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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Experiences and Practices of Prospective Teachers during Teaching Practice in a Pre-service Teacher Education Program**

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**ABSTRACT**

The research set out to investigate the student teachers' positive and negative experiences during teaching practice. This description helped the researcher to understand student teachers' perspectives about the experience of teaching. Student teachers who were studying in the last year of their four-year BEd (Hons) program were the sample of the study. The research was qualitative in nature. Semi structured interviews were conducted from the prospective teachers. Consistent with the interpretive paradigm, these methods allowed researcher to interact with the research participants. The interview data were analyzed thematically. The Study revealed that majority of the respondents believed that preparation of lesson plans and interaction with students and host teachers was a thorough learning experience. It was further discovered that they faced problems regarding school teachers' harsh attitudes and lack of facilities and other resources. It was recommended to conduct regular reflective sessions with prospective students to ensure good practices

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**Introduction**

Teaching is generally described as the process of imparting knowledge or skills in traditional classrooms and giving of instructions (westwood, 2008). Tuli and File (2009) argued that teaching is a "combination of art, a craft and a science"(p:40). This implies that teaching is knowledge about what to teach and how to teach. It focuses on employing appropriate methods for particular topics and particular kinds of students within particular settings. In all, it combines knowledge and skills to effectively shape students' learning experiences. Teaching practice is an important part of learning about teaching. Usually, it takes place in a school (Pukin, 1998) and occurs in natural setting and so, is the most important part of course of training (Cohen & Garner, 1970). This is a key component in

teacher education program in which prospective teachers learn to become professional teachers but also experiment innovative practices in the classrooms. Teacher education with rigorous focus on the development of abilities and skills of prospective teachers enable them to discharge duties efficiently, take initiatives, encourage and inspire students and facilitate learning. It is commonly believed that practice makes a man perfect. In order to strengthen effective habits and to improve the pedagogical weak point's students must be given a chance of teaching and educating with proper guidance and support during practical delivery, (Essays, UK. 2018).

According to the National Education policy of Pakistan, 1998, quality of education is directly related with quality of instruction in the classroom. In Pakistan, teacher education program is not considered effective in providing quality education. The major reason attributed to the fact that student teachers have unbalanced course during teaching. Besides, student teachers also experience lack of knowledge about academic knowledge, subject content of school curriculum and related activities due to short duration of existing teacher education programs (Govt. of Pakistan, 1998). Ball (2011) states that in order to have strong training for responsible practice, teacher preparation program must focus on clear specification of skill, capabilities, and qualities of performance necessary for independent practice, as well as, developmental, clinical training, progressing from observing to simulation, with coaching, to independent practice setting that support professional learning. Core components of practice-centered teacher education involve curriculum, instructional activities and setting, and assessment to assist in preparing novice teachers. Overall teaching is a practice and must be focus on learning and doing the actual work that is crucial to the improvement of teacher preparation.

### **Teacher Education in Pakistan**

In Pakistan after independence, quality teacher education was needed and it was stated in all the educational policies that well trained and realistically well paid teachers are necessary to the building up of a great nation. The Commission on National Education 1959 highlighted that 'no system of education can be better than its teachers' and that proposed reforms will not be successful unless we are able to recruit the men and women of highest abilities at all levels and prepare them to the desired standards.

The National Education Policy 1979 stated that the standards of the teacher education seem to be on the lower ebb because of varied reasons and it is needed to improve the quality of teacher education.

The national Education Policy 2009 further emphasized on the raising the quality of education. It recognized quality of teacher as the top most important factor of quality education along with the text books, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment approaches and learning environment etc. In fact, the pedagogy,

assessment practices and the conducive teaching learning environment are basic tools of a quality teacher. The National Education Policy 2009 also described number of policy procedures to augment the worth of teacher education programs and the teacher. Most significant measures are:

1. To elevate the minimum required qualification to BA, B.Ed. for elementary school teachers and degree with B.Ed. for Teachers of secondary schools.
2. To regulate and institutionalize the teacher training accreditation and certification measures.

