

Teaching Practicum in Private Schools: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The success criteria of any program, largely revolves around the success of its graduate in the practical field. The teaching practicum gives such opportunities for the prospective teachers to acquire desired teaching skills for a successful -career. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the prospective teachers during teaching practicum by highlighting the opportunities and challenges. As private schools have been recently added to the pool of schools for practicum, therefore the study was delimited to the practicum in private schools that takes place during the third year of their program. Data was collected from 15 prospective teachers of three batches with help of semi-structured interviews. The data analysis was done through initial coding and then classifying codes into four themes. The emerging themes revealed opportunities in organized environments, infrastructure with facilities, and rigorous learning. Whereas the obstacles included allocation of classes, work pressure and trust concerns of cooperative teachers. However, the challenges didn't shadow the learning of prospective teachers and served as much needed experience needed to be successful in future. This research aims to assist teacher educators and policymakers in harnessing the full potential of teaching practicum to cultivate a skilled workforce, ultimately enhancing the quality of education.

Keywords: practicum, school placement, private school, opportunities, challenges, rationalization.

Introduction

Teaching practicum is a vital component of all teacher education programs. It connects theory with practice and also gives a diversified experience to the student teachers (Wei et al., 2022). The four-year B.EdA. (Hons.) program places increased emphasis on teaching practicum, addressing concerns about time scarcity compared to the previous one-year B.Ed. program (Gujjar et al., 2011). This extended practicum benefits prospective teachers (PTs) by enhancing their skills, including motivation, pedagogical knowledge application, and professional exposure (Parveen et al., 2020). Moreover, the purpose of adding the component of field experience to teacher education is twofold: first for giving an opportunity of reality and secondly assessing their skills in making them competent teachers (Soliman 1997 cited in Ortlipp, 2009).

Teaching practicum is highly valued by PTs compared to other program elements (Smith & Lev-Ari 2005), therefore it is regarded as one of the most exciting components of teacher education program to which PTs look forward (Farrell, 2008). -Shifting from a technical to a holistic perspective, teaching practicum is considered an opportunity for PTs to develop their professional identities and acquire tools for ongoing professional enhancement. (Ulvik & Smith, 2011). The success criteria of any teacher education program, largely revolves around the success of its graduate in the practical field. Since universities are critically questioned for disconnecting their programs from practical aspect (Unver, 2014), teaching practicum gives an opportunity to predict the success of the graduates by assessing them in ‘real teaching environment’ (Chan et al., 2019).

The placement of PTs in government schools is a conventional practice. The private schools were recently being added to the pool of schools because of the wealth of learning opportunities with the existing empirical evidence of better performance (Alam et al., 2021) and superior school-based management practices (Arif & Saqib, 2003). Since, its inception, a mixed response was reported by the PTs regarding school placement. Research suggests that evaluation of any program is not only required for the sake of improvement but also needed as a test of survival (Darling-Hammond, 2006a). With the continuously changing world and dynamics of teaching, the significance of practicum in teacher’s education has gained more momentum and calls for not only more emphasis but also studies in order to address the current challenges in the schools (Tuli & File, 2010). Similarly, Rizvi & Khamis

(2020) also assert review based on contextual realities requiring extensive research. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perspective of PTs about their practicum experience in the private schools.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the learning opportunities at the private schools during practicum.
2. To find out the challenges prospective teachers face during the placement at private school.
3. To rationalize the placement of prospective teachers in private schools for teaching practicum.

Research Questions

1. What are the learning opportunities present at the private schools for prospective teacher?
2. What are the challenges faced by the prospective teachers at the private school?
3. Does placement of prospective teachers in private serve the purpose of the teaching practicum?

Literature Review

The following literature exhibits recent and historical studies on the teaching practicum. Starting with the significance of teaching practicum in general and then highlighting the issues, concerns and opportunities for learning during this period in placement schools thus presenting a case for further investigation.

In a systematic literature review about the purpose, value and structure of practicum at higher educational level, the authors emphasized that application of knowledge and evaluation of skills is the vital purpose of teaching practicum. They further added that teaching practicum is accepted as a ‘valuable component of professional education’ that requires careful planning and supervised experience (Ryan et al., 1996). A study conducted in South Africa aimed to understand how practicum experiences influence PTs’ perceptions of the teaching profession. Data was collected from 24 student teacher in form of semi-structured interviews.

