

# Challenges Faced by Student Teachers During their Teaching Practicum: A case study of a Higher Education Institution in the Maldives

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher education institutions play a key role in producing a professionally trained, quality teacher workforce for the nation. In the teaching programmes, teaching practicum is a key component, which allows students to practice the knowledge and skills acquired from the program in the field. As such, every student teacher must pass through the practical teaching module, the teaching practicum, which is supervised by trained and skillful mentors. In the context of the Maldives, it appears that little is known about the process and practices of the teaching practicum. It is in this spirit that the current study aimed to examine the challenges faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum. This study adopted a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with eight participants. The findings of this study revealed that challenges were related to schools, institutions, and student teachers. It was therefore recommended that the institution and the respective school in charge should have a close relationship and good communication with each other to provide a conducive learning experience for the student teachers.

**Keyword (s):** Teaching practicum, higher education institution, student teacher

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## INTRODUCTION

Teacher education institutes play a key role in producing a professionally trained teacher workforce for the nation. Other than the technical knowledge obtained through the programme curriculum, it is equally important to gain field experience as an opportunity to articulate the knowledge and skills acquired through the course. As such, every student teacher must pass through a practical teaching module called teaching practicum, which is supervised by trained and skilful mentors. Teaching Practice (TP) is a standard component of all teacher preparation programmes leading to a recognised teaching credential (Aldabbus, 2020). A teaching practicum is where the student-teacher applies the

teaching strategies and methods taught in college (Aldabbus, 2020). It is obvious that teaching practice requires knowledge of more than what to teach and how to teach it and is intended to aid in developing a variety of skills, including interpersonal, pedagogical, intercultural, and psychological skills (Ebrahim et al., 2017).

In the context of the Maldives, the University of Maldives's teaching programme cannot be completed without completing a teaching practicum programme. All the undergraduate teaching programs should complete two programmes, while all the graduate teaching programs have to cover one teaching practicum program. However, it appears that little is known about the process and practice of the course and

practicum components of these programs. It is in this spirit that the current study aims to examine the problems and difficulties faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

For decades, the education faculties in teacher training institutions have been conducting student-teacher practice. Students spend four years studying numerous subjects in depth, with minimal or no emphasis at all on teaching practicum. According to observations, some students are reluctant to try teaching in actual classroom settings. Despite having taken courses in teaching methods, curriculum and pedagogy, and skills, some student teachers are unable to put those ideas into practice. Hence, the aim of this study is to identify the challenges that student teachers face in the classroom during the teaching practicum.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.**

To examine the challenges faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the perception of student teachers on teaching practicum?
2. What are the challenges faced by student teachers during teaching practicum?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Teaching practicum is fundamental to preservice teacher education programs, as through these components the student teachers get the opportunity to practice and make connections between theories they have learned and practice (Imsa-ard et al., 2021). Through this, they encounter numerous challenges. The current study is aimed at exploring the challenges faced by student teachers during the course of teaching practicum, the major challenges faced from the review of literature are discussed below.

Whether students go to public schools or private schools for teaching practicum they experience a lot of challenges. As student teachers are encouraged to participate in and watch a variety of teaching and nonteaching activities, so gaining an understanding of the complexity of teaching and the variety of roles performed was a major challenge (Foncha et al., 2015)

Moreover, Imsa-ard et al., (2021) and Prihatin et al., (2021) in their research discovered that student teachers found experimenting with the pedagogical and instructional practices and managing large classes difficult. For this, they highly depended on the instruction from the school management and their cooperating teacher. The support from the school management and cooperating teachers also plays a key role in the process of practicum. Literature shows that the support and cooperation gained from the school management and cooperating teachers were not sufficient to develop novice teachers and gain good field experience (Ertürk, 2022; Prihatin et al., 2021). Furthermore, the placement schools' management did not get much engaged to the practicum program and only the cooperating teachers performed their role as per their interest (Rasheed, 2017). In addition to this it was also found due to the lack of support and cooperation from school management and cooperating teachers, students missed many opportunities to fully participate in school activities (Saleem Yakoub Masadeh, 2017) Unavailability of necessary resources for the lessons was considered a challenge for the student teachers. Rasheed (2017) in her research found that students had the challenge of getting required resources for teaching during the practicum. Research on the topic recommends that for printing services of the teaching aids and to providing necessary stationaries to make teaching aids and for classroom instructions, students should be provided with pocket money

Another key challenge found in the literature was ineffective meetings and feedback. A study conducted in Zimbabwe for teacher students regarding practicum shows that they had meetings with the cooperating teachers weekly and the discussed issues were specific, clear, and feedback was given (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). However, (Rasheed, 2017) found in her study that feedback was delayed, and as a result, its effectiveness decreased. In addition to this, the study also found that constructive feedback was not given to students. Moreover, students' teachers find that teachers at hosting schools do not consider them as a part of their team and sometimes are not cooperative (Annan-Brew & Arhin, 2022).

