

## **MENTORING PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS AT TEACHING PRACTICUM IN B.ED (HONS) 4 YEARS PROGRAM**

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### **Abstract**

Mentoring prospective teachers is multifaceted process in pre-service teacher education program. This qualitative study was conducted to explore the practices of prospected teachers during teaching practicum in B.ED (Hons) Elementary program. The current study found contradictory views of participants. Teaching practicum was tough experience for prospective teachers, they required proper guideline from cooperative teachers. In school settings cooperative teachers tried to support prospective teachers in learning pedagogical skills through modeling but it is difficult for them to facilitate prospective teachers without appropriate training. The most frequently repeated contradictions are lack of hands on activities, threatening oral feedback, and absence from class rooms on the part of cooperative teacher. Study concluded that prospective teachers learnt a lot during teaching practicum but they need a formal mentoring process to learn how to teach in actual class room situations. In this way, strong collaboration is needed between school and universities.

Key words: Mentoring, prospective teachers, cooperative teachers, teacher education program

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Mentoring in pre-service teacher education is an important element and plays a vital role in the training of pre-service teachers. Mentoring has been identified as a mechanism (Feiman-Nemser, 1996) for providing guidelines and support to prospective teachers by senior colleagues. Mentoring process is substantial to learn required teaching skills including ways of using new innovative teaching strategies in teaching practicum. Furthermore, mentoring is recognized as a powerful tool for training, supporting and improving the professional development of pre-service teachers (Vazir & Meher, 2010). Preparation of prospective teachers through pre-service teacher training programs has become popular all over the world (Abell & Bryan, 2005). These programs are designed to produce trained teachers, so that they perform their professional responsibilities well in future. Pre-service teacher education programs provide course work to prospective teachers with the solid foundations of teaching practicum to make a strong connection between theory and practice (Yost et al. 2000). Pre-service teachers learn the required skills for teaching and

improve their capacities during practicum to enhance the quality of teaching in the classroom (Azad, 2014). Importance of all components of practicum for prospective teachers in teaching practice is well documented (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990).

Modern methods of teaching which are being used did not provide sufficient practices for current classroom situations. Provided training often fails to enable prospective teachers to use the learnt strategies practically in real classroom situations. Therefore, they continue with traditional methods of teaching which negate the whole purpose of training during practicum (Khalid, 2006). Pre-service teacher training program in our educational system are often criticized by internal and external experts for not producing trained teachers. For instance, in the document of National Professional Standards for teachers in Pakistan (2009), it is mentioned that teacher education programs are not successful in producing quality teachers and are suggested to prepare prospective teachers in such a way that they can meet the standard of education.

Quality of education in Pakistan also depends on quality of pre-service teacher trainings provided by teacher education institutions. Quality of teachers is the central element of education system. Competent and professionally developed teachers can raise the quality of educational system (Iqbal, 1996). Unfortunately, quality of teachers in Pakistan is not satisfactory as stated in the Education Policy (2009) that “poor quality of teachers in the system in a large number is owed to the transformations in governance, an obsolete pre-service training structure and a less than adequate training command” (Government of Pakistan, 2009, p.42).

Prospective teachers’ attitude towards learning new skills and innovations in education is a key aspect in improving the quality of education (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2011). Quality of pre-service teacher education is a crucial factor to meet the standard of teacher education and implementing educational reforms at gross root level (Govt. of Pakistan, 1998). In Pakistan training of pre-service teachers is relatively ineffective as it did not address the contextual and situational needs of the prospective teachers (UNESCO, 2014; Azad, 2014). Teaching practice during practicum is often a stressful experience for prospective teachers. The purpose of the teaching practicum is to integrate educational theory with practice (Huling-Austin, 1992). Teaching practicum provides prospective teachers with an opportunity to recognize their beliefs and develop professional identities. During practicum, they teach and participate in multiple, complex and concrete experiences which are essential for meaningful teaching (Brock & Grady, 1998).

In Pakistan mentoring job, has been performed by the regular teachers of the schools where the prospective teachers go for practicum. University tutors also visit schools to support the prospective teachers at practicum. Mentoring is an essential part of teaching practice in which the prospective teachers get supervision and pedagogical and professional support from cooperative teachers. Mentoring in teaching practice is provided in almost all institutions, but in different styles (Azad, 2014). Cooperative teachers play a significant role not only in shaping the attitude towards innovation but also in practicing latest teaching techniques and overall professional development of the prospective teachers. With this background, the study was designed to investigate the practices of cooperative teachers, of the practicing schools in mentoring the prospective teachers at teaching practicum for their professional development. Prospective teachers cannot remove their professional weakness and deficiencies, without proper guidance of senior or expert teachers. In education sector, teaching practice is considered essential component of B.Ed. (Hons) elementary program. This study will help to highlight the gaps between practices of mentoring in teaching practicum.

