as it leads to modification and innovative ideas of teaching. Another study by Cadiz (2021) indicates that reflection in teaching is about planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating teaching skills. The study identifies that reflective practices should be considered for prospective teachers. It includes the strategies that a prospective

teacher can use to evaluate their teaching. The results of this study focus on the relationship between reflection and teaching practicum. Reflection during the teaching practicum allows the prospective teachers to improve their teaching instructions and strategies.

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on assisting prospective educators in examining the insights and understandings they gain from their experiences in teaching practicum-1 in an elementary school. In addition, a SWOT analysis of the teaching practicum-1 experience is attempted to be conducted by the study, with an emphasis on determining the opportunities, threats, weaknesses, and strengths that were faced throughout the practicum. Additionally, based on the findings of the SWOT analysis and the perspectives of prospective teachers, the research attempts to provide recommendations and implications for enhancing the caliber of teaching practicum experiences in elementary schools.

Methodology

The study's approach tries to describe the research methods that this study used to establish the insights and understandings of prospective educators regarding teaching practicum-1 in an elementary school. In this study, a qualitative research paradigm was used, which is useful in the investigation of questionable and multifaceted phenomena, including the perceptions and insights of prospective teachers. In particular, a phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences of prospective teachers regarding insights and reflections on teaching during teaching practicum. This approach is suitable for the study as it enables the researcher to gain detailed analysis of the participant's feelings, thoughts, and perceptions towards the teaching practicum hence offering a detailed and comprehensive understanding of their insights and understandings. The participants of the study were third-year PSTs enrolled in a Bachelor of Education program. They had recently completed their 16-week practicum teaching at a private university.

Sample

The sample of the study participated on a volunteer basis. These are 15 prospective teachers (PSTs) enrolled in the Teaching Practicum-1 course within the Bachelor of Education program. All of these PSTs were female and in their last year of studies. Their ages range from 20 to 24 years.

Context of PSTs (Prospective teachers)

After completing their four-month teaching practicum with success, the fifteen participants were in their final year of a bachelor's degree. The practicum course was created especially to provide prospective teachers, with the opportunity to obtain real-world experience in a classroom environment. A supervisor and a mentor instructor were appointed to each participant to guide them during the practicum. As a final assignment, participants also had to create a portfolio and write a reflective report summarizing their practicum experiences.

Instrumentation

The researcher adapted the semi-structured interview protocol and it was modified according to our context. The modified version of the interview protocol was validated by experts in the same field. Content validity and face validity were assured to be confidential (Hong et al., 2019). SWOT analysis is a key component of the interview process, with an emphasis on determining the

strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A semi-structured interviewing technique was used which is preferred by educational researchers because it allows participants to completely express themselves (Muthanna, 2019).

This approach also minimizes interviewer bias, enhances the comparability of responses, and ensures comprehensive data on the topics discussed for each respondent. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent. They were also assured that their provided information would be kept confidential and their anonymity maintained. No incentives were offered to the respondents to encourage their participation.

Collection and Analysis of Data

The interview data was collected through voice recording with their permission. The goal is not to simplify the participant's voices by summarizing their opinions, but rather to deeply explore them at an interpretive level. In this study, the interpretive approach was used to analyze the data. The focus of this approach is to capture the Insights and reflections from observation during the experiences of prospective teachers (PSTs). This approach involved a thorough and detailed analysis of the participants' accounts, which were recorded word for word, as well as a comprehensive and analytical commentary on their sense-making activities during the learning process. Thematic SWOT analysis also involves findings, classifying, and interpretation of patterns and themes in the data, which was used to examine the information (Lochmiller, 2021).

Table 1: Respondent Exploration of SWOT Analysis

Sr #	Major categories	Associated concepts	Respondents
1	Self-reflection		
a.	My Strengths	Classroom management	R1, R2, R5, R7
		Student's participation	R3, R6, R4, R10
		Collaboration with colleagues	R5, R8, R11, R15
		Advance lesson preparation	R4, R6, R9, R11
		Positive classroom environment	R3, R5, R8, R12
		Command on content	R2, R4, R5, R9
		Focus on student interests	R3, R7, R11, R15
		Effective teaching	R8, R9, R11, R13
		Strategies for student motivation and encouragement	R4, R6, R8, R9, R12
		Professional behavior of the teacher	R6, R7, R9, R10, R13, R15
b.	My Weaknesses	Classroom arrangements	R6, R7, R8, R10
		Difficulty in creating a positive classroom	R3, R5, R7, R9, R13, R15
		Lack of self-confidence and professional competence	R1, R3, R7, R9, R10, R12
		Hindrances in content deliverance	R6, R8, R9, R11
		Distraction from outside the classroom	R5, R7, R9, R12, R14
		Managing student's disruptive behaviors	R2, R3, R5, R10, R15
		Student's attention span	R1, R5, R8, R9