Apart from these challenges which were related to the institution and schools, research shows that students also had issues and challenges related to their personality and personal life. In this regard, student's low confidence was found as a major issue. In dealing with the issues faced at the field, students find it challenging and stressful to address them due to their low confidence (Paula, 2020). Making a good impression of themselves among the hosing school teachers and trying to do things in the right way has put the students in stressful situations, moreover, managing their studies, personal lives, and teaching practicum at the same time were quite challenging and stressful for student (Goh & Matthews, 2011). Literature shows that with all these duties time management has been a quite significant issue during the practicum period. Rebecca (2016), in her study, found that managing all the personal and professional chores at the same time was stressful for student teachers and they encountered major issues in managing time.

Hence, it can be concluded through the light of literature that teaching practicum, despite its effectiveness in developing and preparing student teachers for the teaching field, consists of numerous issues and challenges.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The approach used to answer the researched question was a qualitative case study in which student teachers, coordinating teachers, and the coordinator of the program were interviewed. This approach was used to get rich and in-depth information on the issue being investigated (Creswell, 2015).

## **SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS**

The participants of the study were the final semester students enrolled in Bachelor of Teaching Quran in one of the higher education institutions in the Maldives. The total number of participants was 5 student teachers, 2 coordinating teachers, and the coordinator of the teaching practicum in that respective institution. The participants were selected purposefully to address the research question. The student participants selected were among those who have completed the 2 rounds of school teaching practicum.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The data were collected via face-to-face semi-structured interviews using a self-developed questionnaire guide. The collected data were transcribed and sent to the participants for their approval and then sent to the research team members for member checking. This was done to increase the validity and reliability of the data collected. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke, 2006. The findings were classified into 3 main themes; challenges related to school, challenges related to the institution, and challenges related to student teachers. These themes are discussed below.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Challenges related to the respective schools***

The teaching practicum is carried out in various schools in the Maldives. In this regard, the student teachers are distributed according to the available

slots. The teachers have a lot of expectations from the school management as they believe that this experience is a learning experience for them. However, the participants complained that they were being left out, they felt that they did not belong to the team. One participant ST2 commented, *"We were asked not to come to the school in the evening as they were going to celebrate teachers' day"*. A similar sentiment was added by ST4, *"I was very much looking forward to being part of the sports festival organised by the school, but unfortunately I was not invited"*.

Another challenge identified was the support from the leading teacher and the coordinating teacher. The student teachers expect these personnel to guide and instruct them in the right path. However, at times they felt that they were a burden to them. As such, ST1 replied, *"When requested to comment on an activity that I planned to teach additionally, the teacher responded by saying that she will comment after she observes my lesson"*. ST5 stated that it was just one day that she requested the leading teacher if it is possible to shift her period and make some adjustments as she was having a family function that day. The response that she got was, *"Your working hours are from 1250 to 5.50 so you should be in school during this time"*.

This does not stop from here; another issue was the fact that the materials and resources were not easily accessible. ST2 complained that it was very difficult for them to get worksheets printed on time. There were 2 incidents where she had to go to the class without the printouts which forced her to change the whole lesson plan. Another participant, ST 3 added that booking the Audio-Visual room for them was another difficulty, priority was given to the permanent teachers, and that hindered making their lessons interesting for the students.

Finally, coordination meetings were the most important platform that the student teachers were looking forward to. Unfortunately, the participants reported that as the meetings are held after the session, the teachers are in a hurry to rush home

and that the meetings were not so effective as the lessons are not discussed clearly in detail. One participant remarked; *"most of them are in a rush and will say, "I will share the lesson plan with all of you! no constructive discussion at all"*.

The above-mentioned challenges raised by the student teachers were in line with the comments received from the coordinator and also the cooperating teachers. As such, the coordinator mentioned that the students have raised the issues related to lack of support from the school management and also the cooperating teacher and that she did discuss those concerns with them. Similarly, both the cooperating teachers said that very often the student teachers tend to request suggestions from them for the activities that they plan to conduct in their lessons, and it is very difficult at times to give suggestions for each and every lesson.

