

## LISTENING TO THE EXPERIENCES AND CONCERNS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE PROGRAMME

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*Teaching Practice is widely recognised as the sine-qua-non of any teacher education programme. It is a component in the teacher preparation programme where prospective teachers are provided with an opportunity to put their theoretical studies into practice, get feedback, reflect on practice and consequently further improve their teaching skills. As teaching practice is an important component of a teacher education programme, considerable attention must be given to make it more effective and fruitful. This paper is based on a research study conducted to know pre-service teachers' experiences of the quality of teaching practice and the common concerns they have during teaching practice. On the basis of focussed group discussion a total of five themes were identified, these are (1) usefulness of teaching practice (2) experiences/concerns with pupils' behaviour (3) experiences/concerns with own behaviour (4) experiences/concerns with supervisors' behaviour (5) experiences/concerns with institutional and personal adjustments. The outcome of the focussed group discussion was used to prepare a structured questionnaire. Among other things, the study recommended rigorous practical training in lesson planning, demonstration lessons by teacher educators, simulated teaching before the commencement of practice teaching, school orientation programmes, a separate internship of two weeks and writing a journal by student teachers during teaching practice.*

**KEYWORDS:** Pre-service Teachers, Experiences and Concerns,  
Teaching Practice

## INTRODUCTION

The usefulness and effectiveness of the education system largely depends upon active, resourceful and competent teachers. It is on the qualities and character, educational qualifications and professional competence of the teachers that success of all educational endeavours depends. It is widely recognised that teacher education programme is the single most input to improve the quality of education. Researches have often emphasized the link between the quality of education and adequacy of professional training of teachers. To provide professional training to teachers, colleges of education have been established all over India. Colleges of education impart not only theoretical but also practical knowledge and skills in teaching different subjects to the student teachers. At the end of the session, teaching practice is carried out for practical application of knowledge and skills in an authentic teaching-learning environment.

Teaching practice is recognized as one of the most important aspects of teacher education (Farrell, 2008). Chiromo (2007) observes that the best place to learn to teach is in the classroom situation just as the best place to learn to swim is in the swimming pool. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) states, “the practicum aims to prepare professional and humane teachers who will become reflective practitioners of educational thought and practice.” The term teaching practice embraces all the learning experiences of student teachers in schools. It has three major components: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of teacher, the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies (Stones & Morris, 1972).

Teaching practice refers to the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve his/her professional practice in the context of real life classroom, usually under some form of guidance and supervision. Researchers have tried to increase understanding of the value of the teaching practice to student teachers from various perspectives ranging from the preparation, actual participation and the learning outcomes of the teaching practice (Cohen & Manion, 1983; Goodings, 1983; Brown & Brown, 1990). Cohen and Manion (1983) observed that the theory and training in college prior to practice cannot possibly provide with answers for all the problems and contingencies, a future teacher is likely to encounter in the school and the classroom. Goodings (1983) highlighted that by exposing teachers in training to the realities of their future careers in a control situation, enables them to eliminate a variety of weaknesses characterised by beginning teachers. Not only they are better prepared to teach but possess a high level of confidence in their own abilities.

According to Brown and Brown (1990) practice of teaching provides: (1) an opportunity to gain confidence (2) chance to put theories into practice (3) an

opportunity to learn skills and attitude of a competent and effective teacher (4) the chance to learn about children in real life situations (5) chance to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism (6) an opportunity for self evaluation and to discover strengths and weaknesses and (7) an opportunity for the training institutions to evaluate themselves. Because it is so valuable, teaching practice should be conducted in such a way that student teachers can continuously learn new knowledge and develop professionally. Knowing pre-service teachers' experiences during teaching practice allows more meaningful understanding of the practice of teaching. It is imperative to know the formative experiences student teachers undergoing their practice teaching had in learning to teach. The more is known about the experiences/concerns faced by the student teachers during their practice teaching, the greater the possibility of reducing stress and improving their success and maximizing benefits of the practice teaching for them.

