

Article**ISSUES IN TEACHING PRACTICE: PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN DISTANT LEARNING AND REGULAR PROGRAMS OF TEACHER TRAINING****Dr. Maliha Nasir***

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Keywords: Teacher training, student teachers, teaching practice, distance learning, comparative study

Abstract: Teaching practice plays a pivotal role in a teacher training program. Without practical training, such a program would not be effective and comprehensive in its purpose. Teaching practice provides an opportunity to the prospective teachers to apply their knowledge and learned skills in real situation. Irrespective to its goodness, while teaching practice, teachers may encounter some problems. This study was intended to examine the problems encountered during the process of teaching practice as perceived by the student teachers. Data was collected from student teachers who were engaged in practice teaching. Sample consisted of 100 student teachers out of which 50 were enrolled in regular teacher training programs in the Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan and 50 students were enrolled in distance learning programs in the Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan. A questionnaire was developed about problems related to various aspects of teaching practice. The opinions of regular and distant learners were compared and some recommendations were made in the light of findings of the study.

Received: 10th February, 2022**Accepted:** 11th March, 2022**Published:** 31st March, 2022**INTRODUCTION**

One of the most important element of teacher education programs is teaching practice. It enables student teachers to apply their learned skills in real classroom environment. Practice teaching enables the prospective teachers to evaluate and analyze their skills as a real teacher and also develop an emotional transition from being student to becoming teacher (Yıldız, Geçikli, & Yeşilyurt, 2016).

Practice teaching involves three aspects: (I) the practical application of teaching skills acquiring the role of a teacher, (II) the experiences that students go through in school and (III) the applied aspects of the theoretical courses (Nwanekezi, 2011). Some of the major objectives of teaching practice include providing opportunity to student teachers to apply theoretical concepts in real situations and to enable them understand the implications of educational principles for learning; enabling the student teachers for effective lesson planning; and developing desirable professional attitudes and interests (Akbar, 2002). Mahmood and Iqbal (2018) argued that prospective teachers' expectations differ from classroom realities as they have few opportunities to learn the real perspective of teaching during learning the theoretical aspects. Scott (2015) emphasizes that it is crucial to rethink pedagogy as 21st century's learner needs to develop new competencies.

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Mokoena (2017) found that a major problem that student teachers at open and distance learning (ODL) institution experience during teaching practice is lack of support and mentoring from supervisors. Abdullah and Mirza (2020) concluded that students of ODL institution need strict monitoring of their classroom teaching in order to improve their classroom management skills. In Pakistan, teaching practice is not carried out with full spirit rather it is taken as merely a requirement for degree completion. Teacher education curriculum focuses more on belief and knowledge or orientation and commitment rather than task and activities of teaching (Ball and Forzani, 2009). Student teachers generally face problems during teaching practice. These problems may be related to physical facilities and technical support provided by practicing school as well as by mother institution.

The role of supervisor and cooperation from peers may also affect the quality of teaching practice session. Teaching practice session should be so planned as to provide opportunities of professional development. Some studies have been conducted to examine the problems of teaching practice in Pakistan. Azeem (2011) found that major problems during teaching practice include lack of proper planning, insufficient training of student teachers before practice teaching and lack of coordination between practicing school and the mother institution. Gujjar (2010) also identified some problems during teaching practice. For example, objective of teaching practice were not clearly declared, supervisors did not provided regular feedback, and orientation was not given before practice teaching.

Various teacher training programs offered in Pakistani educational institutions also include teaching practice as an essential part of the training. Both regular and distance learning programs require practice teaching for fulfillment of the training programs. This study was intended to examine the perception of regular and distant students of teacher training programs about problems faced during teaching practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study is comparative in nature and a survey method is adopted to collect the data through a questionnaire. One hundred students were taken randomly as a sample from two public sector universities of Pakistan. Half of them i.e., 50 students were from the Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore enrolled in the regular programs of teacher training whereas 50 students were from Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad enrolled in distant learning programs.

Instrument

A questionnaire having 26 items with responses at three point scale, i.e. to great extent, to some extent and not at all was prepared for this study. These items were related to theoretical perception of teaching practice, supervisor's role, practicing school's role, facilities, peer observations, and professional development. Reliability of the instrument was determined by Cronbach alpha. The value of Cronbach alpha was 0.75 which indicates that the instrument has internal consistency and fit for use.

Data Collection

For the purpose of data collection, students enrolled in regular programs were given the instrument in their classes and distant learners were contacted during course workshops. The respondents were instructed about how to provide responses for each item given in the instrument.

The data was analyzed using χ^2 test to find out any differences between the perception of the two groups, i.e. regular students and distant learners.