The substitution of B.Ed. one year with B.Ed. Hons. four years, establishment of NACTE and initiation of National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan (NPSTP) by the federal ministry of education in 2009, mirror the concern of the Government for teachers education programs, teachers' training and education. The vision 2030 marked teacher as the 'long pole' in the tent of educational system and way to the enlightened society. On the whole, past policies and plans teachers were described as the backbone of the system of education.

Historically, many reforms have been introduced to improve the quality of teacher education. In the recent past, Government of Pakistan has initiated new programs in collaboration with USAID through their Pre-Service Teachers Education Program (Pre-STEP) project. New curriculum has been developed and now taught in the pre-service programs such as a two-year Associate Degree in Education (ADE) and a four-year BEd (Hons). Curriculum has been made keeping in view the contextual relevance and modern educational principles. Curriculum for B Ed (Hons) and ADE by HEC (2010) lay emphasis on capability of teacher not only in the content based areas but also in pedagogy to ensure attainment of learning outcomes by the students.

The ADE and B. Ed programs have been initiated in many colleges and universities. These are innovative practices for effective teacher education programs but some areas need attention to detail for the success of these new reform initiatives. For example, new curriculum demands modern teaching and learning resources. Furthermore, poor Internet connection facility, lack of other resources and many teachers' inability to use computer and internet are big problems. Most of the teacher training institutions are not well oriented with the teaching strategies required by these new programs. Moreover, there is a sense of ambiguity about the sustainability of these new initiatives. A clear policy is also needed to link these degrees to job opportunities for the prospective teachers. This will reduce their insecurities about the job prospects after the completion of their degree.

A number of researches have examined teaching practice from various perspectives (Woods, 1991; Kiggundu, 2007; Yilmaz & Cavas, 2006; Starkey & Rawlins, 2012) with a few conducted in the Pakistani context (Wagenaar, 2005;

Shahid & Hussain, 2011; Gujjaret al, 2011). These studies focused on different contexts and issues related to teaching practice. For example, Woods (1991) portrayed thick descriptions of student teachers experiences by highlighting the similarities and differences. Similarly, Afolabi (2003) conducted a study in Nigeria about the assessment of student-teachers' performance during teaching practice. Most of the studies about teaching practice often focus on the "perspectives of lecturers and cooperating teachers and exclude the perspectives of student teachers" (MacDonald, 1992, p:7).

While there are few studies that tend to describe student teachers' experiences, it is hard to find such a study within Pakistani context. This study is an attempt to fill this gap in literature by describing students teachers' experiences related to teaching practices in detail.

### **The Research Methodology and conceptual framework**

The proposed research was qualitative in nature. The research investigated the descriptions of the student teachers' experiences during teaching practice in a pre service teacher education program. Descriptive research seeks to describe an aspect of social life under investigation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A qualitative research design was used to describe the experiences of the prospective teachers because it allowed researcher to gather in depth information about their behaviors, emotions, desires, routines, feelings, experiences and variety of other information (Madrigal & McClain, 2012). The researcher collected the data by herself through a semi structured interview. Interpretive paradigm was used because it helped out to recognize the social world from the experiences and personal meanings that people affix to it. Because of the subjectivity of human opinions and views and experiences, social reality may also change its nature and form (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). So, researchers working from the interpretive tradition, give importance to experience and perspective as key source of knowledge.

### **Sampling Strategy and Data Collection**

All the student teachers who are studying in the last year of their four-year BEd (Hons) program in Punjab University, was the population of the study. Twenty students who volunteer to take part in this study from the Institute of education and research, university of the Punjab, were selected as sample of the study. The coding scheme adopted for interpretation of results was as given below:

Prospective teacher= PT

Number of prospective teacher= PT1, PT2..... PT20

The researcher employed the method of interview. These involved individual semi structured interviews from the student teachers. Consistent with the interpretive paradigm, these methods allowed researcher to interact with the

research participants. Interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. This is the most wide spread method of data collection in qualitative research. According to Oakley (1998), in qualitative interview practices and standards be not only recorded, but also achieved, challenged and as well as reinforced.

In planning the research design, ethical guidelines were followed. Each prospective teacher was contacted and requested to take part in the research. They were also informed about the nature of research. Confidentiality was also ensured. The interviews were recorded with their permission and the details were kept anonymized.