### **EXPERIENCES AND CONCERNS OF PRACTICE TEACHING STUDENTS**

A number of studies have been carried out to know the experiences and concerns of student teachers during teaching practice (Lock, 1977; Preece, 1979; Briggs & Richardson, 1992; Constable & Norton, 1994; Stephens, 1996; Capel, 1997; Chan & Leung, 1998; Yourn, 2000; Ong et.al, 2004; Leach, 2005; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Kiggundu, 2007; Kabilan & Raja, 2008; Goh & Mathews, 2011; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011).

Lock (1977) advocated that the types of concerns student teachers encounter should be given substantial attention to enable better preparation of new teachers and that the study of problems faced by student teachers was essential. There was a better chance of eliminating problems encountered by student teachers if more was known about the difficulties they faced and the sources of their concerns. Preece (1979) reported that discipline problems often led to high level of anxiety in student teachers. However he also found evidence that in some cases a high level of anxiety by student teachers at the start of teaching practice actually appeared to be a cause of indiscipline among the pupils. Briggs and Richardson (1992) cautioned that the many problems faced by student teachers during their practice teaching could possibly have been an omen of future conflicts and, therefore, should be tackled carefully. Constable and Norton (1994) have made a significant point that pressure on student teachers to cope with teaching practice can sometimes cause impediments in their development. The main focus of student teachers remains on finishing the task of forty lesson plans and maintaining proper written records rather than on developing deep understanding and skills development, needed for their professional development. Stephens (1996) has pointed out how student teachers can sometimes be overwhelmed by a feeling of panic when get a feeling that they cannot do a particular task such as unruly

class. Preparing charts and models also consumed a lot of time of student teachers.

Capel (1997) reported that main cause of anxiety for student teacher was to be observed, evaluated and assessed. Chan and Leung (1998) advocated that it was necessary to focus on the concerns expressed by student teachers during teaching practice as areas of importance for future development in teacher education. Yourn (2000) found that the concerns experienced by beginning teachers could have ranged from classroom discipline, motivating students, organization of class work or insufficient teaching material. She cautioned that concerns faced by beginning teachers were real and these concerns did have the potential to limit and frustrate their already complex teaching situation. These issues needed to be addressed at the institutional level. Ong et.al (2004) found that pressures felt during student teachers' practice teaching prevented them from positively engaging in theory and practice. They identified supervision, workload other than teaching, pedagogical and content knowledge as challenges many student teachers faced during their practice teaching. Leach (2005) identified pre-service teachers' concerns during practice teaching as having to work with many students or having too many non-instructional duties. Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) highlighted the theory to practice and overall school context concerns faced by student teachers and how they successfully managed to gain invaluable experiences during their practice teaching. Kiggundu (2007) found that isolation, low and uneven levels of teacher expertise, and a highly structured (rigid) system of teacher training, all impacted negatively to teaching practice. He further reported that a mentor and / supervisor had considerable influence on the performance of student teacher during teaching practice.

Kabilan and Raja (2008) reported that student teachers could have been overwhelmed by the numerous realities of the classroom and the challenges of mixed-ability classes. Goh and Mathews (2011) examined the experiences and concerns of Malaysian student teachers during their practicum. They reported concerns pertaining to (a) classroom management and student discipline; (b) institutional and personal adjustment; (c) classroom teaching; (d) student learning. Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) analysed pre-service teachers' experiences of teaching practice in a South African University. The data suggested that education of pre-service teachers needed to pay attention to (1) flexibility in time of course participation (2) flexibility in content in the course (3) flexibility in instructional approaches and learning materials and (4) flexibility in course delivery and logistics.