RESULTS

The percentage of responses was calculated using SPSS. In order to compare the difference between the opinions of the two groups, chi square test was applied.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	37	3	1	1.127 (p>.05)
(%)	91	7	2	
Distant (n)	34	6	1	
(%)	83	15	2	

Table 1: Comparison of Variables (Significance of Teaching Practice)

The above table shows no difference in the opinion of regular students and distant learners. Both the groups agreed to a great extent that teaching practice is very important in teacher training programs.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	24 58	16 40	1 2	1.139 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	23 56	18 44	0	

Table 2: Comparison of Variables (Clarity on Concepts)

Table 2 shows no difference in the opinion of regular students and distant learners. Both the groups agreed that they had clarity of concepts before the actual teaching process.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	19 46	22 54	0	0.195 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	21 51	20 49	0	

Table 3: Comparison of Variables (Replication of Assessment and Evaluation)

No difference was revealed in the opinion of the two groups as shown in Table 3. Both the groups agreed that it helps when you replicate the assessment and evaluation procedure adopted by your teachers during the theoretical sessions.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	19 46	18 44	4 10	0.271 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	21 51	17 41	3 8	

Table 4: Comparison of Variables (Orientation about Teaching Practice)

Table 4 shows no difference in the opinion of the two groups. Both the groups agreed that appropriate information was given in orientation about teaching practice.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	22 53	16 39	3 8	1.310 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	22 53	13 32	6 15	

Table 5: Comparison of Variables (Time Allocation to Prepare Teachers)

Table 5 shows no difference in the opinion of the two groups. Both the groups agreed to a great extent that more time should be devoted in order to prepare teachers before teaching practice starts.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	15 36	14 34	12 30	6.114 (p<.05)
Distant (n) (%)	24 58	13 32	4 10	

Table 6: Comparison of Variables (Frequency of Supervisors' Visits to Schools)

A significant difference was found in the opinion of the two groups about visits of supervisors as shown in Table 6. Results revealed that supervisors of distant learners visit schools with more frequency. The difference was significant at α 0.05.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	16	18	7	5.994 (p<.05)
(%)	39	44	17	
Distant (n)	24	16	1	
(%)	58	40	2	

Table 7: Comparison of Variables (Assessment of Lesson Plans)

Table 7 shows a difference significant at α 0.05 in the opinion of the two groups regarding assessment of lesson plans. The result revealed that supervisors of distant learners were more regular in assessment of lesson plans.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	14	17	10	9.177 (p<.05)
(%)	34	42	24	
Distant (n)	27	11	3	
(%)	66	27	7	

Table 8: Comparison of Variables (Frequency of Supervisors' Visits to Classrooms)

Table 8 shows a significant difference in the opinion of the two groups regarding supervisors' visits to classrooms. The difference in the opinions was significant at α 0.05. Results revealed that supervisors of distant learners were more frequent in visiting classes than those of regular students.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	11	20	10	6.714 (p<.05)
(%)	27	49	24	
Distant (n)	17	22	2	
(%)	42	53	5	

Table 9: Comparison of Variables (Frequency of Supervisors' Contact with School Administration)

There was a significant difference in the opinion regarding supervisors contact with school administration as shown in Table 9. The difference in the opinions was significant at α .05. The results revealed that supervisors of distant learners remained in contact with school administration with more frequency as compared to those of regular students.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	19	18	4	0.216 (p>.05)
(%)	46	44	10	
Distant (n)	17	20	4	
(%)	42	48	10	

Table 10: Comparison of Variables (Guidance to Organize School from Administration's Attitude)

Table 10 shows no significant difference in the opinion of the two groups. Both the groups agreed to a great extent that they get a fair experience of how to organize a school from the attitude of the school administration.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	15	22	4	0.00 (p>.05)
(%)	37	53	10	
Distant (n)	15	22	4	
(%)	37	53	10	

Table 11: Comparison of Variables (Preference of School's Administration)

No difference was found in the opinion of the two groups about consideration given to their preferences of classes as shown in Table 11. Both the groups agreed that the school administration paid due consideration to their preferences while allocating the classes.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	15	24	2	11.774 (p<.01)
(%)	37	58	5	
Distant (n)	13	14	14	
(%)	32	34	34	

Table 12: Comparison of Variables (Frequency of Staff Visits to Classrooms)

Table 12 shows a significant difference in opinion regarding school staff visits to classrooms. The difference in the opinions was significant at α 0.01. The results revealed that regular students were more often visited by the school staff.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	15	21	5	2.816 (p>.05)
(%)	37	51	12	
Distant (n)	18	14	9	
(%)	44	34	22	

Table 13: Comparison of Variables (Provision of Necessary Infrastructure)