## Results and Discussion

The audio recorded interviews were then transcribed. Data generated from the interview questions relating to prospective teachers' experiences were thematically arranged and coded. Many steps were followed. These steps involved reading and re-reading the interview information, generating short codes, recognize major themes, reviewing and defining themes, sequencing a coherent description of data extracts and contextualizing the analysis with available literature.

Following were the major themes emerged from this study

**Table1**

**Research questions and major themes of the study**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Major themes</b>
1. What are the overall experiences of the prospective teachers?	1.1-Student engagement and lack of facilities 1.2- Anxiety and Nervousness due to attitude of the school staff
2. What did the prospective teachers Learn from teaching practice?	2.1-Enhanced management skills 2.2-Punctuality and discipline 2.3-Effective Lesson planning 2.4- Personality grooming
3. How did their confidence develop during teaching practice?	3.1- Improved decision making skills 3.2-Peer and coordinators' appreciation 3.3- Increased interaction with students and school staff
4. What are the positive and negative things about teaching practice?	4.1- Enriching experience 4.2-Challenges faced by the prospective teachers

This descriptive study had a purpose of describing and narrating the experiences of prospective teachers during teaching practice. Teaching practice is an enriching experience during a teacher education program. The findings presented below highlighted the nature of experiences that prospective teachers

encountered during teaching practice. It provided in-depth information about the challenges they faced during this phase of teaching practice. It also accounted for the learning and knowledge the prospective teachers constructed as they experienced teaching in real classroom setting.

### **Overall Experiences of the Prospective Teachers**

The teaching learning process during teaching practice was a good learning experience for prospective teacher. They learned from both positive and negative experiences. They also learned from their mistakes. One of the prospective teachers said, "This teaching practice increased our knowledge, skills and confidence level"(PT: 4). another was of the view that:

"At first day, I was very nervous but at the end of the day I was quiet confident to stand in front of the whole class. The students were gazing me with curious eyes. Some of the students were also commenting on my presence. Overall, it was very interactive and full of learning experience (PT:18).

For many students, every day came with a new challenge. One prospective teacher illustrated that, "I was allocated different classes. The students of each class were of different age level and have multiple interests. The challenge was different for every class "(PT: 11)

### **Student Engagement and Lack of Facilities**

Following are some comments of the participants of the study on student engagement

"The classes were overcrowded which was difficult to handle as the back benchers were always complaining each other" (PT: 16)

"Some students are not serious in their studies. They always try to disturb the class. The host teachers of the school are also non-cooperative."(PT:20)

On lack of facilities participants of the research expressed their views very openly about the cleanliness, unhygienic food available at canteen etc. One of them said:

"The Government schools generally don't have many facilities. I know this because I myself studied in the government schools. Similarly to my previous experience, this school also lack many basic facilities. The washrooms were very dirty. Drinking water was not cold and clean. Classes were also dusty "(PT: 02)

Similar views were expressed by some other prospective teachers:

"School canteen was not good. There was no proper arrangement of sitting in the canteen. Unhealthy food was available and no one was checking the quality of food items" (PT: 07)

The school teachers demanded the prospective teachers to complete the syllabus and do not use multiple teaching methodologies. One of the prospective teachers highlighted this demand in these word "Mostly class teachers imposed the use of traditional teaching methods rather than new and innovative methods" (PT: 14).

### **Anxiety and Nervousness due to attitude of the school staff**

The staff rude behavior was the major cause of nervousness of prospective students. They felt that they were not welcomed by the school instead they were rejected by most of the school teachers. Some good examples were also there but some host teachers try to insult prospective teachers in front of students. One expression is given below:

"On the very first day i was excited to go for a practical experience of teaching but later this excitement was dominated by nervousness as the host teachers were always complaining that i am unable to control the class. This happened in the first week but after that I regained my confidence and I also try to develop good relationship with the host teachers"(PT: 8)

### **Learning through Teaching Practice**

Prospective teachers were of the opinion that they were learning with every new day. They were not only learning from positive experiences but negative things were also helping them to improve their teaching and learning. They were not only learning from their own experiences but they were also interactive with teachers and students and were sharing their experiences with them.