Review of the research reveals that almost all the past studies were mostly conducted in other countries. These studies provided the basis for the present study to be done in Jammu city. It has also been observed that quality of teaching practice is a relative term that reflects individual values, perceptions

and experiences that are geographically controlled (Sternberg, 2008). In view of this, it was imperative that a study be conducted to know the experiences of pre-service teachers during teaching practice programme, pursuing B.Ed. programme in the colleges of education affiliated to the University of Jammu. Hence the present study was undertaken to know the experiences and concerns of pre-service teachers during the teaching practice. It was hoped that the enriched understanding of the pre-service teachers' experiences and concerns would make significant contribution to knowledge within the teacher education community by providing useful information about actual practice towards training of teachers. It was hoped that the teacher educators could use the study to reflect on their practices and strategies in planning, organising, supervising and assessing students doing teaching practice. It has been observed that for the practice teaching to be meaningful to the students in developing teaching competencies, problems they experience need to be minimal or overcome completely. The study also sought to propose ways in which the concerns, which pre-service teachers experienced, could be overcome so that teaching practice benefits the professional development of student teachers.

## TEACHING PRACTICE

B.Ed. programme of the University of Jammu consists of two parts. Part-I: Theory papers in which students are imparted knowledge about issues of education in emerging Indian society, philosophies of education, psychology of teaching learning process, school management, pedagogies of education, development of educational system in India, methodologies of any two school subjects etc. Part- II: comprises of practice of teaching. It is one of the two examined sections in the teacher education curriculum of the University. Teaching practice is internally and externally examined and has a weightage of 300 marks out of which 150 marks are awarded by the two external examiners for two final lessons delivered by the pupil teacher and internal examiner awards the 150 marks for practice of teaching programme which the pupil teacher undergoes in school under his/her supervision. This stage of practice teaching is done through micro and macro lessons to be delivered by the pupil teachers, preparation of teaching aids, observation of lessons, delivery of two criticism lessons and internship. The micro lessons are preparatory and are prepared and delivered on any three teaching skills for attaining mastery over the teaching skills prior to the commencement of macro lessons. After this the pre-service teachers are sent to schools for twelve working days for teaching practice programme for delivering macro lessons in actual classroom situations under the supervision of a teacher educators. Apart from delivering macro lessons in school, pupil teacher has to function as a regular teacher in a school i.e. taking part in morning assembly, preparing time table, organize

certain activities in a school, check the home task given to the students, maintain attendance register, participation in staff meetings, preparing written work e.g. notices, examination papers, letters to parents, maintenance of school records, knowledge of preparing school leaving certificate etc. The duration of internship has to be completed during actual teaching practice.

Based on the above mentioned contestations i.e. background of study and nature of teaching practice, the current study examined pre-service teachers' experiences and concerns during the teaching practice.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To analyse the effectiveness of teaching practice from pre-service teachers' perspective.
2. To find out experiences and concerns of student teachers during teaching practice.
3. To make certain suggestions to overcome the concerns pupil teachers experienced.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study was designed on descriptive research methodology. Survey method was employed for the study. In the first stage, 32 pre-service teachers who had completed teaching practice programme in schools of Jammu city and volunteered to participate in the survey were invited to participate in the 'Focussed Group Discussion' to know their experiences and concerns during teaching practice programme. Focussed group discussion was held with three groups. The student teachers were assured that results arising from study would not identify any individual or colleges of education they belong to. On the basis of focussed group discussion a total of five themes were identified. (1) usefulness of teaching practice (2) experiences and concerns with pupils' behaviour (3) experiences and concerns with own behaviour (4) experiences and concerns with supervisors' behaviour (5) experiences and concerns with institutional and personal adjustments. Each theme was again divided into different derived experiences and concerns. The outcomes of focussed group discussions were used to prepare a structured questionnaire. Teacher educators validated the content of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to a purposive sample of 145 B.Ed. students who were pursuing B.Ed. programme in the colleges of education affiliated to the University of Jammu and had attended teaching practice programme. Data was analysed using simple statistical technique such as percentages.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study have been presented in this section.

