# Exploring cooperating teachers' perceptions of their roles and practices in guiding student teachers during practicum

Suneena Rasheed
Islamic University of Maldives
*suneena.rasheed@ium.edu.mv*

**ABSTRACT**

The practicum plays a critical role in teacher education, providing student teachers (STs) with the opportunity to develop essential teaching skills through real-world experience under the guidance of cooperating teachers (CTs). Despite the recognized significance of CTs in shaping the professional development of STs, little is known about how CTs perceive their roles and practices during the practicum. This study aims to explore CTs' perceptions of their responsibilities and practices in guiding STs. A quantitative survey was conducted with 205 CTs across 21 placement schools in four geographical zones, focusing on their roles as feedback providers, advocates for practical application, supporters of reflection, socialization agents, and models of practice. The findings reveal that CTs recognize the importance of these roles, particularly their role as feedback providers, however, the study also identifies a notable gap between their perceived roles and actual practices. Specifically, a significant discrepancy was found in their role as modelers of practice, with 68% of CTs reporting challenges in fulfilling this role. These results highlight the need for further investigation into the barriers that prevent CTs from fully aligning their perceptions with their practices. Addressing these challenges could improve the effectiveness of the practicum and better prepare future teachers.

**Keywords:** Cooperating Teachers, Practicum, Placement Schools, Student Teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental objectives of teacher education is to prepare capable, competent, effective, efficient and qualified classroom teachers (Ali & Parveen 2013; Elligate, 2007; Karammustafaoglu, 2009). These indispensable qualities are primarily developed in student teachers (STs) through hands-on authentic experiences during the practicum. Therefore, without a doubt the practicum has become one of the most crucial and cornerstone elements of any teacher education program (Alger & Kopcha, 2009; Cuenca, Schmeichel, Butler, Dinkelman, & Nichols, 2011; Gursoy, 2013; Gronn, Romeo, McNamara, & Teo, 2013; Loizou, 2011; Lind, 2004; Zhang, Cown, Hayes, Werry, Barnes & France, 2015).

Theoretically, the practicum is defined as a supportive journey of professional development and learning, gained through immersion in the real world of teachers' workplace (Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006). Several authors have sought to define the term 'practicum' (Al-Mekhlafi, 2012; Dymond, Renzaglia, Halle, Chadsey, & Bentz, 2008; Elligate, 2007; Morrison, 2016). For example, Beak and Ham (2009) defined the teaching practicum as a course which allows STs to play the role of a teacher on the basis of theoretical understanding on teacher education and under the guidance and coaching of a CT to develop practical

competence. On the other hand, some authors have highlighted a broader conception of the practicum and viewed it as an invaluable opportunity for STs to experiment and examine the theories that they were exposed to in their theory classes (Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri, & Awwad, 2014).

Similarly, Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2013) described practicum as an extended field experience under the guidance of an experienced teacher who is often referred to as a cooperating teacher (CT). Supporting this definition, Elligate (2007) described practicum as a course which allows the learner to perform a practice under coaching from an expert to develop the learner's practical competencies. However, a slight variation is evident from the definition provided by Al-Mekhlafi (2012). He considered the practicum as 'a strategy': a strategic endeavor that provides incremental and integrated real-life experiences for the STs. Another variant is suggested by Ali and Al-Adawi, (2013) who viewed the practicum as a setting designed to learn the task of 'learning to teach' (i.e., a metacognitive component). In this regard, Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2013) state that the practicum is an opportunity for STs to observe and experience various images of teaching both modelled and articulated by CTs. This modelling mainly focuses on teaching techniques, impulse, traditions and authority.