### **Enhanced Management Skills**

Prospective teachers were managing big classes and it was challenging for them to control these overcrowded classes. But with every passing day they learned how to manage these classes by using multiple teaching techniques i.e. pair share, work teams, home tasks, group discussions, Creative expression through debates etc. Few expressions are illustrated here:

"I learned how to manage and control the class. It was difficult early on but i managed by using different techniques according to the interests of the students" (PT: 10)

"I learned that how to respond an inappropriate behavior of the students in the class and how to answer the different and irrelevant questions and keep them on the track...."(PT:17)

### **Punctuality and Discipline**

School discipline is very important for effective functioning of the school. The prospective teachers were sensitive towards this fact and they were generally very punctual not only in coming to the school but also in taking their classes. One of them explained this as an important thing to do in these words, "..... We [prospective teachers] generally try to go in the class five minutes prior to the class because this punctuality helps you in completing your teaching plan in the class but indirectly gives a message to the students about the seriousness of the teacher and the importance of being punctual" (PT: 19)

### **Effective Lesson Planning**

The Study revealed that majority of prospective teachers believed that preparation of lesson plans and student centered approach for teaching was crucial for effective learning environment. While during teaching practice they faced many problems regarding use of diverse teaching strategies and other resources.

"I have learnt to prepare the lesson plans and how to manage my class according to lesson plan and manage audio-visual aids according to the needs of the class" (PT: 03)

"Because of the lesson plan, it becomes very easy to manage things in the class. It prepares you well for an effective teaching and learning" (PT: 09)

### **Personality Grooming**

This was another important aspect of the teaching practice described by the students. They were of the opinion that outer personality is visible to everyone. so, one should be careful to present nicely. Students try to communicate in a best possible manner. Some of the comments are given below:

"...most importantly, I learned about a proper dress code of a teacher..."(PT: 05)

All the prospective teachers were of the same opinion that wearing a beautiful dress makes the difference. They explained it that students mostly like those teachers who are looking good and wearing appropriate dress. They mostly enjoy wearing a changed dress every day.

" This is really an fun to think about your dressing every day and how you will be presenting yourself in front of students."(PT: 8)



### **Confidence development during Teaching Practice**

A confident teacher can handle most of the problems with his/her confidence. A teacher needs confidence the most. A confident teacher can manage and control class effectively. The prospective teachers confidence level was enhanced through their improved decision making skills, appreciation by others, and regular and close interaction with school staff and students.

### **Improved Decision Making Skills**

One of the prospective teachers expressed her feelings in these words:

"My teaching practice was interesting but challenging also. A big change which I felt and experience was my increased confidence level. On the first day, I was very confused but later I start facing everything very confidently. It was a good feeling that I was autonomous in taking my decisions for my class. Early on, in the presence of host teacher it was difficult to exert my autonomy but gradually the school teacher was also showing her confidence on me and then she let me decide for my class independently" (PT: 15)

### **Peer and Coordinator Teachers' Appreciation**

Peer and coordinator teachers' appreciation also increased the confidence level of the prospective teachers as described by a prospective teacher:

"I tried my hard to overcome my shyness. This became easy when my fellows and peers were encouraging me on my work. Our coordinator teachers' behavior was also good. She always appreciates our good work and that was very helpful in boosting our confidence level "(PT: 06)

### **Increased Interaction with Students and School Staff**

Increased interaction with school staff was another factor that contributed in the good performance of prospective teachers. Some comments are given below:

"frequent interaction with coordinator and school teacher helped a lot in becoming effective and confident"(PT: 04)

"...this experience was not only informative but also interactive. We have gone through many theories but now this was actually putting to theories into action. I tried to interactively learn from teachers and students of my class. "(PT: 18)

" It was difficult to interact freely in overcrowded classrooms at first but later I tried to use multiple methods of teaching and also discussed my problems with other teachers to solve them effectively"(PT: 13)

## **Positive and Negative Experiences during Teaching Practice**

The study revealed that the prospective teachers who participated in this study experienced both positive and negative pressures during teaching practice. On the positive side, prospective teachers shared a practical platform with experienced teachers where they actually combined theory and practice and developed content based and pedagogical knowledge.