**Table 1**  
**Usefulness of Teaching Practice.**

S. No	Statements	Yes	No
1.	Practice teaching gave you a sense of teacher in making	145 (100)	0 (0)
2.	With practice teaching, you learnt to take responsibilities as a teacher	135 (93)	10 (07)
3.	Practice teaching helped to gain confidence in teaching	124 (86)	21 (14)
4.	Practice teaching proved useful in improving upon class management skills	130 (90)	15 (10)
5.	Supervision of teaching practice was useful in giving you guidance on critical aspects of teaching	129 (89)	16 (11)
6.	Supervision of teaching practice helped in developing a disposition for effective teaching	132 (91)	13 (09)

*Note: Figure in parentheses indicate percentages.*

The majority of the pre-service teachers acknowledged the usefulness of the teaching practice component in teacher preparation programme. Table 1 reveals that 100% of the respondents agreed that teaching practice gave them a feel of the teaching profession. 93% of them opined that practice teaching made them to learn the responsibilities of a teacher. 86% pre service teachers agreed that practice teaching helped to develop confidence in teaching and 90% of them considered it useful in improving upon class management skills. Regarding effectiveness of supervision of teaching practice programme, 89% of the sampled pre service teachers opined that it was useful in providing guidance on significant aspects of teaching and 91% expressed that it helped in developing the disposition for effective teaching.

Results in Table 2 reveal that 86% of the respondents denied of getting practical training in lesson planning before being deputed to schools for practice teaching. Although 100% of them agreed that micro teaching was organised by teacher educators yet only 23% of them affirmed the exposure to demonstration lessons. 100% of the respondents reported that they did not attend simulated teaching before they proceeded for teaching practice programme. All the sampled pre service teachers denied of having any input regarding classroom management, dealing with parents, differential instructions for dealing with inclusive settings, maintenance of school records etc. A moderate percentage (57% and 55% respectively) opined that supervisors recorded their comments on lesson plan booklets daily and were fair in giving comments. 83% affirmed the friendly behaviour of the supervisors. Though a very high percentage of respondents i.e. 93% agreed that the supervisor regularly supervised their lessons but 74% of them reported that no conversation took place between them and the supervisors after the lesson was delivered and observed.



**Table 2**  
**Experiences and Concerns with Supervisor's/Teacher Educators' Behaviour.**

S. No	Statements	Yes	No
1.	Rigorous practical training for lesson planning before the commencement of teaching practice was given	20 (14)	125 (86)
2.	Micro teaching was organized by the teacher educators before the commencement of teaching practice programme	145 (100)	0 (0)
3.	Demonstration lessons were given by the teacher educators	34 (23)	111 (77)
4.	Simulated teaching was organized by the teacher educators before sending you to schools for teaching practice	0 (0)	145 (100)
5.	Did you receive inputs in areas/tasks viz. Organization of co-curricular activities/strategies for dealing with inclusive setup, maintain records etc.	0 (0)	145 (100)
6.	Supervisors recorded comments on lesson plans on daily basis	83 (57)	62 (43)
7.	Supervisor was fair in recording the remarks on the lesson plan notebook	80 (55)	65 (45)
8.	Supervisor was friendly with the student teachers	120 (83)	25 (17)
9.	Lessons were regularly supervised by the supervisor	135 (93)	10 (7)
10.	There was little or no dialogue between you and the supervisor after delivery of lesson	105 (74)	40 (26)

*Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.*

**Table 3**  
**Experiences and Concerns with Own Behaviour.**

S. No	Statements	Yes	No
1.	I felt nervous and less confident in the beginning of the programme	100 (69)	45 (31)
2.	Choosing the methodology and techniques to deliver the lesson that were appropriate was a worrisome issue	115 (79)	30 (21)
3.	There was a lack of time to complete all the steps of the lesson	145 (100)	0 (0)
4.	I felt less confident and competent to develop lesson plan on my own	105 (74)	40 (26)
5.	Mastery of only three micro teaching skills was insufficient to manage teaching in the classroom	106 (73)	39 (27)
6.	Workload of delivering two lessons everyday, preparing teaching aids, making observations and doing internship activities etc. was heavy	120 (83)	25 (17)

*Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.*

A perusal of Table 3 indicates that 69% of the respondents accepted of being nervous and less confident in the beginning of the programme. About 79% agreed that they were worried about choosing the appropriate methodology and technique to deliver the lesson. All of them agreed that there was a lack of time at their disposal to complete all the steps of delivering the lessons. A substantial percentage i.e. 76% agreed of being less confident and competent in



developing lesson plans on their own and 73% opined that mastery of three micro teaching skills was not sufficient to manage the teaching in the classes. 83% of the respondents complained of heavy workload of activities during teaching practice.