The practicum is a journey of discovery for the STs that includes both ups and downs associated with any such new adventure. Hamman and Romano (2009) stated that teaching practicum is a situation where STs discover their own teaching styles and management techniques through experimentation which help them to improve their teaching practices. Supporting this definition, Atputhasamy (2005) stated that during the practicum, STs attempt to put into practice the many theories they have been exposed to during the teacher education programme in the actual classroom situation. Thus, it is a period of anxiety, apprehension and adjustment for STs. In this journey of discovery and exploration filled with excitement, anxiety and apprehension, CTs play a crucial role in enculturing STs into the teaching profession. They are considered to be one of the key players who have the most powerful influence and pivotal role in shaping the behavior of STs (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen 2014; Le Cornu, 2010; Thorsen, 2016). They play a significant role in the professional, social, and emotional development of STs as they are the people who spend most time with the STs (Beckford & Roland, 2010; Jusoh, 2013).

Despite the recognized importance of CTs in shaping STs, little is known about how CTs perceive the roles they play and their practices in this transformative experience. This paper seeks to fill this gap by exploring CTs' perceptions of their various responsibilities and their practices in guiding STs during the practicum.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptions of CTs. The concept of CT emerged in North America after World War II (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014). The major reasons for the emergence of the term CT include: the change of teacher education institutions to universities which made the faculty members distance themselves from the schools and saw teachers as merely cooperating with the universities, closure of most laboratory schools due to budget cuts, and the rapid growth of student population demanding increased practicum placements from schools. However, since the faculty members saw themselves as experts they expect that classroom teachers 'to cooperate' with them. In other words, it was at the time a condescending not a complementary term. However, during mid-1980s, due to public and political criticism of university-based teacher education, some institutions began to call CTs 'mentors' or 'associate teachers' as this relationship began to be reviewed and appreciated more fully. Though the practicum has been considered an important aspect of teacher education since 1948,

benefits of the practicum are still not fully reaped, and conditions of effective mentoring have not yet been met.

The term CT is still the most commonly used in the context of teacher education to describe the teacher who works with the student teacher (ST) during the time of practicum. CTs are most often experienced classroom teachers who are assigned a ST for an extended period of time (Atputhasamy, 2005). They host, supervise, and work with the ST on a daily basis during the field experience, and play a fundamental role in the STs' growth and development as a professional (Petrarca, 2013).

According to Wilhem (2007), a CT is variously described as a mentor, supporter, coach, and evaluator. In support of this description, the meta analysis by Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2013) also provided other terms that are in use such as school advisor, school associate, supervising teacher, sponsor teacher, school based teacher educator and mentor. Their meta-analysis revealed that there have been three commonly accepted conceptions highlighted in the literature regarding the role of CTs. Those include; classroom placeholder, supervisor of practicum, and teacher educator. The Figure 1. depicts their level of participation (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen 2014).

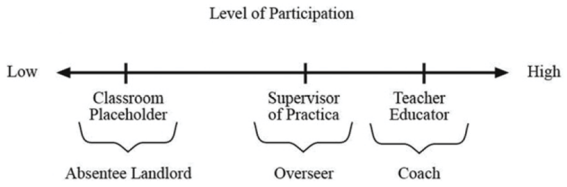


*Figure 1 CTs' Level of Participation.*

Each of these conceptions illustrates different roles and levels of responsibility. For example, the classroom placeholder often acts as an absentee landlord in the practicum setting – the least engaged of all three conceptions. These types of CTs most often emulate their own CTs when they were STs. Their role is for the STs to replace them in the class as soon as s/he commences the practicum. On the other hand, the supervisor of the practicum operates as an overseer. As the name suggests, this type of CT supervises the work of STs by observing, recording and reporting their success, or failure of the ST. The deficiency in this type is having unidirectional interaction, where the ST acts as a passive receiver. However, the conception of the CT as teacher educator has maximum involvement in coaching, guiding, encouraging, facilitating and eliciting meanings in concert with the ST. This category demands that the CTs be equipped with most up-to-date knowledge and debates related to working with STs.

STs seek a lot of support from CTs to develop their teaching skills (Arnold, 2006). They consider CTs to be the most important person to them in making a successful entry to the profession (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen 2014). It is evident from the literature that the support from CTs is highly imperative as it gives STs opportunity to develop their teaching skills through observing and modelling CTs (Jusoh, 2013). Therefore, the greater level of participation by the CT, the more significant the role they play in the process of ST development. This differing level of participation (see Figure 1) stems from the level of their motivation to become a CT and the rewards or benefits arising from their participation.