### **Enriching Experience**

The findings of this study illustrated that prospective teachers developed new ideas, learned skills and personal passion needed for effective teaching. The good and positive experience shared by them includes:

- They learned how to be punctual and disciplined
- personality grooming was another positive feature of teaching practice
- teaching students was itself a learning for them as they learn to deal different behavior types and cope up with people of various temperament.
- The theoretical knowledge gained in the courses and preparatory workshops before teaching practice made them confident and skillful to practice teaching effectively.

### **Challenges faced by the Prospective Teachers**

Prospective teachers faced a number of challenges while adjusting to this new role as a teacher during teaching practice. The participants of the study revealed that they have had mixed experiences involving both positive and negative. Some of the negative experiences are narrated below:

- Rude and non cooperative behavior of host teachers and staff was reported specially at the beginning of the teaching practice.
- The classes were not scheduled according to prospective teachers' choices. There was lack of facilities along with inappropriate environment at the school
- The prospective teachers were not provided proper sitting place or suitable area by the school authorities where they could sit and keep their teaching materials.
- The classes were overcrowded and students were sitting in close proximity which made it difficult to control and teach students with proper attention. In some classes four to five students were sitting on one bench with their heavy bags. This also made it impossible for prospective teachers to take rounds in the class. Students were bullying each other mostly at the back side of the class.

- Senior teachers were not cooperative and they were mostly not aware of the use of instructional and informational technology in the class.

## **Conclusion**

The real life experiences of student teachers largely depend on environment that may or may not respond to their developmental needs during teaching practice. Many scholars in Pakistan assert that teaching practice in our country is not effective to compete at an international level. People tend to adopt this profession out of obligation instead of motivation (Murtaza, 2005). Quality of education is directly related with quality of instruction in the classroom. (National Education policy of Pakistan,1998).

The study demonstrated that the participants of the study faced many challenges. On the one hand, teaching practice positively influenced them with the provision of the platform where they could combine theory and practice and develop their skills and knowledge. On the other hand they experienced many challenges during their teaching practice. The prospective teachers felt rejected in the early few days and complained about the host teachers' rude and non-cooperative behavior. This finding was consistent with Okobia, Augustine, and Osagie (2013) who divulged that one of the biggest challenge faced by the prospective teachers is rejection from the school. On the whole lack of cooperation from the school authorities, teachers and other staff posed significant challenges to prospective teachers during teaching practice.

Prospective teachers not only developed positive behaviors at work place but they also learned to use effective multiple teaching strategies including: management and decision making skills, confidence, tolerance, content and pedagogical knowledge, and the realization of the fact that effective teaching involves continuous and lifelong learning.

The study also demonstrated that prospective teachers faced a number of challenges during teaching practice; In particular, mostly the school staff was not cooperative and friendly. They always criticize the prospective teachers with their discouraging attitude. This situation was very disappointing because of the fact that the host school teachers can help the future teachers in becoming most effective teachers. Besides, other challenges were also there for example lack of proper facilities, inapt environment and overcrowded classrooms. Many of such problems were also reported in a research conducted by Naz, Nasreen, Awan and Noureen (2011). Some of the problems they reported were non-existence of code of ethics, unawareness of responsibilities regarding practicum, conflict of interest, students' non-serious attitude, inconsistency in relationships, lack of diversity and non-availability of proper facilities for proper conduction of the practicum.

The in-depth understanding generated through this study provided insights into the experiences of the student teachers during teaching practice which

has implications for teacher education programs. The findings of this study may also be useful in improving teachers education programs in general and teaching practice specifically. The finding of this study may also be utilized in improving the quality of prospective teachers' experiences during teaching practice by attending these problems.

### **Recommendations**

Reflective sessions and discussions on continuous basis in the teacher training institutions may be organized to discuss practical problems of the prospective teachers and their teacher educators facing in the classroom and institutions. There is also a need to provide teaching resources, rigorous infrastructures and flexible environment to teacher educators for a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching.

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