**Table 4**  
**Experiences and Concerns with Pupils' Behaviour.**

S. No	Statements	Yes	No
1.	Pupils were not interested in what was going in the class	30 (21)	115 (79)
2.	Regular class teacher asked you to take up the topics which were already covered in their classes	75 (52)	70 (48)
3.	Undisciplined students were a cause of anxiety for you	95 (66)	50 (34)
4.	Class management due to discipline problems was the most worrisome issue	115 (79)	30 (21)
5.	Introductory questions were not answered by the pupils	75 (52)	70 (48)

*Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.*

Results presented in Table 4 reveals that in all 79% of the teacher trainees agreed that pupils were interested in activities of the lesson. A moderate percentage i.e. 52% affirmed that regular class teacher asked them to deliver lessons on the topics that were already taught by them whereas 66% of the sampled pre-service teachers expressed that undisciplined students gave them anxiety. 79% of them agreed that managing class due to indiscipline was very stressful. An average percentage of respondents complained of introductory questions not being answered by the pupils.

**Table 5**  
**Experiences and Concerns with Institutional and Personal Adjustment.**

S. No	Statements	Yes	No
1.	Transition from being a student to being a teacher caused anxiety	90 (62)	55 (38)
2.	You were introduced to the teachers and the administrative staff of the practicing school	20 (17)	125 (83)
3.	There was a lack of infrastructure and basic teaching facilities at practicing schools	110 (76)	35 (24)
4.	The time of the year you were placed in school was good	100 (69)	45 (31)
5.	You were given a class of your choice for delivering the lesson	110 (76)	35 (24)
6.	Pupils showed reluctance to accept you as a teacher	110 (76)	35 (24)
7.	Teaching practice programme concentrated on completion of tasks rather than reflecting on classroom activities	130 (90)	15 (10)

*Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.*

A perusal of Table 5 reveals that 62% of the sampled prospective teachers

admitted of having anxiety because of shift of the role from a student to a teacher in the classroom. Only a meagre 17% agreed that they were introduced to the teachers and administrative staff of the practicing school and a very high percentage i.e. 76% affirmed that practicing schools lacked infrastructure and basic facilities. 69% agreed that the time of the year they were deputed to schools for practice teaching was good. 76% of the teacher trainees reported that they got a class of their choice for delivering the lesson and an equal percentage agreed of reluctance on the part of the pupils to accept them as their teachers. A very high percentage i.e. 90% affirmed that teaching practice programme focused on completion of task and not on reflecting on classroom activities.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Teaching practice refers to the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve his/her professional practice in the context of real life classrooms, usually under some form of guidance and supervision. The results of the study are a pointer to the fact that the prospective teachers considered the practice of teaching useful. At the same time, prospective teachers' lack of confidence in developing lesson plans and lack of clarity about choosing correct methodology and techniques to deliver the lessons points out that there were some gaps in their preparedness for the teaching practice programme. Another prominent concern that appeared to impede pre-service teachers' progress was the lack of time to deliver the complete lesson. It was observed that there was lack of knowledge of rules and regulations of the practicing schools and prospective teachers were apprehensive about adjusting to the school environment. Participants have also expressed concerns about lack of infrastructure and basic facilities at school. Emotional concerns about acceptance by students of them as teachers were raised by many of the participants.

## SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of the study the following suggestions could help in further improving the practice of teaching:

- Special attention could be given to exposing student teachers in colleges of education to a variety of teaching methods and how these methods can be used effectively. Assignments should engage student teachers in real school issues and actual teaching problems.
- Rigorous practical training for lesson planning before the commencement of teaching practice is essential for quality teaching practice. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to practice teaching methods and skills under simulated conditions. Constructive feedback of the fellow students will help in enhancing competence and confidence. Demonstration lessons

should be organised for the student teachers in mock sessions. Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education (1998) also endorses this. “For meaningful organisation of practical work, pre-internship stage maybe utilized for demonstration lessons, lectures, simulation, role playing, micro-teaching etc.” Demonstration lessons by the faculty would give the student teachers an idea of how lessons are to be delivered in actual classroom situations. This will not only reduce nervousness and lessen anxiety of pre-service teachers regarding practice teaching but also ensure that time spent in schools is beneficially utilised.