***Various roles CTs play during the practicum.***

The review of extant literature on CTs revealed that they play a range of roles (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005). These include provider of feedback, counsellor, observer, a role model, an equal partner, a critical friend, and an instructor. Similarly, a mixed methods research conducted on 264 mentor teachers revealed that they played roles such as provider of support, provider of feedback, modellers of practice, teach teacher, critical evaluator, providers of context, and supporters of reflection. In addition, these roles were reflected in a meta-analysis of literature on CTs by Clark et al (2014).

From their meta-analysis of 400 papers published within the past 60 years, Clarke and his team categorized eleven different ways that CTs participate with STs during practicum (Clark et al,2014). These categories were identified based on pragmatic philosophy are shown in the Figure 2., and a review of each follows.

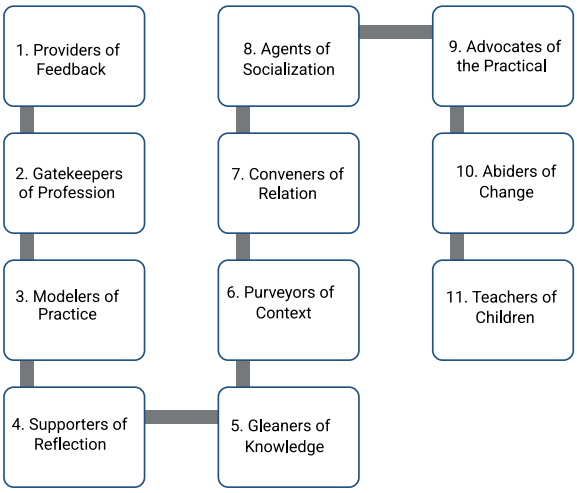


*Figure 2 Various Roles of a CT.*

**Providers of feedback.** The first and foremost category identified is CTs' role as the providers of feedback. It was reported in the review that providing feedback to ST is the most important role of CTs. However, the feedback they provide usually tends to be particularistic, technical, and does not reflect the underlying reasons for the feedback. In other words, very rarely do CTs provide constructive and reflective feedback to STs. The most common types of feedback tend to be the 'follow me model' where CTs offer uni-directional conversation. Authors have noted that CTs are more confident with giving oral or verbal feedback than that of written feedback. The underlying reason for the provision of ineffective written feedback is the lack of necessary skills required to provide this sort of feedback. On the contrary to this view, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005) found from their study that some CTs provide very constructive written feedback to enhance the development of STs' own teaching style. They also have noted that the type of feedback is independent of the type of teaching model. In addition, the type of feedback tends to be the same, irrespective of the stages of the practicum and the developmental levels of STs. This means that STs who are in different level of development tend to get the same type of feedback.

**Gatekeepers of profession.** CTs as the gatekeepers of the profession is identified as the second category. As the name suggests, CTs shoulder the responsibility of deciding STs entry into the profession by providing a summative evaluation at the end of the practicum. During the mentoring process, CTs are required to evaluate the teaching and learning undertaken by STs. To take this critical decision, the CTs need to be competent enough for summative evaluation. But, the literature suggests that the CTs perform this essential task without having sufficient formal preparation. They do not have adequate knowledge on summative evaluation procedures and lack the relevant tools for this sort of evaluation. Neither do, the tools used by CTs measure the individual differences and the standards of performance of STs accurately. As a result, both halo and leniency effects plague CTs when doing evaluations. Apart from this challenge, due to the deficiencies in available tools, CTs are unable to give detailed accounts of individual differences. Thus, they tend to report only the general impressions and often cannot make a clear distinction justifying pass or fail for STs. All of these roles make their gatekeeping role complicated.