Thematic analysis revealed that the practicum exposed them to real teaching world and it added meaning to their theoretical knowledge. The study further added that challenges during practicum play a decisive role in influencing PTs to stay in or leave the teaching profession (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009).

Another research was conducted to investigate the significance of the teaching practicum in view of the prospective teachers. Data collected from 480 PTs using a questionnaire of 68 items, explored that the PTs had high regard of teaching practicum then other components teacher education program (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Another small scale study was done in Karachi for assessing the role of practicum. The data was collected from 46 PTs with help of a small scale panel survey and the result suggested that the practicum experience was successful in enhancing their teaching skills (Qazi et al., 2012). A relatively recent study was conducted with a bigger sample size of 201 PTs and 300 teacher educators in Sindh. Aiming to analyze the impact of practicum on professional development of prospective teachers, the study demonstrated that practicum does not only enabled prospective teachers in enhancing their pedagogical skills, and managerial skills but also allow them to socialize with the community (Parveen et al., 2020).

There is no difference in opinion with respect to the significance and role of teaching practicum in teacher education program. Therefore it is worth mentioning the components of a good practicum. In a qualitative study conducted by Beck and Kosnik in 2002, data was collected from eleven participants to analyze the experiences of the prospective teachers at practicum school. The data analysis identified six components of a good practicum:

1. Emotional support from associate teacher
2. Peer relationship with associate teacher
3. Collaboration with associate teacher
4. Flexibility in teaching content and method
5. Feedback from associate teacher
6. Heavy but not excessive workload

Similarly, in an interesting study conducted by Ulvik and Smith in 2011, the characteristics of a good practicum was investigated in an extensive qualitative

paradigm and the data was collected from all stakeholders involved in the process. The research suggested quality feedback, delegation of responsibilities to the students and giving them diversified experience with a feeling of inclusion as important features of a good practicum.

In view of Darling-Hammond (2006b), teachers who are poorly prepared is even worse than no preparations and such practises are like keeping water in a bucket with a hole. Therefore special emphasis should be given to teacher preparation, especially during practicum where the prospective teachers confront with issues and challenges in applying creative strategies during the field teaching. A mixed method study investigated the problems and issues faced by teacher education institutes while collaborating with cooperative schools, i.e. the schools in which PTs are placed. The research participants included 126 teacher educators from 14 government colleges for elementary education. The study unfolds the lack of coordination between training institutes and practicum schools. This study recommends further research in this domain and calls for policy makers in government to intervene and take appropriate measures to fill this gap (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013).

A study conducted in Peshawar investigated the problems and difficulties faced by PTs. Data collected by 120 prospective teachers revealed problems related to planning, management and freedom of selecting subjects. The study strongly suggested that guidance is necessarily needed to not only prospective teachers but also the staff of the designated schools along with a conducive environment to facilitate teaching (Shah et al., 2021).

A quantitative study was conducted to explore the challenges faced by prospective teachers at the practicum schools. Data from 860 participants highlighted some moderate level problems such as: availability of instructional resources, teaching subjects not related to their specialization, extra classes and other responsibilities of the schools (Massod et al., 2022).

Success of the PTs in the teaching practicum is highly depends upon the effective collaboration of the supervisor from university and teachers of the placement school (Aglazor, 2017). A study examined the roles of supervisors during a specialized instruction program. Data was collected from 79 participants, through

end of the semester evaluation form. Though obtained from limited sample, but this study clearly mentioned the helpful and unhelpful roles of supervisor. Being available, providing evaluative feedback and acting as intermediary were some of the helpful aspects of supervisors. And negative orientation, inadequate knowledge of program and lack of involvement were some of the unhelpful characteristics of a supervisor (Johnson, 1987).

While investigating the key elements in a positive practicum among PTs in Australia, Janet Moody defines positive practicum as having all sort of experiences in order to feel “prepared’ for teaching next year. She collected data from 16 pre-service teachers and concluded that supervisor plays an important role by supporting PTs with positive feedback, giving them liberty to develop their personalized teaching style along with their summative assessment approach. The author further added that the supervised environment facilitates PTs to gradually develop their confidence and sharpen their teaching skills, however, balancing between over and under protection is difficult (Moody, 2009).