#### ***Challenges related to the institution***

Among the challenges related to the institution include having weekly classes during the teaching practicum, efficient work, and lack of feedback and support from the supervisors. The majority of the participants complained that having normal classes along with the teaching practice makes them stressed out. As such, ST3 reported, *"It is very difficult when the classes are also going on at the same time, I have to rush home soon after the class to reach school on time"*. Another participant said that they are unable to concentrate on the classwork and they sometimes fail to meet the assignment deadlines. He stated, *"Assignments should not be given during our practicum period, I am not able to give my best"*.

Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, ST4 and ST1 complained that their supervisors were not so supportive, and they hardly got any feedback from them. They further added that they are the ones who should help and provide constructive feedback so that they could perform better in the future. They also stated that unless they get the full support from both the cooperating

teachers and the supervisors their teaching experience will not be effective or pleasant.

Adding on to these sentiments of the participants the coordinator agreed that if this behavior continues the teaching practicum experience will not be meaningful and the outcome will not be achieved successfully. “ *We need to look into this matter seriously*”.

### **Challenges related to personal life**

A striking finding was that the Teaching practicum left some of the participants’ lives so miserable that some described the experience as “ *I hardly get time to sleep well, talk to my husband and children, I am always worried about my class and busy getting prepared for my lesson*”. In agreement with this statement ST 5 stated that due to the time that she spent on the lesson preparation, there are instances where the kids and husband are blamed for the mistakes that she makes. As such she stated, “*If I am not able to complete my lesson plans, I sometimes blame my family, I tell them it is because of the house chores that I have to do*”.

Another finding was that the participants complained that they faced problems managing time. ST1 said, “*Preparing lesson plans and teaching aids, completing the assignments, and at the same time looking after the family was hard, I was not able to do all these tasks as expected*”. On the same note, ST2 also added, “*I was not able to manage time as too many tasks were there to handle simultaneously*”. All 5 participants in this study raised the concern of having difficulty in managing their time.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study expanded understanding of the problems and difficulties faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum. Several significant obstacles to the practicum’s efficiency have been uncovered through in-depth interviews with practicum participants. The findings of this study revealed challenges related to schools, institutes, and student teachers.

Among the challenges related to the schools, they highlighted being left out and not belonging to the team of the school. However, the research conducted by (Anjum, 2020) showed that internship students’ experiences were different in how they helped them feel like they belonged (Anjum, 2020). These events were rated on a scale from positive to negative, and they had both conflicting and harmonious parts. Moreover, the student teachers expected leading teachers to guide and instruct them in the right path. Nevertheless, they highlighted they were not being guided inside the school or being welcomed by the staff of the school. These findings support the existing literature, which indicates that the support and cooperation gained from the school management and cooperating teachers were not sufficient to develop and train novice teachers and gain good field experience (Ertürk, 2022; Prihatin et al., 2021). In addition, students emphasized instances where both leading teachers and cooperating teachers exhibited discourteous behaviour towards student teachers. These findings provide support for Mutlu (2014), study on Challenges in Practicum: Pre-Service and Cooperating Teachers’ Voices, which emphasized the occurrence of discourteous behaviour exhibited by cooperating teachers towards student teachers.

In addition, interviews with student teachers revealed that they were dissatisfied with the institute’s implementation of teaching practices. According to the students, the challenges they face at the institute are having weekly classes during the teaching practicum, a dearth of supervisor feedback and assistance, and the absence of supervisor support. This is in line with what has been found by Aldabbus (2020), that some supervisors do not have time to sit down with student teachers and discuss their observations and comments. The other complaint from the student teachers is the combination of regular classes and teaching practice, which causes them tension.

## CONCLUSION AND

### RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the challenges encountered by the students in this study align with those reported in the existing literature. Conferring to the findings, there were three kinds of challenges. They are challenges related to the respective schools, challenges related to the institution, and challenges related to the student teachers. To begin with, there are challenges related to schools, where students are distributed to different schools throughout the Maldives and students feel left out and unsupported by the leading teachers, and even the coordination meeting they had to attend was not very fruitful, as teachers are often in a rush to get home, as the meetings are held after the session and student teachers do not learn much from the coordination meeting. Second, when discussing the institution's concerns, students noted a number of difficulties they face. One of the issues is that attending regular classes in addition to teaching practice stresses them out, and supervisors are not always supportive. Not receiving feedback from supervisors is another major challenge that student teachers have identified. Third, student teachers have raised concerns about challenges related to themselves. For example, the data suggest that the teaching practicum has made some of the participants' lives so unhappy that they want to quit. They also have highlighted the difficulties faced in managing their personal life during the period of practicum.

Based on these findings, persons in charge of teaching practicum should look into the roles of leading teachers, supervisors, and cooperative teachers. Furthermore, the university and schools should communicate and coordinate more efficiently, and the value of teaching practice should be highlighted for the country's future generations.

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