



RESEARCH PAPER

Navigating Teaching Practice: An Exploration into Prospective Teachers' Experiences and Reflections

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ABSTRACT

The study has been conducted under Interpretivist paradigm while utilizing the Qualitative research approach. Phenomenology method was opted by the researcher(s) to explore the prospective teachers' experiences and reflections regarding their teaching practice. There were 14 prospective teachers enrolled in their final semester who have been selected with the help of Purposive sampling. The data were collected with the help of a self-developed Semi-structured interview protocol comprising 10 questions. This has been validated while taking the expert's opinion. The collected data have been analyzed with the help of manual Thematic analysis. Based on the results, it has been concluded that pupil teachers faced confronted the challenges and difficulties that fostered resilience, adaptability, and growth. Through self-reflection and inclusive techniques, their professional development and instructional effectiveness were strengthened. It has been recommended that teacher education institutes ought to emphasize class-room management, Inclusive teaching, lesson planning, and resilience-building.

KEYWORDS Teaching Practice, Prospective Teachers, Teachers' Experiences

Introduction

Teacher education schools all over the globe are committed to providing quality training and education for prospective teachers. The teacher education schools provide teachers with theoretical knowledge and practical skills to make them more productive, innovative, and practically competent (Iman et al., 2024). Teachers also go through an extensive hands-on training course of teaching, where they get real-life class teaching and practical guidance from very qualified and experienced teachers (Amor et al., 2020).

Teacher training is a time when pupil teachers go through hands-on classroom training with experienced trainers (Muzaffar & Javaid, 2018; Kaung, 2020). It involves different methodologies of teaching such as the experimentation of teaching methodologies, student perceptions, classroom management, and practical application of theory in the teaching environment (Kamila, 2021).

Through coaching and training, prospective teachers are prepared to successfully train in actual-world school rooms. Effective teacher education is especially designed to equip prospective teachers with the necessary abilities and knowledge to excel of their profession. This is done through internships, which offer teachers-in-training hands-on experience and practical learning (Muzaffar, et. al.,2020; Rupp & Becker, 2021). Teaching methods, which include different aspects such as content presentation, instructional approaches, and the integration of motivating activities, are part of routine training for teachers. These methods allow them to communicate ideas and approaches effectively within schools and between their colleagues (Lysberg, 2023).

Teacher education institutions and their pupils also look for newer ideas, material, and instruments through school applications, promoting innovation and collaboration as a culture (Kabilan et al., 2020). In Pakistan, there is quite a few of researches on reflective practices and practicum contribution to the prospective teachers' learning and teaching experience. The current research seeks to investigate the experience by examining prospective teachers' reflections during their practicum teaching (Shah et al., 2021).

Different terms are used to refer to this activity, such as practicum teaching, student teaching, teaching practice, teaching practicum, field study, field experience, school experience, and internship (Köksal, 2019). The practicum refers to all the learning experiences of prospective teachers. Reading through the literature, it appears that there is a great deal of research on the practicum of teaching (Adams et al., 2018). Recent research on practicum teaching involves a variety of topics, for example, reflection by teachers about processes of situated teamwork and collaborative inquiry, effectiveness and quality of the teaching practice, effective pedagogical practice, classroom management, and putting theory into practice, the significance of lesson planning and associated issues while teaching (Mwamakula, 2021).

The practicum of teaching is a vital part of the teacher education program, and it seeks to provide a seamless continuity of practical experience. There are many factors such as technical and psychological factors that may impact student and teacher training outcomes. Through practicum teaching, prospective teachers develop their professional identities through critical evaluation of their pedagogic practices gradually (Din & Jehan, 2021).

Teacher training includes policies and strategies that focus on providing potential teachers with the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and skills necessary to properly manage the classroom. Prospective teachers receive hands-on experience through implementing theoretical knowledge and skills obtained during their period of attendance at the faculty (Orakçi, 2021). Assisted by a supervisor, they are faced with diverse problems in a live classroom situation, including those pertaining to control, regulation, and emergent circumstances. They need to have the capability to manage and have control over their classroom setting. Moreover, they may need to communicate with the students' parents from time to time. Yet, they are mostly not properly equipped to manage situations where parents ask for information regarding their children's instructional programs, and thus, they get confused (Mudra, 2018).