**Modelers of practice.** Analysis of the literature demonstrates that modelling is an essential aspect of CT participation in teacher education. During the practicum, STs may work with many CTs in different contexts. In other words, the practicum provides a great opportunity for the STs to observe a variety of images of teaching. This modelling by the CT mainly focuses on, techniques, impulses, traditions and authority which are in consistent with the focus of the apprenticeship model. However,

the tension in this modelling arises when the CTs expect STs to simply emulate their practices without integrating other approaches that STs have learnt on-campus, which may have significant impact on learning to teach. Two different categories of CTs are evident from the recent literature on modelling by CTs. That is, 'maestros' and 'mentors'. Maestros follow expert-novice approach to modelling, which is similar to the previously mentioned apprenticeship model. But, those who use a mentors' approach to modelling follow a different approach where they discuss and analyse the classroom teaching, and related matters with the STs. Apart from that, they allow the STs to construct their knowledge in light of the observations and discussions. However, most of the CTs expect the SLs to play the role of mentor rather than themselves. Further, CTs believe that the university course works is too theoretical, so they balance this by acting as modellers of practice and largely as maestros. The literature suggests that student teachers undergo two distinctive stages underpinned by a modelling approach. That is, initially, they mimic experts teaching styles and then (hopefully) move onto more independent and reflective styles of their own teaching.

**Supporters of reflection.** CTs act as supporters of reflection. Reflection in the context of teacher education is defined as framing and reframing of teaching practice in light of past experience or new knowledge (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2013). Almost universally, teacher education programs emphasize reflection. In addition, CTs are usually familiar with this essential feature of the reflection. However, the degree and extent to which they employ it varies greatly. According Stegman (2007), CTs use different strategies to improve their reflective process Those strategies include: telling stories, providing advice and insight, and validating good practice and preparation. Keogh, Dole and Hudson (2006) argued that the most effective and efficient CTs' exhibit and support reflective dispositions which lead to inquiry into practice by the student teachers.

**Purveyors of context.** One of the vital roles that the CTs play in practicum is to provide knowledge about the contexts of schooling to STs (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2013). They introduce STs to both concealed and unconcealed dimensions of teaching, and mediate the STs' interactions with and among contexts. The contexts provided as part of the STs' learning environment by CTs determines whether STs acquire the necessary skills required for them to be successful in the profession. In addition, the contextual factors are recognized as more important than the individual interactions that take place among stakeholders. Therefore, CTs need to be aware of the cultural and political contexts of the schools and must be well informed about the changes in the contexts, so that they could manage the contexts well to ensure that practicum is beneficial to the STs.

**Convenor of relation.** As convenors of relation, the CTs relationships with STs and other stakeholders are very important. Especially, a personnel connection with ST and CT is important for them to benefit from all that the CT has to offer. A strong relationship with the ST is the key enabler of the success, and it is considered as the second largest contributor to a positive practicum experience. The ideal relationship is not just doing what is required; it is more than sharing required information. It is and is dependent on the network of collaborative relationships developed and established during the practicum to which the ST then has access.

**Agents of socialization.** CTs act as agents of socialization. They socialize STs into ideologies, dispositions and habits of the professions. Their influence is greater than the influence of SLs on STs' socialization. This process of socialization, discussed in detail earlier, becomes more effective and efficient when the values of CTs and STs match each other. However, the STs deeply held beliefs about teaching are often unaffected by this process of socialization. The most challenging features of socialization for STs is in fact that they become

more controlling in their relationship with pupils and conforming to the existing school culture.

**Advocates of the practical.** One of the major roles of CTs is to introduce STs into the practicalities of the school classroom. As mentioned earlier, during the mentoring process, CTs carefully introduce STs into the practicalities of the profession. The emphasis on practicalities together with the emphasis on reflective perspectives and critical judgment are equally essential for the practicum. But, CTs are so preoccupied with the practicalities of daily practice like developing lesson planning, the effective use of teaching aids, and classroom management that their observations by ST may overlook the essential role of reflection and critical judgement.