Along with the supervisor, another integral part of the teaching practicum is the teacher from the practicum school, who is associated with the PTs and frequently called as ‘cooperative teacher’ (Clarke et al., 2014). Qualitative data was collected to assess the mentoring process during practicum. The result of the study found some contradictory findings on behalf of both. Cooperating teachers were of the opinion of providing support to the PTs in terms of guidelines and feedback; however, the PTs expressed apprehension regarding the role of cooperating teachers and complained about their rude attitude (Fatima & Behlol, 2018).

A review of empirical studies conducted between 1969 and 2009, explored the conflicting relationship of PTs, school based mentors and supervisors. The study concluded by presenting a problematic situation; thus depicting a need for developing systematic relationship that aligns practicum with school’s vision for facilitating the practical experience (Cohen et al., 2013). Effectiveness of the teaching practicum was assessed by a quantitative survey in Lahore, Pakistan. Data from 200 student teachers was collected through a questionnaire. The findings explored that though mentoring on part of university supervisors, lesson planning and learning are some of the satisfactory aspects but the support given by school was not appropriate, therefore the study recommends the liaison of laboratory school and training for

instructors at practicum schools (Bashir et al., 2014). Similarly, a qualitative case study was conducted in Indonesia by Sulistiyo et al. (2017) regarding improving the quality of practicum. The findings of the study did not only emphasized the role of mentor teachers and teacher educators but also stressed upon building school and university relationship as an effective strategy to facilitate PTs. It further suggested to ‘dismantle hierarchical legacies’ by establishing new partnership with schools.

The partnerships with government schools is a traditional model, adopted in view of permission granted by the school education department. However, research supports a great deal of learning opportunities being present in private schools too. They lead in administration, school discipline, physical facilities and co-curricular activities to facilitate learning and teaching (Shabbir et al., 2014). A research was conducted to study the impact of time management upon students’ performance and qualitative data was collected from 30 public and private school teachers. The data analysis concluded that there are better performing teachers with good time management in private schools because of planning in advance. Other factors contributing to time management were good administration and ongoing training programs that in turns contribute to students’ performance (Sahito et al., 2016). Another study was conducted to analyze factors effecting the quality of education in private, public and Non-government organization based schools. Data was collected from 50 schools in six districts of Pakistan and by comparing the learning achievement of Math, Urdu and general knowledge subjects, a remarkable difference was reported between the public and private schools. Along with family background, variables related to school like school-based management was one of the factor contributing to better performance of the students in private schools (Arif & Saqib, 2003). According to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2020-2021, there is a significant increase in number of private schools in Pakistan and 36% of the total enrolled children in primary are present in private schools (Qadeer et al., 2023). The increasing number of schools with rising enrolment is creating new avenues for the passing out graduates. Moreover, with the system of accountability and potential for delivering, private sector has become a “prime stakeholder and an indispensable government partner in providing quality, affordable education to society” (Rizwan et al., 2022).

With the changing dynamics of education, 21st century skills are often termed mandatory for teachers. By exploring the ongoing practices in terms of

challenges and opportunities; one can help teachers in getting equipped with desired skills during their supervised teaching practicum (Urban et al., 2017). Similarly, a research was conducted by Rizvi & Khamis (2020) for critically analyzing the recent funded models of teacher education in Pakistan proposed that increasing the time duration of the program not necessarily can assure better preparation of teachers. It also asserts for review based on contextual realities which requires extensive research in all aspects. This study intends to investigate the challenges and learning opportunities encountered by the PTs during their practicum in private schools, thus rationalizing their placement and seeking an insight for improving practices.