## **1.1. Research Question**

Key research question for the study:

1. How do co-operative teachers mentor prospective teachers in teaching practicum in 4 years pre-service B.ED (Hons) program?
  - a. What is the nature of relationship between mentor and mentee during mentoring?
  - b. What pedagogical practices they support them to learn?
  - c. How do they provide modeling support?
  - d. How do they provide feedback?

## **2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This study is descriptive and exploratory in nature. It aims to examine the mentoring practices of prospective teachers and cooperative teachers in teaching practicum, at B.Ed. (Hons) elementary program. In the current study, the practices of cooperative teachers, in mentoring the prospective teachers at practicum were

examined in natural setting without any control or manipulation. The study consists of qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to explore the answer of the question. Researcher applied purposive sampling technique to select the participants of the study. There are mainly five teacher education institutions in the Rawalpindi and Islamabad which offer B.Ed. (Hons) elementary program. From which three institutions were selected by applying purposive sampling technique. Selected institutions showed their willingness to participate in the study and their prospective teachers has fully completed their practicum at least two or three times. Three most senior cooperative teachers and 18 prospective teachers were selected for semi structure interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Qualitative data consisted of interviews and FGDs provided in depth understandings of mentoring process at B.Ed. (Hons) Elementary Program. Semi-structured interview protocol was designed for cooperative teachers, FGD guide was designed for prospective teachers of selected institutions. All participants shared their views and perceptions about current mentoring practices, problems, challenges and future prospects.

All cooperative and prospective teachers were female with diverse educational background and experience. Interview protocols were designed by keeping in mind research question of the study. Cooperative teachers were individually interviewed at relatively free place in the colleges and universities after getting permission from administration. The researchers asked all designed questions, record all possible responses and jotted down some points. The researcher remained unbiased and unprejudiced during the structured interview. However, different aspects of mentoring were asked to cooperative teachers and prospective teachers. In the scheduled interview, it was tried to control interviewer effect by showing impartial attitude. At the completion of qualitative data collection interviews and FGD were transcribed by the researcher. Each and every sentence has been transcribed through open coding then axial code has selected from open coding.

### 3. ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed through open coding, axial coding, analytical coding and selective coding. Open coding helped to analyze the data into sequential order and make conceivable for the researcher to infer the efficient meaning from the perception of participants. Open coding provided the opportunity to drive whole data without depletion of single information. Open coding removed the element of biasness as the researcher remained an outsider in the whole process of data analysis. Thematic analysis was carried out through open coding, axial coding, analytic coding and selective coding.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes of qualitative data

S.N	Themes	Subthemes	S.N	Themes	Subthemes
1-	Relationships	Supportive Attentive Comfortable in talking	3-	Modeling	Observation class room activities Practicing latest techniques Used hands on material
2-	Pedagogical knowledge	Teaching strategies Planning lessons Classroom discipline Classroom management Assessment techniques	4-	Feedback	Oral feedback Written feedback Observation Performs

All participants (cooperative and prospective teachers) have clear understanding about their role, as they most frequently indicated that mentors should be supportive and attentive. They should be expert of subject matter knowledge and all teaching strategies appropriate to subject. A cooperative teacher articulated from institution 1;

“According to my opinion, for effective mentoring a mentor should be expert in the subject whom she is going to teach including all skills and strategies for mentoring. She should be supportive for students”.

Cooperative teachers also indicated that mentor should be supportive and cooperative to provide the guidelines to prospective teachers. They insisted in building positive relationships between both parties. Mostly prospective teachers indicated that cooperative teachers should be supportive, friendly, attentive and knowledgeable. According to one of the prospective teachers from institution 3;

“A mentor should be first of all well-mannered and should have a welcoming attitude. All the new teachers or

future teachers should be welcomed with open hearts. In this way the new teachers will feel at home as they are going to join a comfortable place.”

Relationship is the most conflicting code which was repeated number of times. Prospective teachers frequently mentioned that they were not able to build positive relationships with cooperative teachers’ due to lack of cooperation and their rude behaviors. In this way they faced number of problems and challenges during teaching practicum. Prospective teachers mentioned that cooperative teachers were not willing to work with prospective teachers. They considered prospective teachers as burden on them hence created different hurdles in their ways towards progress. They were not willing to give their classes to the prospective teachers specially science subjects. Cooperative teachers thought that prospective teachers will not produce good results and the overall result of their class would go down as a poor outcome. In short they were diffident in compromising on the abilities of the prospective teachers. So they were not able to build positive relationships with prospective teachers.