**Abiders of change.** A further category identified is CTs as abiders of change. CTs abide by the many uncovered and unacknowledged dimensions of their practice while working with STs. For example, working with STs is an interruption to their classroom routines and their normal life in the school but they typically accept this interruption silently. Wilhem (2007) has identified many other drawbacks of being a CT. Those include, substitution of CT from the class, overloading the responsibilities of guiding a ST, invasion of privacy by breaking the 'isolation of the teacher', and disruption of classroom management techniques. Other downsides of being a CT include, difficulty of handing over one's own class to a stranger; disappointment and embarrassment caused due to the under-performance of STs, and the lingering effect of unpleasant, unsuccessful past STs that may influence their work with current STs. In simple terms, there are a number of issues which are challenging for a CT in their work with STs. However, CTs often conceal the emotional labor associated with being a cooperating teacher. Other dimensions of these challenges include controlling what they say and do, always having to always have a positive attitude, and withholding feedback that they feel is too sensitive. Further, CTs' identity is also affected by having a ST: they are no longer 'the classroom teacher' which potentially creates underlying feelings of displacement.

**Teachers of children.** Beyond and above all the duties and responsibilities of being a CT, the teachers who supervise student teacher on practicum are teachers of children, which was identified as the last category of their participation in teacher education. CTs feel that having a ST is an add-on to their principal work as teachers of children. However, some CTs enjoy the opportunity to observe their own students' being taught by STs and see it as an aid to better understanding their individual needs. Nonetheless, the primary duty of any CT is to teach their own pupils and taking care of their wellbeing at school. Dealing with STs is always a distant second. These changes in priorities and the possession of dual roles of being a classroom teacher and CT conflict with their loyalty to children. Even so, this tension is not usually discussed or considered when assigning STs to classroom for the practicum.

The foregoing discussion indicates a range of pivotal roles that the CTs paly during the practicum. Apart from enacting these essential roles as a professional mentor for the STs, they are fulltime teachers of the pupils, thus, they have to act on these two, equally demanding, professional roles simultaneously (Thorsen, 2016). Their influence on ST is found to be more than the influence of supervising lecturer and the college courses (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Nquyen, 2009). Despite the essential roles that they play in preparing STs, all the CTs are not equally competent, effective or successful. Consequently, in some cases, STs end up being exposed to ineffective teaching methods and out-dated pedagogical practices which ultimately impede the application of new innovative methods learned at the university. Therefore, to make the practicum worthwhile to the STs, CTs need to be well prepared and fully supported to enact their roles effectively and efficiently. However,

the literature indicates that there exist a lack of support, collaboration, and training to assist CTs (Petrarca, 2013). This is in accordance with what Clarke, Triggs and Neilsen (2014) concluded from their meta-analysis of literature related to CTs. They indicated that CTs are, in general not professionally prepared to undertake their role. Similarly, a study by (McClure, 2008) found that though the training of CTs has proven to have significant impact on STs, only few universities offer training for CTs.

## METHODOLOGY

The original study employed mixed-method triangulation design; however, this paper specifically focuses on only quantitative data collected through a survey questionnaire (CTQ) designed for the CTs. A sample of 205CTs were selected on voluntary basis from 21 placement schools across four geographical zones: Male' city, North Central, South Central and Southern. This includes 16 schools from Male' city, two schools from South Central, two schools from Southern and one schools from North Central.

All 16 placement schools in Male' city were targeted to obtain a large number of participants from different Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) as many of the TEIs prefer to send their STs to Male schools due the cost of travelling to other geographically dispersed zones. The purpose of selecting schools from widely dispersed geographical zones was not to generalize the findings to the population but to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of key plyers in various school contexts across the country.

A self-administered questionnaire-based survey (CTQ) was used to collect the data from CTs. Since the study is aimed to gather information from the entire population of CTs at the time of data collection, questionnaire based survey was deemed the most suitable. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) stated that the primary purpose of a survey is to elicit detailed information from an entire population as defined by the study. In addition, the multifaceted nature of the practicum and the time constraints necessitated a method that could collect data from multiple sites within a limited timeframe.