	Lesson preparation and time management	R6, R8, R9, R11, R13
	Conducting the classroom	R2, R5, R6, R9
	Lack of objectivity	R4, R6, R8, R12
c. My Opportunities	Leadership	R1, R5, R8, R10
	Purpose of assessment	R2, R4, R7, R9
	Development of lesson plan	R4, R6, R7, R11
	Effective classroom management	R1, R4, R8, R12
	Understanding student's behaviors	R3, R5, R6, R8
	Enhance teachers professionally	R1, R5, R9, 13
	Enhance the skill of collaboration	R4, R8, R13, 15
	Develops the conducive classroom	R3, R5, R7, R14
	Problem-solving	R1, R4, R6, R10
	Improved teacher-student relation	R3, R5, R7, R15
d. My Threats	Different interests of students	R6, R8, R9, 10
	Class controlling	R1, R3, R4, R6
	Disruptive behaviors	R5, R7, R8, R11
	Classroom arrangements	R2, R4, R6, R12
	Time management	R1, R4, R6, R14
	Diversion of student attention	R5, R7, R9, R13
	Interference in classroom	R3, R5, R6, R7
	Use of irrelevant pedagogies	R1, R7, R9, R8,
	Lack of conceptual clarity	R2, R4, R5, R9
	Individual differences	R7, R9, R11, R15

SWOT analysis described an overview of the reflections and observations during the teaching practicum -1. Table 1 shows the data for the four themes of SWOT analysis including (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) observed in the teaching practicum - 1 by prospective teachers (respondents). Prospective teachers highlighted the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats they found in the teaching practicum - 1. In the analysis of data collected in the categories of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) the total respondents were 15 which were coded into (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15). Each respondent reported their observations according to the analysis criteria.

In the exploration of SWOT analysis, the prospective teachers(respondents) encounter their strengths during the observation as managing the classroom, engaging students, collaborating, lesson preparation, creating a positive classroom environment, command of content, developing student interests, strategies for effective teaching, development of professional behavior.

More likely, prospective teachers (respondents) also initiate their weaknesses found during the observation as classroom arrangements, difficulty in creating a positive classroom, lack of self-confidence and professional competence, hindrances in content deliverance, distraction from outside the classroom, managing student's disruptive behaviors, student's attention span, lesson preparation, and time management, conducting the classroom, lack of objectivity.

Furthermore, the prospective teachers (respondents) bring into being the opportunities they got during the observation as leadership, the purpose of assessment, development of lesson plan, effective classroom management, understanding students' behaviors, enhancing teachers

professionally, the skill of collaboration, and develops the conducive classroom, problem-solving, improved teacher-student relation.

Additionally, the prospective teachers (respondents) put in place the threats they faced during the period of observation as different interests of students, class controlling, disruptive behaviors, classroom arrangements, time management, diversion of student attention, interference in the classroom, use of irrelevant pedagogies, lack of conceptual clarity, individual differences.

Results

In this section, the overall idea about the observation and evaluation during the teaching practicum–1 are shared. The results are based on the evaluation of activities by prospective teachers observed during their experience in the field are given below.

Content: The content command observed by the prospective teachers was effective. The prospective teachers observed that the focus was on concept clarity during the teaching – practicum. According to the observations the content demonstration was in-depth. The content was based on general to specific patterns according to student’s grades and level of understanding.

Lesson presentation: According to the observations in teaching practicum–1 the prospective teachers observed that the lesson was presented with interesting content. The lesson usually started with the oral assessment of prior knowledge of students related to the topic. The main focus of teachers was to gain student attention and develop their interest in the content.

Teaching methodology: As the prospective teachers observed during teaching practicum–1 the teaching methodology was based on lecture method and activity-based learning. As per the observations, the teaching methodology focused on the utilization of facilitative teaching and authoritative teaching. Prospective teachers observe that different strategies of involving students were used which created a healthy learning environment.

Assessment: During the teaching practicum–1 prospective teacher observed that the assessment was conducted monthly (written) and daily (oral). Assessment included questions answers, worksheets, weekly tests, and monthly tests. Assessment designs were understandable by the students as they were given clear instructions for attempting the task. The purpose of the assessment was to evaluate students learning and to measure their knowledge.

Classroom management: The purpose of teaching practicum is to develop management skills in Prospective teachers. As per the observation by prospective teachers, the classroom was effectively managed. The utility of time was planned accordingly by the teachers. Prospective teachers observed that the classroom was controlled with equality and discipline was maintained in the class. The goal of objective achievement was focused in the classrooms.

Behaviors and attitudes: During teaching practicum – 1 the prospective teachers observed that the behavior of schoolteachers was positive toward students. It was observed that reinforcement for encouraging good behavior of students was focused. Prospective teachers observed that the behavior and attitude of teachers were different according to the level of students but motivation was considered.

Personal efficiency: According to the observations by prospective teachers the classroom teachers were professionally skilled and confident during the lesson. The collaboration and communication with students were professionally handled. Prospective teachers observed that there was effectiveness in teacher's behavior

Relevancy of content: During teaching practicum – 1 it was observed by prospective teachers that the use of relevant material and examples of daily life was focused on making the concepts of students clear. It was observed that the assessment was according to the content taught in the classroom.