Research Method

The data collecting procedure involved a basic qualitative design, being most common in education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) comprising of semi-structured interviews to collect rich and in-depth data about the perceptions of PTs regarding the teaching practicum in private schools. The population of the study were the PTs enrolled in the four years, B. Ed. (Hon) program at a public sector university in Karachi. Every year, the teaching practicum courses are offered in 3rd, 4th, 7th and 8th semesters. Since, the inception of the program the PTs were placed in government schools for the teaching practicum, but later some of the private schools were also taken on board. Teaching practicum was on halt during Covid-19, therefore data was collected from those batches that had been to both government and private schools since the focus of this research was to rationalized the placement of PTs in private schools.

The maximum variation sampling technique was applied and data was collected from PTs placed in different schools with contrasting views, in order to obtain a diverse perspective (Flick, 2014). During teaching practicum at least five schools are taken on board. In each school about 10 students are placed, i.e. five from second year and five from fourth year. Each school has its own culture, and the reception and treatment of PTs vary from one school to another (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009), therefore maximum variation sampling could help acquire different perspectives. Semi structured interviews were conducted with 15 PTs. They were five from each batch, placed at five different school. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Pseudo names were assigned to all research participants for the purpose of protecting their identities.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interview protocol was used for data collection, recorded interviews were transcribed and translated in English Language. After thoroughly reading the transcripts, codes were assigned to segments of data” for clarity. Initial 32 codes were reduced to 25, which is a considerable number suggested by Creswell (2012). This reduction was done to refine the coding process, avoid overlapping and redundancy. Similar codes were clustered together to generate themes. Initial five themes were later condensed to four because of overlapping ideas. Different colors were used to represent each theme and to facilitate data analysis. The four emerging themes with codes are mentioned in Table 1.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the fundamental tool for data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and in this study, the researcher is also core responsible for organizing and managing the teaching practicum. Therefore, member checking was adopted as a validation strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis was shared with the research participants and feedback was obtained. The participants were satisfied with the interpretation of their perspective and suggested few changes to increase clarity of the text.

Table 1

Emerging Themes and Codes

Themes	School Environment	Learning Opportunities	Challenges	Rationalizing Placement
Codes	Disciplined	Advance curriculum	Allocation of classes	future prospects
	Well Managed	Time management	Trust building	conducive environment
	Proper Infrastructure	Interactive teaching	Extra classes	Freedom to teach
	Welcoming	Teaching aids	Syllabus coverage	Eager to learn students
		Co-curricular activities	High expectation	Rigorous Learning
		Communication skills	Work pressure	Burdened
		Feedback	Interference	
		Content Knowledge	Written work	

Research Findings

School Environment

The initial reactions to the environment were positive, particularly in terms of school organization and management. Almost all of the participants appreciated the infrastructure, including playgrounds, libraries, and laboratories. They also expressed satisfaction with the well-decorated surroundings and systematic procedures. Many shared their excitement about these aspects. For instance, Gul said, *“I was excited and happy, rather overwhelmed, as it has all facilities; library, playground, laboratories.”* The participants mentioned their first meetings with the school management, during which they were oriented about the school’s policies and procedures. Nearly all the prospective teachers (PTs) reported a welcoming and supportive behavior from the school management. Bela shared details about the first meeting, saying, *“When I went to the school, it was very welcoming. The director came to see us and shared the rules, regulations, and policies with us. They guided us initially regarding professional teaching.”* The PTs also appreciated the disciplined environment in which both students and teachers were actively engaged. Filza said, *“Teachers were effectively engaged with students,”* and Ainy added, *“Students were interested in studies, more disciplined than in government schools.”* While most PTs were excited and looked forward to this different experience during the practicum, a few of them also felt nervous, anticipating high expectations. For instance, Tina admitted, *“I was feeling nervous initially about the behavior of teachers and the principal.”* Filza also shared her apprehensions about the early days, saying, *“Initially, I was a bit scared, but with the passage of time, I felt okay as the staff was cooperative.”*

Learning Opportunities

In addition to the disciplined and organized working environment, well-equipped science labs, ICT labs, and printing facilities, the PTs mentioned numerous learning opportunities present in private schools that helped them sharpen their teaching skills. They found that the classes were more child-centered, with a relatively advanced curriculum. Deep explained, *“A lot of learning opportunities were there. Students used to ask questions. We worked hard to make the class interactive and engage learners.”* The PTs also admired the English-speaking environment, which allowed them to improve their language skills. Nida added, *“The curriculum was advanced, and the medium of instruction was English, which*

helped me improve a lot.” Another reason for their improvement was the presence of cooperative teachers in the classes, unlike in government schools. PTs mentioned that these cooperative teachers used to plan lessons and share their planning. Filza added, *“Teachers were also planning like us, so we got an idea of how teachers plan in practical life. We got the opportunity to apply inductive and deductive inquiries in class due to the manageable number of students.”*