Prior to the actual data collection, CTQ was pilot tested with 40 teachers to test its reliability and validity. Reliability of CTQ was determined by calculating Cronbach alpha. The Cronbach's alpha value for CTQ in the pilot sample of 40 teachers was found to be 0.702. Content validity of the CTQ was established through a review by six supervisors: three local supervisors who were familiar with the practicum, and three overseas experts from the field of teacher education. These experts critically examined the content of the questionnaires. After the pilot test, no major revisions were made to the items.

The final CTQs were distributed to the participants, along with the consent form, during the last week of the practicum, through the liaison contacts from the selected schools. Participants were then expected to return the completed CTQs on the final day of the practicum. Once the CTQs were collected, they were then coded and data were analyzed using SPSS, V.12 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Only descriptive statistics were computed, and the findings are presented as charts and tables.

## FINDINGS

CTs perceptions about their various roles. Perceptions about the importance of various roles that CTs play during the practicum was investigated by giving them a series of statements that described ten roles to which they had to respond on a five point Likert-scale in the CTQ: Very important (1) Important (2) Neither important nor unimportant (3) Unimportant (4) and Very unimportant (5). The responses were first analyzed by disaggregating them to the levels (ECE, primary and secondary). The result shows that there wasn't a significant

difference between the responses from these three levels. A further analysis was carried out by disaggregating the data by their educational qualification level (certificate, diploma and degree). The result of this analysis also shows that irrespective of the educational qualification, their perceptions remain the same. Therefore, the result presented in Figure 2. is from the cohort of 205 CTs. Figure 3. shows CTs perceptions about various roles they played.

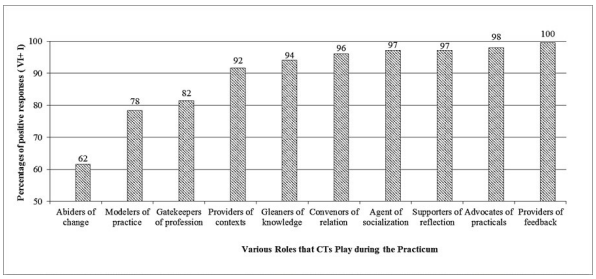


*Figure 3 CTs' Perceptions About the Importance of Various Roles They Play in Guiding STs.*

Figure 3. shows that, from the ten roles given, 62% of CTs identified their role as abiders of change is important, whereas, an overwhelmingly high percentage (above 70%) of CTs perceived that the remaining nine roles given are important, and all the participants agreed that their role as providers of feedback is important.

A similar question consisted of a series of 14 statements that described the way practicum is conducted at the school level was given in CTQ, to which, CTs had to respond on a five point Likert-scale: strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) neither agree nor disagree (3) agree (4) and strongly agree (5). These statements were phrased such that they described the main 10 roles that CTs took part during the practicum. These 14 statements were grouped under ten roles as presented in Table 1. The intend of asking this question is (a) to understand the degree of CTs involvement in guiding STs, and (b) to identify the match between what they perceived as important and what was being practiced.

Table 1. Various Roles of CTs and their Attribution

| CTs roles | Items provided in the CTQ |
|---|---|
| Providers of feedback | I prefer to give oral feedback.<br>In the feedback I provide, the emphasis is on particular and technical issues excluding theoretical and pedagogical matters.<br>My feedback varies depending on whether the practicum is the student teacher's first practicum or second. |
| Advocates of practical | I advise the ST on what is practical in the classroom environment. |
| Supporters of reflection | I urge the ST to reflect on their own teaching by framing and reframing the teaching in light of past experience or new knowledge. |
| Agents of socialization | I help the ST to socialize into the culture of the school and the classroom. |
| Conveners of relation | I help the ST to develop professional relationships with other teachers and myself. |
| Gleaners of knowledge | I gain knowledge of new methods and materials of teaching from the ST.<br>I need more knowledge to conduct the summative/final evaluation of the ST on a pass/fail basis |
| Providers of contexts | I advise the ST with the context of the school, and manage the context to provide a suitable practicum for the ST. |
| Gatekeepers of profession | I expect the SL to mentor (advise and guide) ST. |
| Modelers of practice | I expect my STs to emulate (copy) my style of teaching. |
| Abiders of change | Supervision is an add-on to my usual workload.<br>Supervision is an interruption to my own teaching. |

Positive responses (SA+A) to these statements in each of the roles were analyzed. The result was then compared with CTs' perceptions of their roles (see Figure 3) and presented in Figure 4.