Pedagogical knowledge is another theme repeated frequently, there are subthemes under this i.e. teaching strategies, planning lessons, classroom discipline, classroom management and assessment techniques were repeatedly discussed by the participants. Cooperative teachers provided insight during the mentoring process and argued that they offered all the possible support and assistance to prospective teachers in all aspects as lesson planning, class room management and teaching strategies. But prospective teachers pointed out, that cooperative teachers did not discuss the scheduling of lessons and planning of lessons properly. They faced many difficulties to manage classroom as they did not have any guidelines by cooperative teachers in the classroom.

A prospective teacher said from institution 2;

“Some cooperative teachers guided in some ways but majority of cooperative teachers did not provide us any proper guideline. We faced lot of problems especially during the first day of practicum”.

Prospective teachers shared that during course work they learnt lot of teaching strategies and techniques but during the practicum they were not able to implement all those strategies in the classroom due to huge strength of students. Cooperative teachers also prohibited them to use the novel teaching strategies in real classroom settings.

Majority of cooperative teachers indicated that they delivered best teaching strategies including classroom management skills and maintaining discipline too. They provided possible opportunities of observation and tried to use available hands on materials with appropriate classroom activities during observation. Most of the cooperative teachers stated that they showed prospective teachers how to provide feedback in the form of assessment and evaluation to improve teaching learning. A cooperative teacher said from institution 1:

“When prospective teachers came to us, we tried to facilitate them as much as we could. Most of the prospective teachers faced problems in maintaining classroom discipline and management due to the class size. We always showed them how to control class by using different teaching strategies”.

Prospective teachers also identified another issue that most of the time their cooperative teachers were not present in the classes. Whenever they got chance to observe the cooperative teachers in order to enhance their learning, their observations were completely different from their expectations. Majority of prospective teachers mentioned that their cooperative teachers did not use new and creative techniques and activities in the classrooms. Cases of corporal punishment were also observed by the prospective teachers even daily in the classrooms. One of the prospective teachers from institution 1 stated that;

“Cooperative teachers did not provide us proper opportunities to observe, but whenever we got any chance, we found the situation quite opposite to what we expected from those experienced teachers.”

There were four sub-themes related to feedback emerged from thematic analysis of interviews and FGD. Prospective teachers got feedback from cooperative teachers in oral and written mode. Prospective teachers mentioned that they received oral feedback in the form of criticism from cooperative teachers instead of any positive or encouraging comments. Prospective teachers frequently stated that they did not receive any feedback from cooperative teachers.

Prospective teacher’s concern of unavailability of cooperative teachers in the class to seek help in the hours of need was significant. Their absence from the classes showed that they were not willing to mentor prospective teachers. This finding has been supported by the study conducted by Ngoh and Tan (2000) on determining the roles of the cooperative teacher in the school. They concluded that many of cooperative teachers assigned by schools did not show their interest to provide support during practicum. Another study

conducted by Arnold (2006) also had similar findings. He concluded that cooperating the prospective teachers was not an easy task. It cannot be performed by regular teachers of the school. It required proper training of cooperative teachers for the proper guidance of prospective teachers. A qualitative study “mentors report on their own mentoring practices” conducted by Hudson (2010) supported the finding of the current study. Hudson concluded that majority of cooperative teachers mentioned that they did not have positive relationships or good rapport with their prospective teachers. In this respect they gave many reasons as their prospective teachers were not interested in learning, had insufficient prior knowledge and they were not ready to teach in the practicum etc. Hudson conducted this study in Australia but had similar findings in spite of the change of context. It is maybe teacher education faces many problems which are common in all over the world. Cooperative teacher’s lack of training created tough working environment for them.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there is contradiction between the perceptions of cooperative teachers and prospective teachers. Cooperative teachers are convinced about the supportive, friendly, attentive, well-mannered and democratic attitude for developing and sustaining positive relationship that may facilitate learning in teaching practicum. However, some prospective teachers also complained about the rude and lacking trust behavior of cooperative teachers. Feedback on the part of cooperative teachers were also neither supportive nor encouraging rather humiliating and insulting that have negative effects on prospective teachers. Cooperative teachers tried their best to provide proper guideline to prospective teachers during teaching practicum, but it was bit difficult for cooperative teachers to trained prospective teachers without getting formal mentoring practices. Teaching practicum or field experience for prospective teachers had quite a new experience to explore and seek to what teaching is all about in real class room situations. No doubt prospective teachers learn lot of new techniques and strategies during teaching practicum but they required proper and scheduled mentoring to learn how to teach.

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