Literature Review

Literature review of prospective teachers indicates that there are numerous studies that describe their experiences. For example, prospective teachers have complained about a lack of teaching aids and lab equipment, which inhibits their effectiveness in teaching some subjects (Jin et al., 2020). Other research has noted issues like the selection of training school, inadequate preparation to teach, ignorance and training, biased assessment in favor of mentors, and a lack of mentoring skills awareness (Inarsih et al., 2021). Additionally, prospective teachers have been shown to suffer from carelessness and worry (Rupp & Becker, 2021). Finally, there have been studies carried out on the issues and challenges faced by potential teachers while undertaking their teaching practice (Shah et al., 2021). Future teachers are sure to meet some challenges during their training. By settling these problems, most of the burden will be removed from the shoulders of teachers at university. With time, the skills of teachers in classrooms will see a development. Various studies have been carried out to analyze the problems that future teachers face while training. Inarsih et al. (2021) found that selection of training school, inadequacy of prospective teachers, inadequate knowledge and training, biased assessment by mentors, and poor mentoring competencies were some of the factors contributing to teaching practice failure. In the same way, Shah et al. (2021) discussed problems faced by potential teachers during the field

practice phase, such as short duration, lack of opportunity to teach all subjects, inattentiveness in choosing locations for lessons, unequal time distribution for theory and practice, and lack of responsibility. It is imperative to give aspiring teachers the opportunity to practice teaching in different subjects and with pupils of different proficiency levels to gain sufficient experience and expertise (Muzaffar, 2016; Matthews, 2021).

Practical experience in teaching is applied in diverse fields. The goal of teaching training is to prepare people for the workforce with the skills and knowledge that are needed, depending on the field of choice. The training seeks to prepare students to successfully implement what they have learned in order to address actual problems of life. In schools, teaching is the first contact between the learners and instructors (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018). At this stage, student teachers are assigned more professional duties and advised by on-site supervisors and mentors. Thus, the stage is an investigation of the relationship of teacher-profession and an in-depth description of the experiences and effects on the development and professional growth of teachers (Karagöz & Rüzgar, 2020).

Material and Methods

The study has been conducted under Interpretivist paradigm while utilizing the Qualitative research approach. Phenomenology method was opted by the researcher(s) to explore the prospective teachers' experiences and reflections regarding their teaching practice. There were 14 prospective teachers enrolled in their final semester who have been selected with the help of Purposive sampling. The data were collected with the help of a self-developed Semi-structured interview protocol comprising 10 questions. This has been validated while taking the expert's opinion.

Results and Discussion

The collected data have been analyzed with the help of manual Thematic analysis. The detail can be seen as under:

Experience regarding Challenging Behaviors

The majority of the prospective teachers shared their experiences regarding challenging behavior that they likely had someone (students, colleagues, or even parents) who either exhibited obnoxious, arrogant, inflexible or rude behavior. These events were perhaps in class while instructing, group assignments, or even in the professional environment like staff meetings. These behaviors infuriated, made them doubt themselves, or annoyed the prospective teachers, particularly if they were not prepared to deal with these events. For instance, a sudden pupil have shortened a lesson, and an unwilling colleague have derailed their partnership. But these meetings probably taught them the value of emotional control, patience, and flexibility. They also understand how to diffuse fights, set boundaries, or utilize positive reinforcement in dealing with challenging people. One of the participants said that:

I've had my fair share of challenging behavior from students, to be sure. One time in the course I taught a student was being disrespectful and disruptive. It was really frustrating because I felt like it was slipping from my fingers. When it first happened, I did not know how to react and I found myself questioning my ability to teach. But gradually, I learned that I should stay peaceful and use positive reinforcement to redirect their behavior. It was a great lesson in emotional control, patience, so much about life.

Another participant stated that:

In a group class in my teaching program, I was assigned to collaborate with a peer who was unwilling to contribute at all. They seemed to dismiss my ideas and were uncooperative about working together. I found it stressful since I felt like I was doing all the work in a team and it made me question how I would cope under such scenarios in real schools. However, this experience taught me that it's essential to set boundaries and maintain communication even with the difficult individuals.

Another participant shared a similar response:

I remember having to deal with a cocky student who always challenges what I say in the classroom. That was really frustrating to me, and I felt disrespected. My initial approach was the wrong way so I focused on the fact that, at first, I took it as personal. I started using techniques like de-escalation and granting the student more freedom in the classroom, which did mitigate their misbehavior. It was a hard time but it reminded me of the importance of adaptability in teaching.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

The one that was the hardest was difficulty with a parent who was very rigid and critical of my instructional practices. They questioned my every move, which soiled my sense of self-worth. It stressed me out a lot, but it was a wake-up call for me; a challenge to reflect upon my practices and to build my communication skills. It taught me how to set boundaries and say no while remaining respectful and professional.