Along with enhancing their teaching skills, PTs also improved their content knowledge. As Hani shared, *“We developed command over the content. Previously, we used to focus on teaching skills, but here we started focusing on the content too.”* Maha also shared a similar view about improving content and skills, saying, *“Subject teachers used to give us directions. We were supposed to follow the content being planned by the teacher. The teachers used to have proper planning with time and activities. We used to have good conversations with the teacher.”*

Apart from receiving feedback from cooperative teachers and supervisors, the PTs also reported receiving feedback from their school heads. Maha said, *“The principal was quite involved, and her feedback was also a learning opportunity for improvement.”* In addition to teaching, PTs were also actively engaged in various co-curricular activities, such as assembly presentations, sports days, Milad, Iqbal Day, and parent-teacher meetings. When asked about these activities, Sara responded, *“We prepared students for Milad and speeches. We also planned for the games period and engaged learners in different physical activities.”*

Challenges

When discussing challenges, PTs were open and candid. They began by addressing the challenges related to commuting to the school and the pressure exerted by the school to complete the syllabus on time, along with written work. One of the initial challenges faced by all PTs was the allocation of classes, which was later addressed by the supervisor’s intervention. The two dominant views were having too many classes and encountering reluctance from teachers to give even a single class. Haider shared that the school expected them to handle the full teaching load of a regular teacher, saying, *“Classes were given easily...the science teacher said, ‘This is the topic that you have to teach in sections A, B, C, and D’.”* At times, classes were assigned on the spot based on the particular day’s needs or to cover for an absent teacher. Another issue reported by PTs was not being assigned classes

according to their requirements or subjects of specialization. Sara mentioned, *“We were assigned Urdu and Islamiat only because there was a shortage of teachers in these subjects. Our consent was not taken.”* Regarding difficulties with class assignments, PTs shared that sometimes classes were assigned by the management, but teachers were reluctant. In such cases, supervisors would intervene and negotiate with the teachers regarding timing and content. Moreover, there were coordinators for different levels and classes, as Raza explained how he managed to secure the desired classes: *“It was difficult to switch between classes, as every class had a different coordinator. Because the management had given permission, we used to get the desired classes after careful consideration.”*

While some PTs shared positive experiences with school teachers, such as Rose, who said, *“Some of them were really helpful, suggested activities, and shared their lesson plans,”* others mentioned the uncomfortable attitudes of the school teachers. Bela stated, *“We are there as interns, but teachers do not accept us and consider us interference.”* PTs believed that either the cooperative teachers had no understanding of teaching methods or were intensely concerned about covering the syllabus. Nida shared, *“At times, teachers didn’t like too many questions, so we had to switch to lecture method.”* PTs rationalized that teachers behaved this way due to pressure from the school management to complete the syllabus. Most PTs reported working very hard to meet the expectations of cooperative teachers. They understood the reasons behind the differences in behavior and tried various strategies to achieve a win-win situation. Most of them reported a change in the cooperative teachers’ attitudes over time. Deep stated, *“Later, when they saw us teaching and putting in effort, they accepted and realized that we can teach as well.”* Similarly, Rose added, *“Initially, we faced difficulties, but later we earned their trust and became more creative in developing teaching aids. We also improved our time management because of back-to-back classes.”* The practicum experience also helped them learn and develop their soft skills. Zara shared, *“I learned not to say ‘no’ directly. We used to negotiate with them. We used to explain and then assign written work.”*

Rationalizing Placement

To seek a categorical response, PTs were asked about their preferred school for practicum, if given a choice. Table 2 shows that out of 15 respondents, respondents preferred to go to private schools; five preferred government schools

and two thought both types of schools should be there.