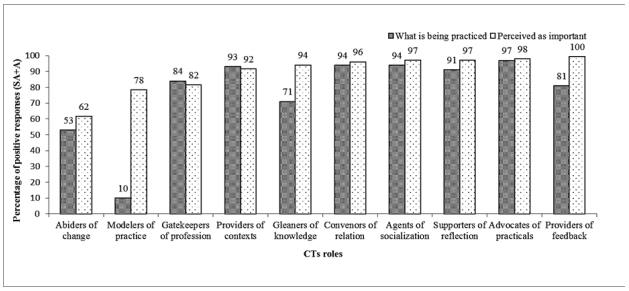


*Figure 4. Comparison of CTs Perception about the Importance of Their Roles and What was being Practiced during the Practicum.*

Figure 4 shows that there is not much significant difference (less than 8%) between CTs perceptions about most of the roles (six of ten) they play and the roles as they have been practiced during the practicum. The roles that showed the most difference include providers of feedback, gleaners of knowledge, modelers of practice and abiders of change. Among these four roles, the highest difference is apparent in modelers of practice (68%) and least is abiders of change (9%).

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings clearly indicate that all the CTs who participated in the study recognized the importance of their role as feedback providers. Similarly, a significantly high percentage of the CTs viewed their roles as advocates for practical application, supporters of reflection, agents of socialization, conveners of relationships, gleaners of knowledge, gatekeepers of the profession, and models of practice as equally important.

The meta-analysis of literature on CTs identified that the role of the CTs is a common theme in teacher education literature (Clarke et al, 2014). From their review of last six or more decades of research on CTs, Clarke and his colleagues were able to cite only one study in which the CT was not a part of the practicum. That shows the significance of the CTs' role in training future teachers. In other words, it shows the criticality and centrality of their role in the preparation of STs. Among the many essential roles that CTs play during the practicum, the review of the literature indicated that, their role as providers of feedback is more important than any other roles. Interestingly, it should be noted that all the CTs participated in the current study affirmed that their role as a providers of feedback was very important.

At the same time an overwhelmingly large proportion of the participants perceived that a multitude of roles such as advocates of practical, supporters of reflection, agents of socialization, conveners of relation, gleaners of knowledge, gatekeepers of profession, and modelers of practice are also very important. This implies that they perceived themselves as significant contributors to the training of future teachers.

However, though CTs believed that play a multitude of roles in training STs during the practicum, the analysis of their responses to the question about the alignment between what they perceived as important and what was actually practiced revealed a different picture. There was a significant gap between what they perceived as important and what they practiced, particularly in the roles of modelers of practice, gleaners of knowledge, and providers of feedback. Among these three roles, the most notable discrepancy was in their role as modelers of practice (68%). In contrast, the differences in the roles of gleaners of knowledge and providers of feedback were 23% and 19%, respectively. This suggests that although they recognized these roles as important, they struggled to apply or emphasize them in practice. Therefore, this area warrants further exploration to understand the factors preventing them from performing the roles they deemed essential.

In conclusion, the findings of this study emphasize the crucial role that cooperating teachers (CTs) play in the preparation of STs during their practicum experiences. The CTs not only recognize the importance of their feedback and guidance but also acknowledge the significance of their various roles, such as supporting reflection, advocating for practical application, fostering relationships, and modeling professional practice. However, the study also reveals a notable discrepancy between what CTs perceive as essential roles and the reality of their practice. This gap highlights the challenges they face in fully implementing these roles, particularly in their role as modelers of practice. The results suggest a need for further investigation into the barriers that prevent CTs from aligning their perceptions with their practices, in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teacher education programs. Addressing these challenges could ultimately lead to more consistent and impactful contributions from CTs in shaping the next generation of teachers.

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