Struggles with Classroom Dynamics

The pupil teachers praised classroom dynamics and stated that in the long run, they learned how to connect with kids, set norms, and use proactive methods to keep problems from occurring. They learnt how adaptable instruction might be to students with various types of personality and learning styles. One of those involved said: One of the participants said that:

It has undoubtedly been one of the most daunting things I have ever done, keeping a class. I once had a student who wholly refused, to the point where they just did not want to do group work. This is frustrating for us because it disrupts the flow of the lesson and detracts from other students' ability to focus. I did not handle this well initially, but over time, I realized we could collaborate and formulate ideas on how to make the activity more exciting for the student. It helps me understand the needs of people and flexibility in management.

Another participant shared that:

There was once a student I worked with who showed great resistance to control. They always make sure to call me on it during class but it was near impossible to try to keep class under control. "It was difficult though, and it settled me down a lot to say this is what I expect, and this is what you're getting from me, so it's easy for me to follow up with the consequences from day one." I found that active responses were effective—using positive reinforcement as a reward for more desirable behaviors. It has not been an easy lesson to learn, but it has made me a more effective educator.

Another participant responded similarly:

One of the hardest, most complicated classroom management scenarios was working with behaviorally difficult students. I remember a student who would incessantly yell out and interrupt classmates. It really made it difficult to create a positive learning environment." I developed strategies over time like intentionally communicating

expectations and employing visual cues to better orient their behavior. I also learned strategies for differentiating instruction so I can keep all my students engaged, which was huge.

Another participant responded similarly:

It wasn't easy managing a room full of different learners. I had students with totally different personalities and learning modes, and it was difficult to engage all of them. One student, in fact, was quite arrogant and would always question my approaches. It was demotivating at first, but I managed to turn their inquisitiveness to my use by assigning them leadership responsibilities in group exercises. This made them feel appreciated and enhanced the general class dynamic.

Importance of Lesson Planning

When the prospective teachers were asked regarding the importance of lesson planning, they responded that at first, they undervalued the significance of detailed lesson planning. Yet, classroom experiences revealed to them that a well-organized lesson plan is vital in keeping themselves organized, effectively managing time, and achieving learning goals. They observed that without planning, they have faced problems like running out of activities, losing the interest of students, or not covering important concepts. One of the participants said that:

I used to believe lesson planning was overrated, that I could just wing it and still be effective. When I ran out of things for my students to do, that type of fun class ended, and that was good! That's how I figured out that planning at the detail level really matters. Prep, Pause, Prepare: Who knew that Zoom fatigue would hit so hard? Now I prep for backup activities to keep students engaged!

A similar stance was given by another participant:

It took me a while to learn how much effort I was going to have to put into lesson planning. This led the class to become hit and miss and I didn't manage to cover some areas. This was a turning point. However, I now spend time creating lesson plans that can be flexible and objective based and they have transformed my teaching for the better.

Another participant responded similarly:

I learned about the importance of planning the hard way. One of the first lessons was that in the absence of preparation, students misbehave and control is lost. Over the years, I've developed more in-depth, interactive lesson plans with contingency strategies that have allowed me to run a more successful classroom.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

Lecture planning felt like just going through the motions, until one time when it didn't go well. But the lack of a plan made it hard to keep engaged students, and some started to fall behind because the pacing was so different. Now, I do lots of detail back-from-focus, again factoring in differentiated activities so unique learners are engaged.

Another participant responded similarly:

Planning lessons was not something I did seriously at first, but soon learned how crucial it was. I had one lesson where I hadn't planned sufficient activities, and the children got bored and began to misbehave. It was chaos! That lesson taught me to always plan more than I anticipate I will need and to have alternative plans up my sleeve. I've also learned to

make my lesson plans fluid so that I can switch on the spur of the moment if something is not working.

Classroom Management Challenges

When the prospective teachers were asked regarding classroom management challenges, the majority of them responded that they had a very hard time with discipline, managing disruptions, and keeping all students on task. For instance, a recalcitrant student would not comply with instructions, while a distracting student disrupted others. These made it hard to effectively deliver lessons. But eventually, they probably did learn to employ an array of such things as positive reinforcement, explicit rules and consequences, and non-verbal cues to control behavior. They also came to understand how to build relationships with students in a way that produced a sense of mutual respect.