- Student teachers pursuing teaching practice should be encouraged to design and deliver lessons with students needs in mind. If students' needs are not met, it makes little difference whether the process of delivering instruction is of high quality. Similar concerns have been expressed by study conducted by Mitika (2008).
- With students population in classroom becoming more diverse in both abilities and needs because of inclusive education, student teachers should be made to understand better the concept of discipline as overcoming student problem versus classroom management as order within a class provides a conducive learning environment. School administration, on the other hand, can also provide support to practice teaching students regarding class management and controlling disciplinary issues in classroom by making teacher concerned to remain present in his/her class when the pre-service teacher is delivering the lesson.
- Prior to the placement of teacher trainees to schools there should be school orientation programme spread over two to three days. Orientation to the school will boost prospective teachers' self-confidence and reduce the feeling of fear of the unknown and feeling of anxiety, which has been described as 'anticipatory emotion' by Hayes (2003).
- The transition from being a student being taught to being a teacher is not easy and adjustments are to be expected. Some form of support network to dispel nervousness and anxiety for students practicing teaching should be initiated. Teachers of the practicing school should be available to the student teachers for interaction on issues pertaining to teaching and learning.
- School administration must be approached by the colleges of education to find the support structures available to them during the tenure of teaching practice. In other words all efforts should be made to promote interaction between colleges of education and schools by closely liaising with school heads. If pre-service teachers, supervising teacher educators, heads of the schools and school teachers work in cooperation, only then teaching

practice programme would lead to the development of professional competencies and skills among the prospective teachers.

- Although it is important for student teachers to be competent in all the activities prescribed in the syllabus of teaching practice, having to include all aspects in one school experience session of two weeks places an enormous burden on students. Considering the volume and depth of activities and information that has to be performed, collected and presented in the internship file, by the student teachers, during a two week period of practice teaching, it is suggested that internship should not be completed during actual teaching practice programme. Rather, after taking final B.Ed. examination, student teacher should go for a two-week internship to schools. During this period they will be performing all the functions of a regular teacher.
- Writing journal (a written record of one's experiences in which one writes what happens every day) should be incorporated as an activity of teaching practice curriculum. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) highlighted that each intern would be expected to keep a reflective journal that would help him/her revisit his/her experience in the classroom over the period of internship (NCFTE, 2009, P. 61). This would provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to develop their reflectivity and accept responsibility for their professional development. The ability to reflect is often regarded as an important attribute of effective teachers (O' Donoghue & Booker, 1996; Posner, 1996). Lortie (1975) had proclaimed that failing to reflect on teaching disposes one to teach by imitation rather than intention. While learning to become a teacher, a prospective teacher must examine his/her way of teaching, his/her pre-conceived notions and biases through reflections.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper highlighted the pre-service teachers' experiences and concerns during teaching practice. The intent was to propose ways and means to overcome the concerns so that teaching practice benefits the professional development of student teachers. The research gave invaluable insights. The positive side of experience was that teaching practice gave the prospective teachers a sense of accomplishment and acted as a firm base for them to develop a disposition for effective teaching. The paper concludes that concerns faced by the pre-service teachers are attributable to factors concerning preparation before getting attached to the school for practice, induction into the school, attitude of the teacher educator, learners' discipline, relationship with school based teachers, lack of support from the school and overload. The results emphasize that strengthening the activities

of practice teaching programmes is needed to improve the quality of practical component of the teacher preparation programme. The suggestions presented in the paper can go a long way in assisting the supervisors' of teaching practice and prospective teachers to achieve the desired outcomes from the teaching practice in more comprehensive manner.

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