Table 2

Preference of School

S.No	Participants	Enrolment Year	Passing out Year	Gender	Preference
1	Ainy	2018	2021	Female	Private
2	Bela	2018	2021	Female	Private
3	Deep	2018	2021	Female	Public
4	Filza	2018	2021	Female	Private
5	Gul	2018	2021	Female	Private
6	Hani	2019	2022	Female	Both
7	Johi	2019	2022	Female	Private
8	Raza	2019	2022	Male	Public
9	Maha	2019	2022	Female	Private
10	Nida	2019	2022	Female	Both
11	Sara	2021	2024	Female	Public
12	Tina	2021	2024	Female	Private
13	Zara	2021	2024	Female	Public
14	Rose	2021	2024	Female	Private
15	Haider	2021	2024	Male	Public

PTs opting for private school, mostly rationalized it with for more learning opportunities, like Juhi said, *“We used to get free hand in government schools. But here, we used to be bound. We used to be given specific topic and we were answerable. In government schools, we were able to select topics according to our ease”*. Bela being the graduate of previous batch said, *“After completing the degree and working now, I have realized that mostly we go to private schools. Therefore, we should go to private school so that we improved ourselves”*

None of the research participants denied about the presence of learning opportunities and strong management in private schools. But, few still preferred public schools and gave logical reasons. One strong reason was the freedom of teaching in the class without any interference as Zara explained,

“Teachers are less problematic as compare to private teachers. In government schools, there are senior teachers. We learn a lot there.

Students are easy to handle. They show interest and get excited to see even colorful sheets.”

Though the academic environment was mostly appreciated by the PTs but few felt burdened and controlling. Haider shared vividly,

There is a race in private school of doing work. They don't see the capability of a person, weather a person can do or not. But they expected us to teach full load. We also had to recheck students work if it is all completed or not. We learnt how to do more work in less time. We felt that teachers are really burdened here.

Students in the public schools was another strong reason of the PTs for preference. They were moved by the thirst of knowledge and the reciprocal respect earned from students. Raza expressed clear inclination towards public school, rationalizing his point in these words,

.... I believe, that a country's school system should be public. So we should go there and learn about their culture and challenges. If we want to serve them in future, we should go therewhile I was leaving school (public) in the previous semester, a student said, 'Sir, only today I have seen you sitting'. The students were really eager to learn....But in private school it was not the case.

PTs preferring public school still acknowledged the learning experience present in private schools, as Deep stated, *“I would still go to public school because the children in public really needs good teachers. But the opportunities of learning are more in private schools than government school.* Nida advocated for both and connected it with the practical life in these words,

Both schools should be selected. Because, in the starting we have to work in private schools only. When we enter practical life, we are aware about the system. In government schools we have more freedom. We can choose content ourselves. And, students are also happy and grateful for the way we teach them, as we engage them in new activities and reward them.

Most of the PTs preferred private school for teaching practicum and acknowledged to improve their teaching skills. Tina compared public and private using an analogy, *“Like dishes are washed...it can be washed with water as well like it happens in government; but soap will make it shine that happens in private school.”*

Discussion

The intent of the study was to rationalize the placement of PTs in private schools. Since connecting with private schools and placing PTs also require a lot of effort, justification is needed. The well-organized school environment, as reported by PTs, was an important element in facilitating the teaching practicum and improving their time management and teaching skills. This finding is aligned with the findings of Sahito et al. (2016), which suggest that the organized system of private schools inculcates time management and effective planning among teachers. Along with the school management, private schools had proper infrastructure and the availability of teaching resources, which was acknowledged by the PTs to be facilitating their learning experience. This is also well-supported by research conducted on private schools, indicating that strong management, proper infrastructure, and the availability of resources promote learning (Shabbir et al., 2014; Shah et al., 2021).