One of the participants said that:

Classroom management was also one of the toughest things for me when I first became a teacher. I had one student who was totally noncompliant and would not listen to directions. It was frustrating because it disrupted the whole class and made it difficult for me to present my lesson. However, I learnt to deal with all this with the help of reinforcement.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

Classroom management is something I struggled a lot with initially. I had one student who was pretty much interrupting everyone, and it felt like I was always putting out fires instead of actually teaching. It was confusing, but in time I learned to use non-verbal skills — proximity and eye contact — to manage behavior without disrupting the flow of the lesson. Developing relationships with my students also helped create a respect for me as well and that made all the difference.

Another participant responded similarly:

Two of the most challenging obstacles I faced was dealing with an annoying student who used to disrupt the class constantly. It became very hard to keep everyone going in the same direction and deliver my lessons effectively." I was failing as a teacher, I thought. But over time I got more active by setting clear expectations up front and using a mix of approaches like positive reinforcement and then firm consequences. It's a work in progress still but I've seen great improvement.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

A classroom management was one thing that I did not expect to find so challenging. His Backstory I had a student who was very defiant of authority, which made it hard for me to maintain order. I was struggling to hold on to power all of the time. I realized that connecting with students is the most important thing. When they sense that their feelings are respected and understood, they are more likely to cooperate. That, as well as starting to use regular non-verbal signals and explicit rules, also helped a lot!

Another participant responded similarly:

When I started teaching, I was confident that classroom management would be very hard for me. One student would consistently distract others, and I felt like I wasn't able to teach a single lesson without someone interrupting. It was challenging, but I learned to apply a mixture of techniques, including positive reinforcement and immediate consequences, to appropriately address behavior issues. I also learned how crucial it is to build rapport with

students. When they feel connected to you, they're more likely to obey the rules and stay focused.

Assessment Strategy Implementation

When the prospective teachers were asked regarding the assessment strategy implementation, they responded that they grappled with designing assessments that were equitable, aligned with learning targets, and accessible to all learners. They encountered challenges in grading subjective assignments, giving constructive feedback, or employing assessment data to guide instruction. A rigid stance toward assessment has also caused frustration for students. Nevertheless, through experience, they probably learned how to craft assessments that accurately measured student knowledge and gave useful feedback. They also tested other ways of measuring, e.g., formative measurements, peer assessments, or project-based measurements.

One of the participants said that:

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching for me was creating equitable and effective assessments. I had a tough time early in my career getting my assessments to match up with the learning goals, and some students took issue with the fairness or difficulty of the tests. I also had a hard time grading subjective assignments such as essays, as I wasn't certain how to give constructive feedback. However, with the passage of time and experience I started designing the appropriate assessment activities followed by the constructive feedback.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

When I started teaching I had a lot of problems around assessment. My system was inflexible, and my students were frustrated. They were also feeling as if the assessments weren't reflecting what they had learned, and I knew that it was time to shift gears. I started exploring alternative methods of assessment including formative assessments and project based assessments where they could demonstrate comprehension in different ways. It had a big effect on their motivation and performance.

Another participant responded similarly:

As a new teacher, assessments were hard for me. I have no experience creating assessments that are equitable for all learners, specifically those with different learning abilities. Another area where I challenged myself was using assessment data to inform my instruction. I felt as though I was just grading to be grading. However, over time I was able to create assessments that were reflective of my students and goals for instruction. I also started implementing peer evaluations, which let students learn from each other and take accountability for their own learning.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

I had no idea how complex assessments can be. The first few times I attempted doing this, I didn't have the learning goals tied together as well as they should have been, and my students would often end up confused or frustrated. Similarly, grading subjective assignments was challenging too, because I had no idea how to give constructive feedback while still encouraging the students. Over the years, I have created assessments that meant something and were fair, and I also added in formative assessments along the way to check for understanding throughout the unit. It enabled me to adjust my instruction and support my students better.

Another participant responded similarly:

One of the biggest struggles I faced was creating an assessment where all of my students could succeed. My original approach was a highly structured methodology that didn't account for the individual learning styles/strengths of students. My students and I were very frustrated by this. However, with time, I learned to be more flexible and creative in judgement. I started adding project-based assessment and other types that would allow students to showcase their knowledge the way they were most comfortable. It streamlined the process of assessment considerably and fairly.

Self-Reflection on Strengths and Weaknesses

When asked by the prospective teachers about the strengths and weaknesses, most of them answered that Potential teachers identified strengths and strengths when they sang their strengths well, such as, being creative teacher, caring to students, or being an effective communicator. These strengths help them to survive in challenging times and build relationships with students. They also identified areas for improvement such as poor time management and conflict or disorganization. They knew they must be be more aggressive with disruptive behavior or more structured in following rules. So they turned to seek professional development activities such as workshops, mentoring, or additional training to build on their weaknesses and leverage their strengths.