Planning and preparedness: Prospective teachers observed during teaching practicum– 1 that the planning was done in advance. The teacher was prepared to teach the lesson. Students were also attentive and focused on the lesson. It was observed that classroom settings were prepared according to the lecture.

Classroom environment: During teaching practicum – 1 it was observed by the prospective teachers that the classroom arrangements and physical factors were considered accordingly. It was observed that the classroom furniture and resources were according to the level of the class. Prospective teachers observed that the classroom environment was effective in teaching and learning.

Discussion

The research results give a complete picture of the initial teaching experiences and reflections of those who are preparing to teach in an elementary school setting during their teaching. The SWOT analysis carried out by the participants informed on different areas of their observations, outlining the strengths; weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The observations of the prospective teachers revealed that apart from their strengths and competencies there are also areas of weakness that need to be looked at. Similarly, in research Lautenbach & Heyder (2019) point out that the changing of attitudes is important for pre-service teachers' professional development. It also focuses on the development of strengths and weaknesses of the teachers. The field experience leads to knowledge of future opportunities and threats a teacher may face. One of the items to emerge from the analysis was how effective lesson transmission depends greatly on the content knowledge. The student teachers stressed having good control of content and energetic delivery of lessons were critical for student learning and engagement. This is a clear indicator that professional development in the subject area and teaching techniques is a necessary condition for prospective teachers. On the other hand, Tondeur et al.(2020) state that positive strategies for teaching can create effective relations among teachers and students. The professional development programs develop the sense of instruction among the teachers to use different techniques for control of content.

Furthermore, class management and behavior management are highlighted by the center of focus on observations. Prospective teachers stressed the key issues of building a positive classroom atmosphere, managing disruptions, as well as keeping the learner's interest by delivering lessons. These findings show how important the role of the teachers in the process of creating classroom management which enables the students to have a pleasant environment for learning likewise Siddiqui et al. (2021) a similar study about the challenges faced by the prospective teachers during their practicum were addressed. Those challenges were developed due

to the teacher's lack of self-assessment. Teacher self-assessment can provide better ways to create a positive climate in the classroom. The investigation also focused on the growth and development prospects the student teachers have recognized from the experience. Opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and professional development were underlined as the directions of progress. These openings could be used as a guiding force for the best way of initiating future training programs and interventions designed to boost prospective teachers' skills and competencies. In another research Flores (2020) the teacher training programs should be based on a larger scale which can provide prospective teachers an opportunity to explore the field. Professional development of teachers should be designed according to the needs of society by current trends. Moreover, as the observations by PSTs, the challenges they faced were a lack of confidence, different student behaviors, and interactions with staff. The PSTs observed that the challenges were producing hindrances in the teaching-learning process for teachers and students. The study by Pakpahan, (2023) explores this factor that internal and external challenges in teacher training can hinder the growth of teachers. The study also argues that teachers are mostly influenced by external challenges such as lack of resources, facilities, school environment, and student behaviors. The observation process also agrees that the challenges faced during the teaching practicum can slow the professional development of the PSTs. Whereas, in teaching practicum the PSTs observed their strengths as new trainee teachers which helped them to feel more commanding in their teaching skills. The practicum made them skillful in managing the classroom and student's behaviors by giving them exposure to the school system. The study by Tondeur et al., (2020) suggests that teaching programs workshops, and practices develop the professionalism in the PSTs as they work in the field. The teaching practicum provides the practical implementation of the theory they have studied and an effective strategy to work in the world. Teaching practicum leads to the effectiveness of teachers' instructional areas. On the other hand, opportunities including multiple interests of the students, classroom control issues, and time management challenges were also the most noticeable things from the SWOT analysis. Such threats evoke the fact that prospective teachers have to face such complexities and challenges during teaching practicum and, therefore, appropriate support and guidance are necessary to find ways toward effective solutions to such obstacles.

Conclusion

The teaching practicum-1 in an elementary school has yielded valuable insights into teaching and classroom management. The evaluation and observation conducted during this period have highlighted the strengths of prospective teachers in areas such as content knowledge, student engagement, and collaboration with colleagues. However, weaknesses in classroom arrangements, confidence levels, and managing disruptive behaviors have also been identified. Moving forward, it is crucial to utilize these insights to inform targeted interventions and support mechanisms for prospective teachers. By addressing the identified weaknesses and capitalizing on growth opportunities, we can create a more conducive learning environment that fosters the professional and personal development of educators. Through continuous reflection, collaboration, and a commitment to improvement, we can nurture a group of highly skilled and confident educators who will have a significant impact in the field of education.

Recommendations

- Improving the organization of classroom setups can have a significant impact on the learning environment. By investing in adaptable seating options and optimizing the layout of the classroom, it is possible to promote greater engagement and participation among students.
- Taking a proactive approach to managing disruptive behaviors in the classroom can be highly effective for prospective teachers. By implementing strategies such as behavior management plans, restorative justice practices, and positive reinforcement techniques, educators can effectively address these challenges.
- Encouraging collaboration among colleagues and fostering leadership development is essential in promoting the growth of prospective teachers. By providing opportunities for collaboration, these teachers can effectively enhance their professional skills and make a positive contribution to the educational community.

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