The difference in the opinion regarding infrastructure and staff attitude was not significant as shown in the Table 13. Both the groups agreed that the school provided them with necessary infrastructure and the attitude of the staff was encouraging.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	19	15	7	0.846 (p>.05)
(%)	46	37	17	
Distant (n)	15	17	9	
(%)	37	41	22	

Table 14: Comparison of Variables (Provision of Instructional Material)

There was no difference in the opinion regarding availability of instructional material as shown in Table 14. Both the groups agreed that they had the availability of all the instructional material that they needed.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	10	26	5	11.081 (p<.01)
(%)	24	64	12	
Distant (n)	20	11	10	
(%)	49	27	24	

Table 15: Comparison of Variables (Schedule of Teaching Practice)

A significant difference was found in the opinion about following the teaching practice schedule as shown in Table 15. The difference in the opinions was significant at α 0.01. Results revealed that schedule of teaching practice for regular students was more strictly followed in comparison to the one for distant learners.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n)	16	20	5	1.419 (p>.05)
(%)	39	49	12	
Distant (n)	21	17	3	
(%)	52	41	7	

Table 16: Comparison of Variables (Availability of Audio-Visual Aids)

Table 16 shows no significant difference in the opinion of the two groups regarding availability of audio-visual aids. Both the groups agreed that there is sufficient availability of audio-visual aids for the training programs.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	10 24	22 54	9 22	1.856 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	12 29	16 39	13 32	

Table 17: Comparison of Variables (Role of Peer Cooperation)

Table 17 shows that both the groups agreed to a great extent that peer co-operation plays in important role in developing critical thinking and polishes teaching skills. The difference was statistically not significant.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	22 54	16 39	3 7	1.118 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	22 54	18 44	1 2	

Table 18: Comparison of Variables (Opportunity to Discuss Problems with Teachers)

Both the groups agreed to a great extent that there is an opportunity after the teaching practice to discuss the problems with the teachers and give suggestions as shown in Table 18. The difference was statistically not significant.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	20 49	17 41	4 10	4.206 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	22 54	19 46	0 0	

Table 19: Comparison of Variables (Provision of Students / Teachers to Observe Strengths and Weaknesses)

Table 19 shows no significant difference in the opinion regarding peer observation. Both the groups agreed to a great extent that the student teachers should be allowed to sit in each other classes to observe strengths and weaknesses of their peers.

Type	TGE	TSE	NAA	χ^2
Regular (n) (%)	17 41	19 47	5 12	0.834 (p>.05)
Distant (n) (%)	16 39	17 41	8 20	

Table 20: Comparison of Variables (Quality of Teaching Practice in Pakistan)

No significant difference was found in the opinion regarding quality of teaching practice in Pakistan as shown in Table 20. Both the groups were satisfied with the quality of teaching practice as conducted in the country.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed that both regular students and distant learners face more or less similar problems during teaching practice. It was found that the perception of both the groups regarding theoretical aspects of teaching practice was similar. Both the groups agreed that practice teaching is very important in teacher training programs. They agreed that appropriate information is given in orientation about teaching practice, however, more time should be devoted in order to prepare teachers before teaching practice. Yıldız, Geçikli, & Yeşilyurt (2016) suggested that the courses of teacher education programs should be more practice-oriented in order to raise the level of preparedness of

prospective teachers for the profession. The perception of both the groups regarding supervisor's role was different. Distant learners showed more positive perception about supervisors' role as they agreed that supervisors frequently visit their classes, assess lesson plans and discuss ongoing teaching practice with school administration. Regular students did not agree with these statements. According to Mokoena (2017) and Mahmood & Iqbal (2018), support and mentoring from supervisors play a significant role in effective teaching practice. Both the groups to some extent had positive perceptions about school administration support, provision of physical facilities and an expert support from the concerned school. Mahmood & Iqbal (2018) also found school administration attitude as significant challenge for prospective teachers. Both the groups agreed to some extent that they have opportunity of peer observation and collaboration during teaching practice which help them polish and improve their teaching skills.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of this study, it may be concluded that both regular students and distant learners face similar problems during teaching practice and that there was no statistically significant difference between the opinions of the two groups except in few cases which were mostly related to supervisors' role. One of the major problems faced during teaching practice in Pakistan is that theoretical perception of student teachers about teaching practice is not very clear and that they are not provided with sufficient orientation before starting of practice teaching. Another major problem is that supervisors of student teachers do not play their role in its true spirits. They do not assess students regularly to give them timely feedback for improving their skills. As teaching practice is a way to practically involve student teachers in teaching profession, there is a need to provide ample opportunities for professional development.

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