One of the participants said that:

I always took pride in my creativity as a teacher. I enjoy brain-storming innovative activities that make learning come alive for students. My strength has been being able to relate to them well and inspire them, even during difficult times. But I came to understand that I need to work on time management. I found myself hung up on completing lessons because I failed to plan well in terms of time. It's this self-awareness that pushed me to seek time management and planning workshops.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

One area that I am good at is that I am sympathetic to students. I actually do my best to see things from their perspective and ensure that the classroom remains a welcoming place. This has served me well in establishing good relationships with my students, even when things get difficult. But I've come to understand that I am not good at conflict, particularly among students. I do not like arguments, which just complicate matters. I have begun seeking out mentoring so that I may acquire skills on becoming assertive and confident when handling such an issue.

Another participant responded similarly:

I believe that my good communication skills have been a definite plus when it comes to teaching in the classroom. I can explain things clearly and develop a rapport with the students, and the class is more of a working partnership. But I've learned that I need to establish boundaries more regularly. I won't discuss things with students for a minor disruption every so often, and then it balloons into a greater problem later. Having learned that, I've proceeded and asked for further training on classroom management and discipline techniques.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

Creativity has always come easily to me, and it's helped me create lessons that really connect with my students. They like doing the activities, and it keeps them interested. But I've discovered that I have a problem with being organized, particularly with grading and paperwork. It's overwhelming at times. I've made the choice to work on this by taking professional development in organization and productivity, so that I can be on top of things.

Another participant responded similarly:

I've always had a strong ability to develop good relationships with my students, and I believe empathy is a large part of that. They feel comfortable bringing problems to me, and I do my best to help them. But I've come to understand that I need to be more assertive in managing classroom disruptions. I'm too permissive and soft at times, and it erodes my authority. This has led me to work on being firmer and more consistent in maintaining classroom discipline.

Professional Growth through Challenges

When the participants were asked regarding professional growth, the majority of them responded that the difficulties mentioned herein drove them beyond their comfort levels, forcing them to exhibit adaptability and resilience. As an instance, coping with someone being rude and not cooperative, they learned how to keep cool during pressure moments and look for solutions in constructive terms. As well, each challenge offered learning. As such, they probably learned to engage in conflict management skills, to work with team members, or to approach mentoring when confronted by challenging situations. Likewise, by the challenges experienced, these actually strengthened their passions for teaching since they understood that challenges are what make teaching itself. They accepted that challenges would be part and parcel of being a teacher as every challenge leads to learning opportunities and development.

One of the participants said that:

The difficulties I experienced as a potential teacher actually tested me out of my comfort zone. Coping with rude or unhelpful people was challenging, but it taught me how to remain composed under pressure and seek constructive answers. For instance, I had one student who was always being disruptive, and it compelled me to acquire conflict resolution skills.

Another participant responded similarly:

I had to navigate so many challenging situations, such as dealing with bad behavior or working with resistant colleagues. Each obstacle compelled me to learn new skills, such as conflict resolution and communication. These experiences strengthened my resolve to teach because I learned that every obstacle is a chance to grow and learn. I feel better equipped now, knowing I can navigate anything that comes my way.

Conclusion

The study has been conducted under Interpretivist paradigm while utilizing the Qualitative research approach. Phenomenology method was opted by the researcher(s) to explore the prospective teachers' experiences and reflections regarding their teaching practice. There were 14 prospective teachers enrolled in their final semester who have been selected with the help of Purposive sampling. The data were collected with the help of a self-developed Semi-structured interview protocol comprising 10 questions. This has been validated while taking the expert's opinion. The collected data have been analyzed with the help of manual Thematic analysis. Based on the results, it has been concluded that prospective teachers faced challenges regarding classroom management, lesson planning, and interpersonal dynamics, fostering resilience and versatility. They observed strategies like emotional regulation and inclusive evaluation strategies. They took the help from self-reflection to select out strengths and areas for growth, reinforcing their determination to coaching. These results emphasized the significance of training, flexibility, and professional improvement. Ultimately, challenges have become opportunities for growth, equipping them to create powerful studying environments.

Recommendations

Based on the results, it has been recommended that teacher education institutes ought to emphasize class-room management, Inclusive teaching, lesson planning, and resilience-building.

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