The relatively small number of students with a relatively advanced curriculum was another reason for PTs preferring private schools. This preference aligns with research conducted to compare private and government schools in Karachi, which states that classrooms are better managed in private schools due to the small number of students (Karim et al., 2011). The PTs also had the chance to participate in co-curricular activities, and they were excited to be actively engaged in out-of-class activities, including parent-teacher meetings. This comprehensive experience of school life prepares them for future perspectives. This is also supported by Grudnoff (2011), which suggests that PTs should not be restricted to classroom teaching. Furthermore, the PTs reported receiving continuous feedback not only from their cooperative teachers but also from the school heads. This finding is supported by Ulvik & Smith (2011), which describes quality feedback as a significant characteristic of a good practicum. The cooperative teachers not only provided feedback but also shared their lesson plans with the PTs, fostering a peer relationship with associated teachers, which is one of the six components of a good practicum (Beck & Kosnik, 2002).

One of the major problems mentioned by the PTs related to the allocation of extra classes. The relatively large number of classes allocated to PTs is also aligned with the research conducted by Chughati & Perveen (2013), comparing the workload of public and private schools. PTs were assigned different classes to cover for absent teachers, which is also reported by Khan et al. (2021) and Masood et al. (2022). Another challenge faced by the PTs was the unsupportive behavior of the cooperative teachers, which is also documented in many local and international research studies (Farrukh et al., 2017; Fatima & Behloul, 2018; Shah et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2022). The relatively burdened work environment with high work pressure in private schools is also congruent with the findings reported by Karim et al. (2011). In connection with these challenges, PTs acknowledged the role of their supervisors in overcoming the issues and facilitating the allocation of classes according to their requirements. This is validated by the findings of several research studies, which state that supervisors act as intermediaries (Johnson, 1987) and are key factors in the success of PTs, serving as their main point of reference (Murray-Harvey, 2001). Over time, PTs reported resolving their problems and developing working relationships with the cooperative teachers. This is also supported by a study indicating that challenges during the practicum help PTs devise strategies to develop resilience (Soleas & Hong, 2020). Most of them shared about concluding the practicum on a positive note and developing good relationships with the cooperative teachers. This is also supported by a study by Hudson (2013), which states that PTs need to develop resilience as one of the desirable traits to cope with challenges.

One of the reasons the majority of PTs supported the practicum in private schools is their future job prospects. This is due to the accessibility of private schools (Siddiqi, 2021; Qadeer et al., 2023) and the fact that government job placement takes time. The research illuminated various merits supporting the placement of PTs in private schools, along with the challenges that can be addressed by building a connection with the practicum schools (Bashir et al., 2014). Research supports that close relationships with schools and other stakeholders would give confidence to beginning teachers (Plessis & Sunde, 2017). As mentioned earlier, working with private schools is a relatively recent phenomenon, and relationships with partner schools not only need time to mature but also require ‘commitment, engagement, and continuous transparent examination of mutual agendas’ (Ma & Green, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Before making any tentative conclusions, it is worth mentioning that the focus of this research was to acquire research-based evidence for practicum in private schools. No deliberate effort was made to compare the two systems of schools, but the focus was on rationalizing the placement of PTs in private schools as well. Furthermore, the findings are based on data from a small sample within a teacher education institution. Therefore, the findings of the study should be considered suggestive rather than conclusive. The analysis of qualitative data supports the placement of PTs in private schools for the sake of rigorous learning, better facilities, and an organized system. The positive role of school heads and continuous feedback are also substantial for learning. However, the role of public schools in facilitating the practicum cannot be undermined. Government schools not only provide a conducive environment for PTs but also offer an opportunity for sharpening their skills by applying learned pedagogies to a larger audience, thus preparing them for future teaching roles. Therefore, this study concludes by suggesting the placement of PTs in both public and private schools for teaching practicum.

This study opens up an avenue for broadening the landscape of teaching practicum by not only engaging a variety of schools but also enabling PTs to participate in out-of-class activities. The study strongly recommends long-term and sustainable relationships with the practicum schools to facilitate learning. The role of cooperative teachers, being one of the key players, should also be acknowledged, and measures should be taken to address their apprehensions about the teaching practicum. The study has implications for teacher educators in planning teaching practicum. Teaching practicum does not only need diligent planning but also the constant engagement of teacher educators in the process to maximize learning and address concerns of future teachers. The study also has implications for policymakers to address the concerns of teachers who are overloaded and compromising their instrumental role in providing quality education. The findings also cautiously highlight the widening gap between public and private school practices, requiring attention from government agencies responsible for providing quality education to the masses.

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